

Testing botrytis management options for wine grapes

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Project overview

Project: Fast-tracking solutions for reliable and climate responsive wine grape production

Funding source: Tasmanian Government, Agricultural Development Fund

Lead organisation: Tasmanian Institute of Agriculture (TIA)

Project partners: Wine Tasmania

Contributors: Wine Tasmania, Nufarm, Australian Wine Research Institute, collaborating wine businesses in Tasmania.

Lead researcher: Professor Kathy Evans

Project duration: May 2023 – April 2026

KEY POINTS

- This project aimed to address the production constraints for Tasmanian wine producers caused by botrytis bunch rot disease.
- The project team worked with producers to design and conduct on-vineyard trials to better manage the disease.
- The trials were designed to work within existing operations of a vineyard while allowing producers to access expert help from TIA researchers.
- The trials revealed situations where botrytis severity was reduced significantly through specific techniques or timings of leaf removal and synthetic or biological fungicides.
- Results were shared among other participants and the broader wine producing sector to highlight successes and practical implementation.

The challenge

Botrytis bunch rot disease continues to be a major production constraint at many vineyards and wine growing sites in Tasmania.

The disease is caused by the fungus *Botrytis cinerea*, which causes a soft rot of grey mould on grapes and can destroy whole bunches.

It is estimated that the processed value of wine grapes in Tasmania could be 24 per cent higher if costs due to botrytis are recuperated.

A reliable supply of high-quality fruit from Tasmania is needed to sustain and grow premium wine brands. The effective management of botrytis bunch rot disease means more high value wines with fewer costs.

Our response

The project team collaborated with Tasmanian wine producers to design and conduct simple on-vineyard producer-led trials to better manage botrytis bunch-rot disease.

Collaborators from 13 wine businesses took part in the trials and were invited to select a botrytis management practice to test and find out what works best on their site.

The trials comprised various cultural, chemical and biological control tactics for the management of botrytis bunch-rot disease. These included leaf removal by hand or machine, the location of leaf removal (one or both sides of the canopy), and the timing of leaf removal.



Our response (cont.)

Different sprays were also tested, including adding or omitting a biological product, substituting one chemical fungicide for another, testing alternative timings of sprays or trialling spray programs to aid longevity of fungicide efficacy.

The project team supported wine producers during the trial from idea to data collection and interpretation. The team also facilitated the sharing of trial results among project participants and the broader wine sector to highlight successes and practical implementation.

Trials were conducted across a diversity of business types, vineyard sizes and grape varieties in the North-West, Tamar Valley, East Coast, Coal Valley and Huon Valley regions of Tasmania. The trials were designed to work within existing operations of a vineyard while allowing producers to access expert help from TIA researchers.

This project also boosted efforts to help prevent botrytis bunch rot disease by producing an instructional video that demonstrated how to assess botrytis disease in a vineyard. It was published online, on social media and distributed to Tasmanian wine growers. The videos are an extra tool to help wine producers assess botrytis in their own trials.

The video was supported by extensive resources that were developed by the Tasmanian Institute of Agriculture to help wine growers that are available on the TIA website.

Delivering real-world impact

Each wine producer that participated in the Botrytis Project was intimately involved in the trial by deciding the focus of the trial. Producers selected a management practice which they tested to determine what works best for their site. The team then supported producers during the trial including the collection and interpretation of data.

Evan Rolley from Heriots Point Vineyard highlighted the value of having a structured process.

"I just think that this is a very worthwhile methodology for, not just viticulture, but for primary industry research generally. I think many people are motivated towards improving their productivity, reducing their environmental impact, and then having a structure for that. You have a thought about these things, but then having a structure for it and an intervention is what gets you there," Mr Rolley said.

Outcomes

The project led to improvements in grower skills and knowledge, a greater willingness for experimentation, practice changes, and a desire for future trials.

Researchers attributed the success of the trial to a simple trial design that produced results with minimal data collection, timely access to technical experts and knowledge exchanges among participants.

Workshops provided a valuable opportunity for producers to share and reflect on trial results, current practices and future trial designs. Participants noted the benefits of learning together and gaining awareness of other vineyard practises.

The aim of the project was to give producers the tools to find out for themselves what will work best at their own vineyard for disease management.



Image caption: (top) Botrytis bunch rot disease in Riesling grapes.
(bottom) Professor Kathy Evans explaining how to do a grape assessment.

For more information, please contact Professor Kathy Evans at TIA: katherine.evans@utas.edu.au

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