Australian Government

Australian Grape and Wine Authority

# SOFT PRUNING TO MAINTAIN LONG-TERM STRUCTURE AND HEALTH OF GRAPEVINES

FINAL REPORT to

AUSTRALIAN GRAPE AND WINE AUTHORITY

Project Number: **AGT 1522**

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Research Organisation: **The Mornington Peninsula Vignerons Association**

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# AGT 1522 - SOFT PRUNING TO MAINTAIN LONG-TERM STRUCTURE AND HEALTH OF GRAPEVINES

## INTRODUCTION

Simonit and Sirch is an Italian company that has developed a method of soft pruning, based on the methods developed in France by Guyot and Poussard. They focus on training vineyard staff to prune according to their method. Their work has been widely recognised and they are now working with major vineyards across Italy and France, and broadly across Europe, South Africa and in the U.S.A.

The project was designed as a pilot to introduce soft pruning techniques to selected vineyards and to create broader awareness across four of Australia's cool climate wine producing regions.

## SUMMARY OF ACTIVITIES

This project has been an outstanding success and has exceeded expectations. This report summarises the activities as planned in the proposal to AGWA. A separate paper is being prepared for submission to *Australian Grapegrower and Winemaker* to provide broader awareness and understanding of the soft pruning techniques developed by Simonit and Sirch. The paper is expected to be submitted during August 2016.

It had been planned that the two representatives from Simonit and Sirch would be Giacomo Manzoni and Marco Ostan. However, company changes meant that instead, we welcomed Giacomo Manzoni and Marco Tessari. The MPVA was very happy with this outcome.

### Final Itinerary

The program commenced just over a week later than originally proposed, and ran for a few days longer to accommodate the addition of a workshop in the Adelaide Hills. Apart from these changes and changes to the order of some activities, the itinerary was as shown below.

| DATE | LOCATION | ACTIVITY |
|---|---|---|
| MAY 2016<br>27-28 | | Travel Italy (Florence) to Melbourne |
| Sun 29 | Melbourne | Free |
| Mon 30 May to Thu 2 JUNE | Mornington Peninsula | Work with four individual vineyards, developing understanding and preparing improvement plans for each vineyard<br>Monday 30 May: Stonier Wines<br>Tuesday 31 May: Yabby Lake<br>Wednesday 1 June: Kooyong Estate<br>Thursday 2 June: Mornington Peninsula Viticulture |
| Fri 3 | Mornington Peninsula | General presentation and demonstration to Association Members at Stonier Wines |
| Sat 4 | Mornington Peninsula | Work with one individual vineyard, developing understanding and preparing improvement plans |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | | Merricks Estate |
| Sun 5 | | Free<br>Evening travel: Melbourne to Adelaide |
| Mon 6 | South Australia | Work with one individual vineyard, developing understanding and preparing improvement plans.<br>Henschke |
| Tue 7 | | Presentation to Adelaide Hills Wine Region and meet with Dr Mark Sosnowski (SARDI).<br>Afternoon travel: Adelaide to Melbourne |
| Wed 8 | Macedon | Work with one individual vineyard, developing understanding and preparing improvement plans.<br>Curly Flat<br>General presentation and demonstration to Association Members at Curly Flat |
| Thu 9 | Yarra Valley | Work with one individual vineyard, developing understanding and preparing improvement plans.<br>Taraford (Giant Steps)<br>General presentation and demonstration to Association Members at Helen's Hill Estate. |
| Fri 10 | Mornington Peninsula | Work with one individual vineyard, developing understanding and preparing improvement plans.<br>Portsea Estate |
| Sat 11 | Mornington Peninsula | Winter Wine Weekend including MPVA Dignitaries Breakfast. |
| Sun 12 | Melbourne | Free |
| Mon 13 | Mornington Peninsula | Work with one individual vineyard, developing understanding and preparing improvement plans.<br>Montalto Vineyard and Olive Grove |
| Tue 14 | Complete | Available for additional work |

**Planned Output A**

***Output***

a) Creating awareness and understanding, in selected vineyards

b) Embedding method in selected vineyards

***Performance Target***

a) Number of vineyards participating (and paying). Target 10 vineyards. 30 June 2016

b) Transition and adoption of methodology in selected vineyards. Target transition to methodology within four years.
*Target Date* 30/6/2016

***Performance***
Performance Target a)
This target was achieved as planned.
Ten vineyards participated from across the four regions, with a day spent on each vineyard: Stonier Wines, Kooyong Estate, Yabby Lake, Montalto Vineyard and Olive Grove, Mornington Peninsula Viticulture, Portsea Estate and Merricks Estate (Mornington Peninsula), Henschke (Adelaide Hills), Curly Flat (Macedon Ranges) and Giant Steps (Yarra Valley).

