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Vintage and hygiene

VINEHEALTH Australia is calling for grape growers to examine and improve their farm-gate hygiene practices during vintage 2017.

Vintage is a key risk time for the spread of pests and diseases, including phylloxera, due to the increased movement around regions and states of machinery, equipment, vehicles, people, footwear, clothing, winegrapes (whole or harvested) and grape products such as unfiltered juice and pre-fermentation grape marc.

Responsibility for preventing the spread of pests and diseases between states and within states is a collective effort between industry and regulators.

Vinehealth Australia says new research has given rise to changes to the footwear and small hand-tool disinfection protocol, now requiring 60 seconds immersion in 2 per cent sodium hypochlorite solution, and no rinsing of footwear or tools after immersion.

"We know from surveys of vineyard owners that farm-gate hygiene is patchy," said Vinehealth Australia chief executive officer Inca Pearce.

"And we also know that vintage is a ridiculously busy time and, despite good intentions, in the rush to pick and deliver fruit, hygiene standards can slip."

Vinehealth Australia's top 10 tips

VINEHEALTH Australia strongly advocates adopting these 10 practices as a minimum this vintage:

1. Review links with interstate vineyards, wineries, contractors and suppliers. Are those businesses in a phylloxera-infested zone (PIZ) or phylloxera-risk zone (PRZ)? Understand the regulations and documentation required for the movement of grapes, must, unfiltered juice, marc (pre- or post-fermentation), machinery and equipment used in vineyards, diagnostic samples, soil, grapevine cuttings, rootlings, potted vines, within and between states.
2. Provide training for all vineyard staff including contract and casual labour on hygiene protocols.
3. Restrict access to your property with fences and gates.
4. Use signs to advise restrictions of entry to your property.
5. Require everyone other than staff to report on arrival at your property. Keep a visitor log, recording vineyard regions each visitor has visited in the past eight days and check whether there has been a visit to a vineyard in a PIZ or PRZ in Victoria, New South Wales or Queensland.
6. Do not allow unauthorised vehicles to drive within your vineyard and provide a vineyard vehicle for use if necessary. Provide parking for visitor vehicles away from vines on a hard pack surface.
7. Check machinery and equipment (including small hand-tools and technical equipment) to ensure it's cleaned of all soil and plant material before it's used on your vineyard. Ensure it complies with state quarantine regulations for cleaning, sterilisation and proof of origin and is accompanied by required documentation. Provide a wash down facility to enable cleaning of machinery and equipment before it leaves your property.
8. Ensure all people who come onto your property disinfest their footwear upon entry and exit in accordance with the new 'footwear and small hand-tool disinfestation protocol'. Ensure visitors and contractors wear clean clothes before starting work on your property.
9. Only plant with certified, pest-free propagation material.
10. Regularly inspect your vines for anything unusual or different. Seek help to identify what the problem is.