

# NEUTROG® feedback

Commercial update  
from Neutrog Australia #2

## New kids on the block

Jim Efrosinis  
Pennyfield Wines

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suitable for  
my business

Distributor

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Cropping Enterprise	Use	Hectares (approx)
Viticulture	<input type="checkbox"/> (eg. new or established vines or cover crops)	
Horticulture	<input type="checkbox"/> (eg. potatoes, carrots or cover crops)	
Broadacre	<input type="checkbox"/> (eg. cropping, pasture)	

# Pennyfield Wines



To have a wine rated in The Advertiser's Top 100 and score 93 out of 100, is a dream for many wine makers. With numerous bronze, silver and gold awards at regional and capital city wine shows throughout Australia, brothers

Jim and Bill Efrasinis of Pennyfield Wines have achieved this dream with their Petit Verdot 2002. This same wine was awarded a Gold Medal at the Australian Alternative Varieties Wine Show in 2003.

The family owns and operates a boutique winery at Berri in the Riverland, which first started commercial production in 2000, with the aim of producing quality wines of distinctive character.

Jim is passionate about changing the commonly held perception that the Riverland doesn't produce quality wines. 'Historically this may have been true, but there are a number of premium wines that are now coming out of this region. The Advertiser's Top 100 included nearly 10% of wines from irrigated areas such as the Riverland', Jim said. 'Hopefully we can help to break this stereotypical mould'.

Their neighboring properties of about 18 hectares at Berri in the Riverland are a major source of their grapes, supplying cabernet sauvignon, shiraz, grenache, mataro and gordo. Other varieties (chardonnay, merlot, petit verdot, touriga and viognier) are sourced from some of the Riverland's finest grape growers. 'We constantly strive to develop wine styles which fully express the inherent qualities of our fruit', Jim said. Since their first vintage in 2000, they have increased their production to fifty tonnes of crushed grapes, equating to about 3,500 cases of finished wine. Expansion is planned over the next two or three years.

Together with their in-house wine maker, David Smallacombe, who has more than 20 years experience in the industry, Jim and Bill are self reliant with all the wine making processes occurring on their property. 'We are passionate about wine quality and every step of the production process, from vineyard to bottle is handled personally. As a small winery, we see each and every bottle of our product as a reflection of our own hard work, skills and personalities – we are therefore reluctant to entrust any aspects of the process to a third party.'

'When we purchased the property in 1995, we wanted to get better quality crops by reducing the yield of the vines and also reducing canopy size by reducing vegetative growth. This is achieved partially by practicing restricted deficit irrigation (RDI), which cuts back on water usage, and also by avoiding synthetic fertilisers with high nitrogen content.'

'Initially we were using synthetic fertilisers on the vines, but as we learned

more about the environment and the soil, we became more worried about what we were throwing out', he continued. 'We made the change to organic based, non synthetic fertilisers about five years ago, and by using Neutrog fertiliser, we have had great results. We apply their fertiliser (Vine Mix & Bounce Back) in mid July at a half a tonne to the acre. It takes about four to six weeks to become available to the plants, and this slow release helps us to control canopy growth for better quality fruit.'

'In order to make high quality wines, we need to produce and source the highest quality grapes', Jim said. 'Neutrog is part of the program that helps us to achieve this.'

With an unbending commitment to quality on all levels, Pennyfield Wines has a very bright future. They are mindful of the need to ensure that any future developments do not result in the loss of the company's character. Jim concluded by saying 'At this small size, we have a very personal involvement with our wines – this not only provides the consumer with a unique range of wines, it also gives us a great deal of satisfaction.'



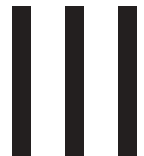
David Smallacombe, Jim and Tina Efrasinis

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Arthur Pippas

Arthur Pippas was a fruit grower prior to establishing his business, the Loxton Vine and Citrus Nursery, in 1985 in response to the boom in grape growing and increased demand for vines. Situated on 55 acres at Loxton, his is one of the biggest field nurseries in the area, producing more than 150,000 vines a year, 50,000 almond trees a year and 30,000 citrus trees a year.

He also grows large numbers of olives and avocados in pots. Arthur has an accredited vine nursery with the Australian Vine Improvement Association (AVIA) and is currently undergoing accreditation with the new body Vine Industry Nursery Association (VINA). Most of the vines he produces are sold direct to the growers within the Riverland region.

When they grow vines, almonds or citrus in the field they rotate the area used to grow their plants and let it rest for several years before replanting. This helps to keep their stock free of pathogens. 'We were very mindful of disturbing the balance of the soil by continually pouring on chemical fertilisers, and as our soil was virgin soil it was very low in organic matter', Arthur explained. 'I was keen to use an organic based, pelletised manure with a view to improving the organic content and structure of the soil as well as looking at the health of our soil from a long term perspective. I was one of the first growers in the Riverland to start using Neutrog organic fertiliser and have continued to do so for the past 10 years. We have now had several complete rotations of growing areas on the property and our soil structure is certainly better than it was - and we have noticed increased worm activity.'