In each case, the program provided for:

- Time in the vineyard with the vineyard Manager and usually the owner to enable Giacomo and Marco to understand the vineyard and the objectives of the managers.
- Selection of two or three vines that were sectioned with a bandsaw to reveal the consequences of past pruning practices
- A presentation to vineyard staff, covering:
    - Observations of current pruning practices and the consequences
    - The key principles of the Simonit and Sirch method of soft pruning This included the benefits offered by the method, including:
        - Lower costs
        - Increased uniformity
        - Greater longevity and productivity
- Time in the vineyard with vineyard staff to discuss the principles outlined in the presentation.

In every case, the response from vineyard management and staff was outstanding. In particular, understanding of the consequences of current practices was an 'eye-opener', as the sectioned vines clearly showed that large cuts, or many small cuts, caused large cones of desiccation, in many cases with the entry of eutypa, and disrupted sap flow. The rules to be followed were readily appreciated and will be adopted by each vineyard in ways that suit their particular operations.

Performance Target b)
Arrangements are in place to ensure that this target will be met.
Half of the participating vineyards have fully embraced the soft pruning principles and have continued to engage Simonit and Sirch to fully train their staff. Other conversations are taking place. An additional two vineyards have also fully embraced the method as indicated by their contracts with Simonit and Sirch. The training covers mainly winter pruning but also spring shoot thinning, with both classroom and vineyard work.

**Planned Output B**
***Output***
Networking / relationship building.

Relationship between Simonit and Sirch and:
a) An Australian viticultural consultant

b) The trunk disease research team at SARDI

***Performance Target***
a) An agreement with at least one Australian consultant. July 2016
b) A trunk disease avoidance/management strategy developed by SARDI and others that includes pruning methodology. June 2017
*Target Date* 1/7/2016

***Performance***
Performance Target a)
This target has not been met and will not be pursued for the reasons described below. An alternative strategy is being developed that is expected to have greater impact.

Discussion with three prospective viticultural consultants (from the Mornington Peninsula, Yarra Valley and Macedon Ranges) demonstrated recognition of the Simonit and Sirch method so that it will be recommended. However, the business of training pruning staff did not align with the existing consulting practices of the people involved.

It has become apparent that the opportunities for Simonit and Sirch to work in Australia are significant, as indicated by the rapid uptake and response to date. Experience to date is guiding future planning to help disseminate the technology. This includes return visits by Simonit and Sirch people designed to:

- Continue their existing contracts, which cover spring shoot thinning, and develop new contracts
- Working with other regional Associations to hold workshops, along lines similar to the pilot project

Importantly, work has commenced on the prospect of running pruning schools in various regions. Simonit and Sirch already run several pruning schools in Italy (see http://simonitesirch.com/italian-school-of-vine-pruning/), and they contribute to a Master of Pruning degree at the University of Bordeaux (see http://simonitesirch.com/the-worlds-first-masters-degree-in-grapevine-pruning-in-bordeaux/), so they are very experienced at running such schools.

Performance Target b)
This work has commenced but will not be complete until the return visit by Giacomo Manzoni in spring 2016.

It is clear that pruning considerations should be part of a total eutypa management strategy that Dr Mark Sosnowski (SARDI) has been developing. Giacomo Manzoni and Dr Sosnowski met during the workshop in the Adelaide Hills to explore the scope of collaborative research. Further discussion is needed to finalise the objectives and scope of research.

**Planned Output C**
***Output***
Extension.

Creating general awareness of the method by Association Members

***Performance Target***
Number of participants in general presentations and demonstrations. Target three presentations with a total of 50 Members.
*Target Date* 30/6/2016

***Performance***
This target has been met and exceeded.

Four workshops were held, one in each of the regions (Mornington Peninsula, Adelaide Hills, Macedon Ranges, Yarra Valley). Each workshop was held at a vineyard and comprised:

- A presentation by Simonit and Sirch, covering:
  - their observations in Australian vineyards
  - the results of dissection of vines, showing the consequences of current practice pruning cuts
  - principles of the soft pruning method, including examples of what is possible
- Time in the vineyard to illustrate the principles discussed during the presentation
- Further discussion.

More than thirty people attended each workshop (i.e. a total of over 120), despite plans to restrict numbers to 20 at each workshop.

**CONCLUSION**
This pilot project has been an outstanding success and has exceeded the expectation of the Associations, the Association Members and participating vineyards, and also of Simonit and Sirch.

The consequence is that the ideas have been received very well and uptake has commenced. Plans have commenced to expand work to broaden awareness, firstly through a paper to Australian Grapegrower and Winemaker and then potentially through pruning schools in various regions. Simonit and Sirch will continue their business development in other regions.

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Very importantly, the MPVA would like to thank the other Associations (Adelaide Hills Wine Region, Macedon Ranges Vignerons Association, and the Yarra Valley Winegrowers Association), along with their participating vineyards (Stonier Wines, Kooyong Estate, Yabby Lake, Montalto Vineyard and Olive Grove, Mornington Peninsula Viticulture, Portsea Estate, Merricks Estate, Henschke, Curly Flat and Giant Steps) for their collaboration and contributions.

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