

# You need to get to know your GLO

**Justin Jarrett** has no worries growing grapes for 15 different wine producers and adjusting what he does in the vineyard to suit the wine label each parcel is destined to be bottled under.

JUSTIN Jarrett remembers his last 'normal' season in Orange like it was yesterday. The trouble is, it wasn't yesterday... it was actually back in 2010.

Since then, the region has been wet (2011); promising then wet (2012); brilliant then even wetter (2013); and frosty to start, then warm, then wet (2014). To really rub it in, the 2013 and 2014 rain fell in February and March when, according to 120 years of records, it should have been the area's driest months.

Jarrett and his wife Pip both grew up on the land and both have qualifications in agricultural science, but they had nothing to do with vineyards before they bought their own in 1995. Nothing except admiring vines on a trip to Europe.

Fast-forward almost 20 years and their core business is managing their 170 ha of vineyard in Orange. The Jarretts are one of the larger growers in the region, only Cumulus and Angullong have larger vineyard holdings, but Jarrett points out the five largest growers represent 80 per cent of the region's total planting.

Jarrett runs a dedicated benchmarking program for each block, with the poorest performing either dropped or the vines pulled or re-grafted. He said right now they are moving into a major phase of change and at least one paddock will have its vines pulled and they won't be replaced.

"I think during the next five years we are going to have to be even harder on our standards," Jarrett added. "Yield mapping is another key tool in our quality program as it helps us identify the blocks that just aren't delivering."

The experience with yield mapping started out with infrared aerial photography to identify the potential higher and lower yielding areas. He said it was fantastic to get a snapshot but you had to be careful interpreting the data – especially if the photo was taken on the back of a 40C heat wave, as it was one year.

"We've put the same yield mapping technology you see in broadacre headers into use, with a set of scales weighing everything as it goes across the boom. It took some support from Bernd Kleinlagel at Advanced Technology Viticulture and some tricky logarithm calculations to give us an accurate, live tonne per hectare figure," he said.

"Using that information we are trying to be more consistent across the whole vineyard and we can increase or decrease the bud numbers to change the yield accordingly. It's all about aiming for consistency. Although, in the back of my mind is the idea that complexity in wine probably has a lot to do with complexity in the vineyard – but that's an internal debate I'll keep having."

Jarrett said his vineyards are planted in mostly red-basalt soils and it is a soft system. "In a normal year we might have to add some zinc, boron and manganese but not much else".

"The major trick here is the water-holding capacity of the vines. Particularly when we do get all that rain we really have to focus on our Shiraz, for example, to try and slow it down, and that entails juggling the herbicide program, cutting under the vines and pruning," he said.

"Then in the drought it is hard to maintain our type of soils and as our irrigation only comes from dams when they run out



**HIGH STANDARDS:** Justin Jarrett has 170 hectares of vineyard in Orange, NSW.

things became very tough."

Some of the changes Jarrett is considering include switching from Cabernet to Sauvignon Blanc and introducing Tempranillo and Malbec. Another variety he is keeping an eye on is the Austrian variety Grüner Veltliner, which has been performing in cool climates here in Australia.

"Of course you can put in all you want, but when it comes to selling it you have to have a winery that wants to come along for the ride," he said.

Jarrett currently supplies 15 different wineries.

Hang on. How many?

"It's not actually that difficult, certainly not an impossible task. The key thing is to know what the winery wants – what their price point is, what cropping levels they want, which wine your grapes are going into – all those things you have to be constantly talking about," Jarrett said.

"For example, I've just had the guys from Casella here. I know what price point they are offering and I know the grapes are going into Yellowtail, so I'm not going to be trying to be asking for lots of extra money for those grapes. But vice-versa, I'll also talk to clients who are producing an \$80 bottle of Shiraz and we will be talking about how I'll be working really hard, leaf plucking and all sorts, to make sure those grapes meet the standard required." ▶



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Jarrett says he gets positive responses from his key contacts by being positive and creating good, ongoing dialogue.

