

Elders

RURAL *report*

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Eco Growth fertilisers shine at Narrikup

XABREGAS Vineyards has a targeted approach to fertilising its vines with exactly the right mix of nutrients needed for their specific location within a block.

The winery, near the Great Southern town of Narrikup, is achieving excellent grape yield and quality results after switching to Eco Growth high analysis liquid fertilisers three years ago.

Vineyard manager Ross Pike said failure of other fertiliser products to deliver good vine responses led him to investigate more specialised products.

"After we first tried Eco Growth we didn't need to look any further – it worked so well for us," Ross said.

With the help of the Elders Mt Barker Cooperative team and Eco Growth's Daniel Sutton, Xabregas now carries out a rigorous annual soil and tissue testing program, coupled with petiole testing of vines at flowering, to determine future fertiliser strategies.

"We were having issues with some vines in a block having deficiencies, while others were not," Ross said.

"It was very hard to manage because they were all in the same block."

But Ross said the switch to foliar



Xabregas Vineyards manager Ross Pike with Chester Giles, formerly with Elders Mount Barker Cooperative and now working with Xabregas, at the Narrikup winery earlier this season.

sprays meant areas in a block that were showing signs of nutrient deficiency could be better targeted.

Vines were now healthier across the whole block and costs were significantly reduced because applications were more strategic.

Ross said the Eco Growth range contained highly specialised nutrients for the vines and covered the whole range of nutrients required by the vineyard.

The current regime for the Xabregas vineyard is two

applications per year of Eco Growth Foliar Express PK, with 13 per cent phosphorus and 30 per cent potassium, and two applications per year of the all-round Trace Elements Express TE.

Ross said he used Eco Growth's Eco Vital PK and TE, which were complex foliar sprays designed for rapid leaf uptake, to help overcome any micro-nutrient deficiencies in the vines.

"For this job, we find the liquid foliar sprays are so much more

effective than granular fertiliser products," he said.

"And we have found that the Eco Vital products really boost the toughness of the grape skins, which is important for botrytis control and reducing the effects of the cold weather here."

Ross said he had been working with Elders Mt Barker Cooperative merchandise manager Matt Ericsson for the past five years and organised all his Eco Growth requirements through the branch with his assistance.

"We order through Matt and he delivers everything to our door. It is a great service," he said.

"He will let me know if things are going to be in short supply or if prices are going to increase.

"This year we saved thousands of dollars on the back of Matt's advice about fertiliser price hikes."

Ross said there was also good back-up service from Eco Growth and the Xabregas vineyard now used these fertiliser products exclusively.

For further information on the Eco Growth range of fertilisers, contact Elders Mount Barker Cooperative on 9851 3325.

Grape growers urged to be on look-out

SOUTH West grape growers are being urged to maintain vigilant surveillance for early detection of pests and diseases heading into the warmer spring months.

Elders Bunbury agronomist Tammy Eckersley said powdery mildew was likely to start appearing in vineyards, where vine flag shoots were evident and the weather conditions were favourable for powdery mildew infection.

She said now was the time for vineyards to plan fungicide and pesticide treatments with an agronomist, especially for outbreaks of powdery mildew, botrytis, mealy bugs and mites that could seriously set back vine production.

Tammy said seasonal conditions this year had also been ideal for widespread invasions of Apple Dimpling Bug across the region.

She said apple producers could expect heavy infestations of this devastating pest after early sampling by growers and the

Department of Agriculture and Food WA indicated above threshold numbers in fringing wattle vegetation.

Tammy said apple producers were well advised to step up their monitoring for the bug this year and consider preventative spraying options.

"There is a new registration for the insecticide active, thiacloprid, on Apple Dimpling Bug, plus other spray and management options that I will be assessing and considering for orchard clients," she said.

This year Tammy has also been working with brassica producers in the South West, investigating new control options for Diamondback moth, which is also very prevalent in the spring months. Also known as cabbage moth, this is potentially the most damaging and difficult to manage pest of vegetable brassica crops – mainly broccoli, as well as cabbage and cauliflower.

The caterpillars cause leaf mining and leaf "windowing" or

tearing damage and can feed inside the broccoli floret or cabbage head, where they become difficult to control with pesticide sprays. The damage to the floret/head can make affected produce unfit for sale.

Tammy said the Diamondback moth could annihilate broccoli as well as most brassica crops and this season was set to be a high pressure year with swarms of these pests coming from pasture and canola growing areas.

"In conjunction with a local grower, I am looking at new options for a more sustainable, prolonged control program for Diamondback moth," she said.

"The trials are investigating new insecticide chemistry alongside existing or standard treatments for Diamondback moth control and should help us avoid future Diamondback moth resistance to insecticides."

Tammy is working with graziers and dairy farmers as well on the management and improvement of their high rainfall pastures.

Much of this work is focused on longer season pasture varieties, predominantly tetraploid ryegrass.

Tammy said she worked with

her pasture clients on the timing of application of nutrients for pasture crops, which involved soil and plant tissue testing.

"This allows us to more precisely meet the nutritional requirements of next season's crop, which is especially important in the current environment of spiraling fertiliser costs."

For further information on pests and diseases in the South West, contact Tammy on 0427 861 164.



Tammy Eckersley, Elders Bunbury agronomist.