

FACT SHEET

Five-year payback for Eutypa reworking at Taylors Wines

A major Eutypa reworking program at Taylors Wines has realised a profit five years after cutting trunks to dripline level.



The Clare Valley winery upped the ante on its fight against the fungal disease Eutypa Dieback in 2011, when the infection was detected in 63% of its 20-year-old Shiraz vines. Irrigation restrictions had impacted on vineyard health, making the vines more susceptible to the disease and ultimately cutting yields by half. When yields dropped to 4t/ha on vines that were capable of 8t/ha, the winery initiated a large-scale reworking program in several of its straight-line Shiraz blocks.

Taylors opted for a radical strategy of trunk removal to 300mm above ground level to ensure clean wood and also establish the foundation for a consistent vine structure across the vineyard. The winery's technical viticulturist Ben Mitchell said although it was a more extreme approach, it paid dividends over time. "Training the vines up in a uniform manner means we're not going to have variability in fruit quality and yield for each vine," he said.

The cost of reworking these Shiraz blocks was \$14,000 per hectare over two years, with \$10,000/ha spent in year one. "The first year includes the cutting off process, then painting, trellising, removal of the old wood and also training up the new water shoots," said Ben. "The second-year cost is generally associated with more vine training, pruning and setting up the vine framework."

It took five years for Taylors Wines to realise the benefits of the program, with the vines returning to a 8t/ha yield and original B grade fruit quality after three years. "After the training process, we can actually get the yield up to 8t/ha and at that point it makes the vineyard a lot more profitable and sustainable going forward," said Ben. While fruit quality diminished slightly in the first two years of the program, it was restored by year three.

"In that third year you've got really good vine balance and the fruit quality returns to the original level, and because you're also doubling the yields, it's a win-win situation." Tracking the profit of these Shiraz blocks since 2014, Taylors has recorded a 48% profit increase. The winery's profit per hectare was \$6500 in 2014 compared to \$9,625/ha in 2018.

Despite this success, one-hectare reworking trials in Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon vineyards haven't produced the same positive results. In most cases, slow or inadequate vigour has led Taylors to replant rather than rework these varieties. "With the Merlot, we struggled to get vigour...[and with Cabernet Sauvignon], water shoots were only bursting after three or four years, which meant we weren't getting that uniform framework," said Ben. "You would probably get that after 10 years, but it's a lot more labour-intensive process. We've generally just pushed out those vines."

It may be the same story for the winery's 30 to 40-year-old Shiraz vines on contour blocks, as they pose problems for efficient trellising. Plus, Ben is concerned that the Eutypa infection may have progressed into the root system. "We're not going to worry about reworking those heritage vineyards."

However, the future looks bright for the newly-reworked Shiraz vineyards. "In hindsight, we would still rework our Shiraz vineyards. We've found this a very sustainable and profitable process. Hopefully, these vines can survive the test of time...[and] are here in 30, 40 or 50-years' time, still being productive and still producing great quality fruit," said Ben.

REWORKING COSTS

TAYLORS WINES 8.2HA SHIRAZ VINES

YEAR ONE	\$/HA
Removal of old cordon and wires	2,200
Reworking of Eutypa-affected vines	800
Wound treatment (fungicide, labour)	280
Re-trellising (materials & labour)	1,525
Stringing up vines	2,100
Vine training	2,700
Sub total	9,605
YEAR TWO	
Winter pruning	2,500
Vine training	2,050
Sub total	4,550
TOTAL	14,155