



Photo courtesy of Agriculture Victoria (Rutherglen).

HIDDEN SPREAD

AN ILLEGAL HARVESTER MOVEMENT HIGHLIGHTS PHYLLOXERA RISKS.

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Just before last vintage, a grape harvester was being moved from Victoria to South Australia, when it was stopped and inspected on the SA border.

The inspection revealed the machinery – which was coming from a phylloxera-infested zone – had not been appropriately cleaned and sterilised. And the South Australian vineyard owner responsible for the harvester did not have the appropriate documentation.

The owner of the machinery was instructed to return to the original location and have the equipment heat treated.

“This illegal movement of agricultural machinery can attract a \$20,000 fine, but that’s not the biggest issue here,” Vinehealth Australia CEO Inca Pearce says. “The machinery could have been carrying

phylloxera. The vineyard owner could have unwittingly introduced phylloxera into South Australia for the first time.”

Grape harvesters are a major risk vector for transporting phylloxera because they often harbour grapevine material or soil and are especially hard to clean. As a result, strict legislative requirements must be met before harvesters can be moved legally between states and also between phylloxera management zones within states.

Vintage sees much inter and intra-state movement of many other potential vectors for phylloxera and others pests, diseases and weeds. These include grapes and grape products, tractors, grape bins, picking snips and other handheld tools, picking buckets, netting, footwear, clothing and people. Strict quarantine regulations also apply for moving equipment between states and within states.

The harvester scenario highlighted issues – and opportunities – within the wine industry’s biosecurity program. Inca Pearce says questions have been raised about vineyard owners’ knowledge of pest and disease spread, particularly in relation to the movement of machinery, equipment and people between phylloxera-infested zones and phylloxera exclusion zones. “It’s clear we need to do a better job of

communicating with vineyard owners, wineries, contractors and everyone moving between regions about pest and disease risks and prevention,” Inca says. “We need to make sure we clearly present the rules around moving machinery, equipment and all other vectors between phylloxera zones and between states, and we need to make sure vineyard owners and others know where to go for information about this.

“The vineyard owner who was bringing the machinery to South Australia was unaware that the behaviour was illegal. This person wasn’t trying to break the rules; they didn’t know the rules. It’s our job to fix that.”

Vinehealth Australia, formerly the Phylloxera and Grape Industry Board of SA, has developed a program of activities to improve knowledge and communication. This year, the Vinehealth team, led by Inca

“THE VINEYARD OWNER COULD HAVE UNWITTINGLY INTRODUCED PHYLLOXERA INTO SOUTH AUSTRALIA FOR THE FIRST TIME.”

Pearce, will visit every South Australian wine region to share information about biosecurity, to talk to vineyard owners about their concerns, and to spread the word about pest and disease prevention best practice with local media, tourism operators and other agricultural operators.

“There was a ‘keep our vineyards phylloxera free’ sticker on the back of every ute 15-plus years ago, but as an industry we’ve become a little complacent,” Inca says.

“I’ve worked in the viticulture industry for the past 19 years and I’ve seen the devastation that pests such as phylloxera can cause. I know how dangerous complacency can be.

“Biosecurity and farmgate hygiene may not be the most exciting things, but if we get those fundamental things wrong, then our industry will suffer.” ♦

For information about pest and disease prevention as well as tools to help clarify state quarantine requirements, visit vinehealth.com.au

GEOFENCES BEING TRIALED IN SA

Vinehealth Australia is running a trial of a cyber monitoring program designed to keep vineyards free of pests and diseases such as phylloxera.

Launched in December and funded by the State Government and Vinehealth Australia, Project Boundary Rider creates a virtual boundary – or geofence – around vineyards and uses smartphone app technology to monitor the movement of people entering vineyards. Vineyard owners are alerted when anyone crosses their property line.

The Boundary Rider pilot project is being trialed with 30 businesses across 85 vineyards in McLaren Vale and the Barossa. Those taking part include Chapel Hill Winery, Charles Melton Wines, d’Arenberg, Dorrien Winemaking, Gemtree Wines, Henschke Cellars, Noon Winery, Scholz Estate, St Hallett Wines, Torbreck Vintners, Wirra Vineyards and Wright Vineyard Trust.

“We view this groundbreaking project with much anticipation and excitement because the health of our vines is paramount and we are always looking for new and improved ways of ensuring their longevity,” Prue Henschke, Henschke Cellars’ viticulturist, said.

For more information visit vinehealth.com.au/projects/project-boundary-rider

