Bunch thinning



FINAL REPORT to

GRAPE AND WINE RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

Project Number: **RT 02/22-3**

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Research Organisation: **Murray Valley Winegrowers Inc.**

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Executive Summary

The Murray Valley Growers' Research & Development committee highlighted bunch thinning as an important topic for extension. The correct explanation of this topic was seen as the key to improving the usage of this specific vineyard management technique.

The project aim was to increase awareness amongst winegrape growers of the most appropriate management technique for bunch thinning. To achieve this the following outputs were proposed:

- A double-sided A4 handout outlining Best Management Practices for bunch thinning.
- An Information Package on bunch thinning produced for extension officers (i.e. consultants, chemical resellers, government employees and grower liaison officers). The information package would contain a Power Point presentation with speaker notes, relevant journal articles, the Best Management Practices handout and contact details of scientists who have worked on bunch thinning trials.
- An article in **The Murray Valley Winegrape Growers' Grapevine** advertising the Information Package.
- A seminar using the Power Point presentation from the Information Package.
- A vineyard demonstration of hand and machine bunch thinning.

The primary outcome from the project would be growers' having access to credible information on bunch thinning. Access to this information would be achieved by means of a bunch thinning seminar, production of a handout on best management practices and through educating extension officers in the use of the Information Package. On-going extension for this topic would be achieved through extension officers using the Information Package to operate their own bunch thinning seminars.

Ultimately, access to reliable information on bunch thinning would result in the correct use of this management technique and could lead to quality fruit being consistently produced from the Murray Valley region. Consistent quality fruit from the Murray Valley would help to sustain the region's wine industry, which is an important employer in this region.

Objectives

- Increase growers' access to reliable and credible information on bunch thinning.
- Generate the following outputs:
    1. A bunch thinning seminar using the Power Point presentation from the Information Package for extension officers.
    2. A double-sided A4 handout outlining Best Management Practices for bunch thinning.
    3. An Information Package for extension officers.
    4. An article in **The Murray Valley Winegrape Growers' Grapevine** advertising the Information Package.
    5. A vineyard demonstration of hand and machine bunch thinning.

Outcome/Conclusion

1. Bunch Thinning seminar

One of the reasons for the seminar was to "road-test" the power point presentation (appendix two) included in the Information Package for extension officers. Feedback would help to decide if it was a worthwhile product for extension officers. The seminar also provided an opportunity for growers to be exposed to reliable and credible information on bunch thinning.

The power point presentation included information on 'how to' bunch thin, at what stage it should be implemented, results from scientific trials and associated cost/benefits. The presentation was developed in conjunction with CSIRO research scientist Paul Petrie who has worked on bunch thinning trials. Paul was present in the audience during the seminar to provide advice on how the seminar went. His feedback was that he felt the presentation went well and the technical information was correct, however we both felt the speaker notes needed to be worked on.

The seminar was held on October 17th 2002, at the local TAFE auditorium. Eighty-two people attended the seminar. Advertising for the event was via flyers (see appendix five), radio announcements on radio (ABC and local commercial station) and an article in the local newspaper, Sunraysia Daily (see appendix six).

EVALUATION

Thirty-two people filled in the evaluation sheet (see appendix one for evaluation sheet).

Results from the returned evaluation sheets:

1. Did you feel the information in the presentation was easy to understand?

Yes	31
No	0

2. Have you implemented Bunch Thinning in the past?

Yes	10
No	21

3. After attending the seminar and reading the handouts do you feel confident about implementing Bunch Thinning?

Yes	13
No	7

4. Do you feel the seminar and the handouts have supported your understanding of Bunch Thinning?

Yes	26
No	0
Not sure	1

What other information about Bunch Thinning would you like?

More research data for a range of red varieties

Wine results

Actual demonstration

Talk to other farmers that have actually bunch thinned. Demonstration

Look forward to further experiments and trials

Tablegrapes?

Comprehensive data on average bunch weights, allowing a category for old minimal pruned and tightly pruned, rootstocks and own roots.

Ideal time limit, with good information to take away to further consider.

Maybe a video of harvester thinning and harvest set up.

Returns per acre, control versus thinned and wine score.

I use slightly different techniques that seem to work.

What do the wineries think?

Website.

The evaluation indicates growers understood the information from the seminar and found it useful in supporting their current/intended practice of bunch thinning.

Not all growers answered questions 3 and 4 (questions trying to determine the usefulness of the seminar and handouts) and I believe it was because they found it difficult to commit to a yes/no answer. An improved response may have been gained if the questions were asked some time after the seminar allowing the growers time to reflect on and absorb the information presented at the seminar and in the handouts.

2. A double-sided A4 sheet outlining Best Management Practices for bunch thinning.

Each grower at the seminar received a double-sided A4 sheet outlining Best Management Practices for bunch thinning (appendix four), a copy of the slides used in the Power Point presentation (appendix three) and an evaluation sheet (appendix one).

3. An *Information Package* on bunch thinning produced for extension officers.

A component of the project was to work with Paul Petrie from CSIRO on refining the power point presentation, allowing it to be used by extension officers. Unfortunately CSIRO was not prepared to work with me on the CD until the scientific information in the presentation was published. They also expressed concern with producing a product that would be available to the general public; CSIRO requires rigid and lengthy proofing before products can be released. Consequently, the Information Package on bunch thinning could not be produced for extension officers.

4. An article in The Murray Valley Winegrape Growers' Grapevine advertising the Information Package.

Due to the cancellation of the Information Package, no article appeared in the Murray Valley Winegrape Growers' Grapevine newsletter.

5. A vineyard demonstration of hand and machine bunch thinning.
A vineyard demonstration of hand and machine thinning was to occur in December 2002, however bunch numbers for that year indicated a low yield, consequently growers were not prepared to volunteer their property for bunch thinning. Also due to the forecasted low yield growers were not interested in visiting a bunch thinning demonstration. Unfortunately, we had to cancel the vineyard demonstration of bunch thinning.

CHANGES & FUTURE SUGGESTIONS

The Information Package for extension officers was a crucial part of the communication strategy for the bunch thinning project. It was unfortunate CSIRO was unable to help. I am unsure how to address this matter and would encourage discussion from industry on how to get new research out to growers efficiently and in a timely manner.

I think the objective of this project, *to increase growers' access to reliable and credible information on bunch thinning*, is a valid one that needs to be further explored. I would like to see GWRDC or CRCV work on this project with CSIRO and other scientists to produce an information pack for extension officers. It would be more specific than a Research to Practice module however more comprehensive than an Ag note.

Budget Reconciliation

Budget	Funding Required from GWRDC		Actual Expenditure
Hire of venue	150.00		150.00
Info package for extension officers	200.00		0
Evaluation of Projects	100.00		50.00
Advertising	600.00		450.00
Vehicle running costs	200.00		150.00
Administration costs	1,718.00		1,550.00
Total	2,968.00	**Total Expended**	2350.00
Add 10% GST	296.80		235.00
Total funds requested from GWRDC	3,264.80		2,585.00
		Remitted to GWRDC	679.80