

Case Study: Building soil organic matter and the business benefits of using organic fertilisers.

Mr Hutchings practices environmentally sustainable viticulture, combining modern vineyard management with respect for tradition. He is balancing the desire to see the terroir come through in the wine, while developing resilient, low-input organic management systems through soil health and decarbonisation practices.

Landholder:

Brad and Cheryl Hutchings, Savina Lane Wines, Stanthorpe, 28kms north of the Qld border with NSW.

Business:

3.25ha of Shiraz, Fiano, Tempranillo, Graciano, Montepulciano, Manseng and Viognier vines on a 21ha property. The Shiraz is a heritage block pushing 70 years old.

Resources:

760mm annual rainfall on granitic gravel soil at 850m elevation.



BRAD AND CHERYL HUTCHINGS



THE WEATHER STATION AT SAVINA LANE WINES

A long term project

Mr Hutchings' is continually trialling new ideas, equipment and products to balance vine growth with fruit quality, celebrating the variability of each year's weather on that year's vintage. He is slowly building his understanding of how each variety responds to the organic poultry manure fertilisers and the Ruby Creek Granite soils to produce that distinctive mineral wine character he seeks.

Using soil tests and monitoring yields, Brad tweaks application rates of his post-harvest organic fertiliser with micro-nutrients and lime/dolomite, while building soil organic carbon from 0.6% in 2012, to 1.2% in 2022. The building of soil organic carbon is the basis for improving vineyard nutrition.

Even with the improved soils, Brad makes precious use of his irrigation water guided by a moisture probe and weather station, to encourage the vines to put down deep roots. A little struggle that helps intensify the fruit flavours.



BRAD LEAF PLUCKING TO OPEN THE VINES

The challenge and opportunity

Mr Hutchings said that Savina Lane Wines is very small and costs are a huge impediment. “Every major item on the road to sustainability has been costed and proved to work financially.” He went on to say “We have had to do everything slowly (13 years to get where we are now) to fit into the budget.

Of course every variety is different, not only in their nutrition and irrigation needs, but also in their pest and disease management. Avoiding pre-emergent herbicides, Brad has also trialled every organic herbicide available.

“We now are at the point where the next items toward sustainability are even bigger ticket items. There aren’t any electric tractors currently suitable in Australia. Electric mowers are twice the cost of a diesel mower.”

The sustainability journey was supported with a carbon workshop

Mr & Mrs Hutchings knew most of the carbon stuff was coming down the road. They have been a member of Sustainable Winegrowing Australia for nearly 3 years and carbon reporting is a part of that program, so they were already on board. Mr Hutchings said “The carbon workshop complemented what we already do with Sustainable Winegrowing, but was more in depth about the bigger picture.”

Next steps to achieving business goals

For Mr Hutchings, the workshop reassured him that his farm business plan was appropriate. “As farmers growing an annual crop, we get one shot at a crop each year, so we live on a knife edge at the whim of the weather gods. We already export far more electricity than we use, but as a small primary producer, we are at the mercy of the large corporations. It would be great to be able to sell our excess power back to grid, but currently this is unavailable.”

What more could the carbon outreach project support?

Mr Hutchings suggested that perhaps for those that don’t know where to start, the project team could offer a 'Beginners How to Begin' set of factsheets

Further information

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