

THE GREEN GAUGE

As the thirst for organic wine grows, wineries are looking to new practices in the vineyard.

TEXT MAX ALLEN



NEW SENSATION
Plastic-coated posts
are suitable for
organic vineyards.

ORGANIC THIRST GROWS

The Australian Organic Market Report for 2014, compiled from research conducted by the Swinburne University of Technology, Australian Bureau of Statistics and Mobium Group, showed a huge 120 per cent increase in the sales of certified organic drinks (including wine) between 2012 and 2014, and the value of organically grown wine grapes jumped from \$25.1 million to \$54.5 million in the same period.

South Australia's Angove Family Winemakers is one of the success stories in the Australian organic wine scene, enjoying booming sales with its range of good-value certified wines. "We are experiencing about 40 per cent growth, which is staggering," Angove marketing manager Matt Redin is quoted as saying in the report. "It's really surprised all of us how well the organic wine portfolio is doing, and now we are looking five or 10 years ahead to see how much more we need to convert to organic viticulture." For more, go to www.austorganic.com.

NAKED SUCCESS

Since its launch less than three years ago, online retailer Naked Wines Australia has made a big splash with its customer-funded business model. It has more than 35,000 members and provided funding for more than \$20 million worth of Australian wine.

Reflecting the trends outlined in the Australian Organic Market Report, sustainable, biodynamic and certified wines have proved very popular at Naked. The certified organic range of wines from Ashley Horner in the Hunter Valley, for example, has been the second highest rated brand on the Naked website over the last 12 months, and wine director Mark Pollard says the call centre is constantly fielding enquiries about organic, vegan, vegetarian and biodynamic wines.

As well as the wines from Ashley Horner, the Naked model – where equipment, such as new barrels, is paid for by customers and interaction is encouraged with the winemakers – has attracted a number of top producers of organic wine in Australia, including Ben Gould of Blind Corner in Margaret River and Derek and Anna Hooper of certified biodynamic winery, Cape Jaffa, on South Australia's Limestone Coast.

"I really like the level of interaction we get with the Naked community," says Derek Hooper. "We've done a number of online tastings and meet-the-member events. We get 40 to 60 messages direct from customers every day. It's a different demographic to other retail channels. There are some pretty savvy wine drinkers, and they're keen on the whole subject of organics and sustainability. I think they really appreciate the fact that they're able to ask questions about

things like biodynamics and get answers directly from us, the winemakers."

For more, go to www.nakedwines.com.au.

SUSTAINABLE INNOVATION

It seems like such a simple idea that it's baffling why someone hasn't thought of it before. There are millions of pine trellis posts in Australian vineyards treated with CCA, a powerful preservative consisting of copper, chromium and arsenic. Despite repeated assurances from the timber industry, there is increasing global concern about the environmental and human safety of CCA. Treated posts are not, for example, allowed in new certified organic vineyards.

The solution? As I say, it's remarkably simple. Instead of bathing them in toxic chemicals, untreated pine posts are coated in a thick layer of black recycled plastic. Not only does this provide more protection from the elements than CCA or creosote, it also results in stronger posts, less damage during installation and a far greater lifespan. "They will last five times longer. We expect them to stay in place for 100 years," says Ashley Davidson of WoodShield, the Australian company behind this innovation. "They're also chemical-free and are registered as approved products by certifying bodies in Australia and New Zealand for use in organic vineyards."

So why aren't we seeing these plastic-coated posts popping up in vineyards across the country? Because they cost 30 per cent more than the CCA-treated posts. "My old man's a farmer," says Davidson. "And he always said, 'In farming, if you can find a way to save money, you do.' I understand that while a lot of vineyard managers love what we're doing with the posts and want to do the right thing in the vineyard, they know that their bosses want to do the right thing by the budget and the shareholders."

Davidson hopes that more Australian wine companies will realise that the long-term benefits to the environment, and their bottom line, outweigh the short-term cost. 🍷

For more, go to www.woodshield.com.au.