The fertiliser is incorporated into the soil in preparation for planting. 'Using about two tonnes to the hectare, we rip in underneath the rows and plant our new plants on top. These young plants then grow down into the fertiliser and get a head start', Arthur said. 'We recommend that all our clients plant their new trees out with handful of Rapid Raiser in each hole.' Arthur also top dresses his pots of olives and avocados with it about six months after planting. 'After each season, we always put a cover crop on the ground where the vines or fruit trees have been, and we have noticed that this cover crop generally grows well without the addition of extra fertiliser, showing that there is an ongoing benefit in the soil from having used Neutrog's organic fertiliser.'

David Agg has been growing table grapes on a 40 acre property at Barmera for over 20 years. He grows varieties such as Flame Seedless, Medindie Seedless, Thompson Seedless, Red Globe and Fantasy Seedless.

He is also the first in Australia to grow some new varieties of table grapes, under license from Sun World Corp in the USA. Currently, his grapes are exported to Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia. Despite his experience, David is always trying new cultural practices, with the aim of producing the highest quality table grapes. He believes that his extra effort is being rewarded.

He has 23 acres in production with 450 vines to the acre. Production varies between eight and nine tonnes per acre, with picking starting in early January and continuing until mid March. The property produces about 17,000 ten kilogram cartons of grapes. Because he wishes to produce consistently high quality crops, David swapped to using Neutrog fertiliser seven years ago. He applies three quarters to one tonne to the acre per year in a split application. 'I apply it in autumn with a cover crop and lightly rotary



David Agg

hoe in. We mulch the winter cover crop and allow it to dry out before doing a further application in early August, which again is rotary hoed in to a shallow depth.

He also grows pumpkins on newly replanted areas. 'Since applying Neutrog to the pumpkins,' David said, 'we have produced bigger pumpkins, which colour earlier. We produce between 12 and 15 tonnes of pumpkins per acre. These are sent to Adelaide and New South Wales.'

'By using organic pelletised fertiliser, the effect on the vines is both reliable and consistent. I know that we will get 26 to 28 bunches of grapes from each vine and each bunch will

## Rod Davis

On his property at Winkie in the Riverland, Rod Davis grows 34 acres of citrus for the export market, with about 250 trees to the acre and 50 acres of vines for BRL.

He is the third generation to farm the land and the second generation to grow citrus. Rod is a member of the Berri Agricultural Bureau, with 25 years in the citrus industry and had, until 5 years ago, always used chemical fertilisers on his citrus. After a



recommendation from James Altman of the Fruit Doctors, he changed to Neutrog's organic based fertilisers. 'I was keen to use a balanced fertiliser to avoid getting high potassium levels which leads to magnesium deficiency on our

property', Rod said. 'We apply Rapid Raiser in July at the rate of half a tonne per acre and in November at a rate of 350kg per acre. Its ease of application makes it ideal for both established trees and new plantings. The long term benefit of using organic fertiliser with new plantings is that, as the plants get older, hopefully the soil will be in good nick.'

'Along with cultural practices such as thinning, pest management, pruning and watering, the application of Rapid Raiser has become part of the management program. Over the last five years, what we have noticed is the consistency of our cropping.' Rod continued, 'We produce more uniform levels of large fruit and yet require less hand thinning. We have got rid of the highs and leveled out the lows.'

'Our aim is to grow uniformly large fruit for the export market and we have achieved this in recent years with up to 56% of our crop sent to the USA who demand high quality, large fruit and with up to 90% packed for fruit rather than juicing.'

weigh about 750 grams.' David continued, 'The vines themselves have a bigger, more open frame. This allows for increased light penetration, increased spray penetration and in general they are easier to work with - even down to the fact that the fruit is easier to find.'

David strongly believes that the key to getting good skin colour is to use organic fertilisers. 'Most people who use chemical or manufactured fertilisers have problems getting good skin colour. Organic potassium produces better skin colour, as well as stronger, thicker skin. This means that there is less damage to the grapes due to rain, and also that the bunches have an improved shelf life.'

Other benefits that David has found from using Neutrog's organic based fertiliser is reduced fungal disease due to a general increase in vine vigour and health, as well as increased earthworm activity in the soil. 'I can dig down anywhere on the property and find stacks of worms', David said.

'If I could do anything better I probably would', David concluded. David is also the South Australian delegate on the Australian Table Grape Association and as well as the Murray Valley Table Grape Growers Council.



Trevor

Trevor Jachmann



and Dudley Jachmann

Dudley Jachmann

The Jachmann brothers, Trevor and Dudley, are well known figures in the Riverland region, both in the farming, transport and wine industries. They established Jachmann Transport in 1990, although both had been involved in transport for many years prior to this time. Currently they transport grapes as agents for Orlando Wyndham. Five years ago Dudley sold his share of the transport business to establish himself as a grape-harvester contractor, leaving Trevor to run the transport business. At this time, both brothers set up their own vineyards on adjoining properties at Loxton.

