

Saving grapevines from trunk diseases

Wine regions across the world, including New Zealand, all face the reality of grapevine trunk diseases. Fungal spores infect wood, affecting both yield and quality, and posing a threat to vineyard sustainability.

A recent SFF-funded project by New Zealand Winegrowers to study the local extent of trunk diseases in vineyards brought some good news, yielding a range of practical tools for managing the diseases and lifting industry awareness.

“Trunk diseases are a looming issue for local winegrowers – and with replacement cost of a vineyard hectare at \$50,000, a potentially expensive one,” said NZ Winegrowers General Manager Research and Innovation, Dr Simon Hooker.

The project began in 2013 with a

survey of more than 700 vineyard blocks in Hawke’s Bay, Marlborough and Central Otago, consisting of 22 varieties, ranging from 4 to 33 years of age.

This work found that Malbec, Cabernet Sauvignon, Chardonnay, Syrah and importantly, the dominant Sauvignon Blanc, were the local varieties most susceptible to trunk diseases. Merlot, Pinot Gris and Riesling were the least.

Simon said that vines that were 15 years old or more were more likely to have symptoms of the disease.

“Given the average age of vines in Marlborough and Hawke’s Bay is 12 years, and that Sauvignon Blanc was found to be most susceptible, it is likely that we’ll detect more trunk diseases in vineyards over the next decade if strategies are not implemented.”

The project also included evaluating fungicides to apply to pruning wounds on vines, the most common point of infection. Data from the evaluation was then supplied to fungicide companies, a number of which have subsequently applied to add the procedure to their label directions.

Simon said the project had been a significant capability building exercise for the industry – and that useful tools had been produced, including cost-effective methods of applying the fungicides.

“These new methods are already being adopted by industry as the fungicides become available.”

– SIMON HOOKER



Trunk diseases are a looming issue for winegrowers.