"I couldn't think of anything worse than being a GLO and going from farm-to-farm and having every grower whinging and complaining at you. I think you have to aspire to what your winemaker is aspiring to. We've got our own small label and that helps us enormously when it comes to a GLO coming to us and saying 'cool climate Cabernet is on the nose with consumers' we have some idea of whether it's full of shit or not."

After vintage Jarrett tries to visit every winery he supplies to, and aims to taste as many of the wines made from his grapes as possible – which, of course, offers another opportunity to talk directly to the winemaker.

"Some of the winery contacts you only meet two-or-three times each year, but you have to make sure you have meaningful conversations when you do see them," he said.

When it comes to tackling the idea of meaningful conversations, Jarrett has an industry-wide "bug bear"... the discussion about regions "sticking to what they do best" (and as the NSW/QLD representative on the WGGA executive

committee, he's in a good position to have observed – and joined in – a few of these conversations).

"We all agree on it, but there's still Sauvignon Blanc from McLaren Vale and Merlot from Clare and a long list of others. What's the point of these wines? We need to get rid of these areas of oversupply, but it's a really hard conversation to have. There will always be a place for small guys to make 60 cases of something different, but when the larger wineries are still producing 10,000 cases of something their region doesn't do well, it is only going to end up discounted and by the time it reaches the consumer it's not doing the industry any favours. We need to be able to have a mature discussion about this."

This level of mature, whole value-chain thinking is increasingly important for every grapegrower.

"It is not just your GLO you need to get to know better, you have to know what end product you grapes are going into. If you are supplying a wine that sells for \$4.99 you can't realistically expect \$1000 per tonne.

"You have to adjust how you are growing grapes to the end product, which would be my advice to everybody," Jarrett said. **GW**

## Manage environmental stress

GRAPEGROWERS can boost a crop's ability to cope with environmental conditions with an effective and naturally-occurring product that can be included in existing spray programs and tank mixes, and which leaves no white residue on fruit at harvest. Australian plant-management technology company Agricrop is supplying the horticulture market with Photon 500SG, based on dicarboxylic acids – naturally-derived plant compounds that stimulate the crop's own defences against heat, moisture and chilling stress, enabling higher yields and better quality produce.

Kerrie Mackay, Agricrop product marketing manager, said Photon was an innovative alternative to sunscreen, being absorbed by the plant and triggering the plant's own defence mechanisms, and leaving no surface residue.

"Photon effectively prepares the plant before the onset of environmental stress – resulting in more vigorous crop growth and productivity. It works systemically, causing a biochemical response in the plant's stress sensors, so it can

react more quickly and effectively to environmental conditions that negatively impact on growth," Mackay said. "Photon can reduce the impact of climatic stress – maintaining crop health and productivity in adverse conditions."

Photon has proven its efficacy and crop safety in four years of comparative trials in Australia and overseas. Mackay said Photon was now in its third season of commercial use in Australia, receiving praise from growers for protecting foliage, flowers and fruit.

"The high quality water-dispersible granule is used on grape vines at a very low rate of 4gms per 100 litres, so is easy to mix, handle and store, providing very cost-effective plant stress management," Mackay said. "With no known compatibility issues and used in similar water volumes to insecticide and fungicide applications, Photon can be conveniently applied as part of normal spray programs and in growers' existing tank mixes."

"A lead time of five days is ideal for the plant to fully respond to Photon 500SG to minimise the impact of stress. Grapegrowers are advised to begin application between bloom and capfall, continuing to apply Photon every 21 days until just before harvest. It is important to apply in sufficient water for uniform coverage of foliage, with a surfactant (preferably non-ionic or organo-silicone adjuvant) to spread Photon over the surface of leaves.

"Maximum protection is reached with a second application, with the product remaining effective for up to 21 days. So a season-long program is recommended to maintain ongoing productivity. Agricrop encourages to apply Photon early, to prepare their crops for the season's stress events. With no withholding period, Photon can be applied as a foliar spray until just before harvest."

For more information, contact:

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P: (07) 3348 4113

E: sales@agricrop.com.au

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