Trevor is the third generation farming the 350 acre family property, which was purchased in 1940. Prior to getting involved in viticulture, both brothers had been cereal farming on 4000 acres of dry land while running their transport business. Currently, Trevor grows over 50 acres of grapes, which he has planted since 1997. The varieties include shiraz, ruby cabernet and chardonnay grown for Orlando. Large parts of the land used to establish his vineyard had previously been used for dry land farming. 'Since they have been cropped for over 100 years, the cereal crops had taken the goodness out of the soil without putting enough back in', Trevor explained. Large areas were basically drifting sand hills, so to prevent soil drift he uses a permanent cover crop. This also helps to choke out the weeds and keep the temperature down on very hot days.

One benefit of using a cover crop is that the grapes often ripen a week or so later than those in the surrounding vineyards. Trevor believes that 'This extended growing time is very beneficial, as the longer it takes for the bunches to ripen, the better.'

When he first planted vines in this area, he found that they failed to thrive and he was keen to remedy the situation.

'The ground had no goodness in it and whenever I applied chemical fertilisers they just washed straight through', he said. 'Dudley's brother-in-law, Lloyd Schmaal, a dry land wheat farmer from Veitch, suggested that I needed to use organic fertiliser to improve the soil and that I should try Neutrog. This was ironic as I used to cart Neutrog in my transport business, but it never occurred to me to make the connection and use it on my own property. Within two or three months of applying Neutrog's Rapid Raiser to these struggling vines, they changed colour, became a healthy dark

green and started putting on new shoots. It surprised me that just one application, broadcast under the vines, made such a huge difference. The consistency of my vines and crops improved greatly after just two to three years.' Trevor concluded 'There were areas where I couldn't even grow weeds and now I can't tell the difference between the areas that used to be good and those that used to be poor.'

Trevor continues to use Bounce Back at the rate of one to two tonnes to the hectare, banded under the vines and lightly rotary hoed in without ploughing in the cover crop. This is all he uses and there is no need for foliar sprays or chemical fertiliser supplements. 'It is just so easy - you just chuck it on and the vines will do the rest. There's no worry about burning. I just make one application in May/June when the ground is wet. I don't have to think about what to put on next - just one application does it'.

His brother Dudley, established his own 50 acre vineyard at the same time and grows for Simeon Wines, who rate him as one of their top producers. He grows shiraz, ruby cabernet and pinot noir. Unlike Trevor, he uses drip irrigation on his vines and does not use a cover crop.

Following Lloyd's recommendation to Trevor, Dudley also started using Neutrog fertiliser. He was keen to use an organic product, but also wanted a quality product that would produce optimal quality grapes with uniform and consistent results throughout the vineyard.

'Its slow release nature means that the nutrients are taken up from start to finish', Dudley said, 'and its pelletised form means easy application.' Bounce Back is banded in a one metre strip underneath the vines in July/August

'Our aim is to open up the canopy to allow good light penetration to the bunches. One thing that has really become obvious is the even balanced canopy growth we get along the vine rows, despite the undulating ground.' Dudley finished by saying 'I believe this consistency indicates vine health and increasing humus content of the soil from using this fertiliser.'

Robert Morena of Baramba in the Riverland thinks that because of changing vineyard management practices and tighter chemical and water use regulations, organic is the way to go with fertilisers. Robert took over the 75 acre property from his parents, and has grown premium red and white grapes for BRL and Southcorp for the last nineteen years - always using organic fertilisers. 'Wineries are always going on about chemical residue', Robert said. 'People are becoming very health conscious and there is a definite shift towards organic farming practices.'

Up until seven or eight years ago, he used raw manure on his vines, but problems of awkwardness of application and the weed seeds that it contained, made its use quite time consuming.



Robert Morena

'The main reason that I initially changed to using Neutrog's pelletised organic fertiliser was for easier application and bulk handling. My spreader applies it directly under the vines where I need it for drip irrigation. It is safer to use than raw manures or chemical fertilisers, as it doesn't cause burning.' Robert applies it to both new and established vines in July at the rate of a half tonne to the acre. He also does extra applications for young vines. As well as including it in the soil when planting, he applies a handful per vine every three to four weeks.

Following these fertiliser practices is definitely working for him. He has achieved good colour scores with the fruit colouring early and good baume levels. Robert also believes that he achieves better flavour in his grapes by using organic fertiliser. 'Southcorp grades us as average or above for our area and sometimes we have been in the top 4 to 5%', he said.

'Producing good grapes is a balancing act where you have to get everything right, especially water and fertiliser. Since changing to Neutrog fertiliser I have noticed far better consistency - in growth and cropping. The growth is always better with organic fertilisers, as is the improvement in soil structure and earth worm activity. I am very quality conscious and as such, am happy with Neutrog's product, which seems to be doing the job!'

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