DIMCHURCH VINEYARDS

IMPROVING YIELD FROM 3.5 T/HA TO 7.0 T/HA BY REWORKING EUTYPA-AFFECTED VINES

For viticulturist Adrian Hoffmann, dealing with Eutypa has been a classic case of finding an opportunity behind the problem.

After spending 10 years fine-tuning a Eutypa reworking method, the proprietor of Dimchurch Vineyards believes that taking a rigorous approach to Eutypa leads to a reinvigorated vineyard that delivers yield and quality in spades.

“By reworking our vines…I suppose giving them a new lease on life, we’ve seen that quality come back into the fruit…the vine structure is a lot better and where the fruit is [well] placed on the vine…[it’s] a lot better for quality going forward,” said Adrian.

With yields as low as 3.5t/ha in the mid-2000s, Dimchurch Vineyards now rework four to five hectares every year to maintain yields of between 5.5 and 6.5t/ha. “Through reworking…the yields all of a sudden bumped themselves back up to around that 5.5, 6.5t/ha level and now what we’re actually seeing is the yields maintaining that level,” said Adrian. “We’ve seen yields in excess of 7t/ha off these blocks and the quality has been far superior to what we were receiving even when it was only 3.5 to 4.5t/ha. All the winemakers that receive their fruit from this block are looking at much better-quality fruit for their products and they’re much happier with what I’m delivering.”

WELL-SPACED SPURS ENCOURAGE FRUIT GROWTH

Creating a new vine structure with well-positioned spurs is at the heart of Adrian’s reworking strategy. It involves training up watershoots, removing the old, infected vine and creating evenly-spread spurs. “It’s all about spacing the fruit out, making sure you’re getting plenty of sunlight into the vine,” said Adrian. He also ensures that two watershoots are trained up from the trunk, to provide a back-up watershoot if one is infected by Eutypa or damaged in the process.

Adrian learnt from experience that taking an all-or-nothing approach to Eutypa, by cutting out old wood and training new canes onto the wire is the most efficient and effective method. “Using the old method, when you’re overlapping canes on the wire… you start seeing a lot of crowding on the ends of the vines and…a lot of fruit on fruit. The fruit doesn’t ripen the way the wineries like [and] we ended up with green bunches. We were spending a lot more money on green shoot thinning and I see that as very counterproductive.

“This band-aid approach, it was good to help [us] with a bit of crop, but it didn’t help me with that quality of fruit that I was growing for the wineries. So, to cut the vine back, get some new arms out [and] get some great spur positions I think is the way to go.”

REWORK EARLY TO AVOID QUALITY LOSS

After suffering yield declines of up to 60% at its worst, Adrian now believes it is important to be proactive about Eutypa, starting the reworking process as early as possible to prevent dwindling fruit quality. “We saw about 40 to 60% [yield] reduction, but we also started to see a reduction in quality, as the vines didn’t throw enough leaf and [the fruit was] starting to get sunburnt,” said Adrian. “So even if the blocks are only at about 20 to 30% decline, we really like to get into the blocks early, before you see Eutypa too far established.”

For more information on Barossa’s focus on sustainability go to https://www.barossawine.com/vineyards/resilience/ or contact Nicki Robins, Viticultural Development Officer, Barossa Grape & Wine Association at nicki@barossa.com

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