

commercial feedback

Commercial update from Neutrog #7



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Angove's Nanya vineyard



The Angove family company is one of Australia's largest privately owned wine companies, and stands as one of the few with strong interests in distilling as well as grape growing and winemaking.

Angove's 480 Hectare Nanya Vineyard is situated on the banks of the Murray River approximately 5 km north of the township of Paringa in South Australia.

Planting of the Nanya Vineyard started in 1968, and today it

has in excess of 800,000 vines, boasts 19 grape varieties, encompassing 279 hectares of white varieties and 197 hectares of red.

Despite the size of the Nanya Vineyard, it produces only one half of Angove's requirements, with the remainder of the fruit drawn from smaller holdings owned by the company including their Anchorage vineyard, as well as from local independent grape producers, and other premium grape growing regions throughout South Australia.

As part of Angove's continuing efforts toward quality grape and wine production, the vineyard team of 7 full-time employees and 3 technical and management staff is undertaking an enormous project of redeveloping the entire Nanya vineyard over a 10 year period. Starting from scratch with a bare paddock, the row direction is being turned around 90 degrees, running east-west, with rows surveyed and deep ripped. The vineyard's soil types run predominately east-west throughout the property, therefore irrigation practices and varieties are now managed and planted according to soil type.

Nick Bakkum has been Vineyard Manger with Angove's since 2002, and has been using Neutrog fertilisers for 3 years at both the Nanya and Anchorage vineyards. He is very happy with the results achieved by using Neutrog, and says "Because it's pelletised it's very easy to handle and transport, as well as easy to spread. We use a ripper spreader that allows us to target the fertiliser 8-10 inches into the soil, direct into the root zone on both sides of the vine. Another benefit is that we only need to

do one application a year, which means we save money as we don't have to use other fertilisers".

Nick commented that there are many benefits of using Neutrog ... one being that the fertilisers are organic, which was a major factor in his decision to change from alternative methods, and resultant weeds ceased to be a problem as he stopped using the broad-based cow and chook manures. "Obviously a huge benefit is the improved health of the vines, and the fact that the vines remain in a good controlled vigour/crop load balance without the disproportionate issues created by some of the higher analysis products." Nick said. "Neutrog helps us to maintain consistency in our vineyard, which is essential to good wine grapes".

Considering the frost earlier in the season and the current drought conditions, Nick is reasonably happy with this year's harvest which has seen reduced crops throughout the district, but he has been able to maintain overall vineyard health, and is committed to using Neutrog in the future.

Trevor Ledgard

Having a background as a qualified mechanic, engineer and grape grower, Trevor Ledgard has built a business designing and building pruning equipment, combining his practical knowledge of vineyards and orchards with his engineering skills.

Ledgard Pruning Systems uses advanced computer-aided design techniques to refine its product, which is now working throughout Australia, as well as in South Africa, USA and Brazil.

Over the years Trevor has also spent time developing his 17 acre vineyard in McLaren Vale, South Australia growing A-Class premium grapes for Fosters Wines.

Trevor has consistently been using Neutrog products for 10 years as a sole replacement for raw manure, and is pleased with the results he has achieved since making the change. He found that raw manures contained additives, which upset the balance of the soil, which is one of the reasons why he now uses



organic products. **Bounce Back** was the first product Trevor used, which was banded down the vine rows, and he comments "Using **Bounce Back** has allowed me to develop a very good balance of nutrients in my soils".

Seeing positive results, Trevor began using **Rapid Raiser** instead of **Bounce Back**. The pelletised **Rapid Raiser** is easily applied with a tractor-towed spreader, and Trevor says "using **Rapid Raiser** has maintained a consistent and pleasing level of nutrients in the soil."

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Seamungus trial results



Seamungus is a soil and plant conditioner in pellet form, manufactured by composting seaweed, fish, humic acid and manure. It undergoes a unique composting process, specifically developed to stabilise nutrients, maximise nutrient availability and to ensure the product is free of any parasites, pathogens and weed seeds. Most importantly, the resultant product retains the microbiology necessary for a 'living' product. Seamungus is also certified by the Biological Farmers Association.

The benefits of applying organic materials such as seaweed and humic acid are well documented – in particular, seaweed contains naturally occurring growth stimulants along with a wide range of other essential elements, ideal for promoting plant growth and health.

Many farmers have been using Seamungus on crops ranging from grapes through to fruit and vegetables, and are seeing amazing results, whether it's used as an alternative base manure or as an additional input to their existing fertiliser programs with measured returns on investment.

Vic Szabo from Sustainable Horticultural Crop Management Services is an independent consultant agronomist, who recently established a number of controlled Seamungus trials for Neutrog in the Virginia area of South Australia.

These trials were carried out on potatoes, spinach, carrots and almonds.

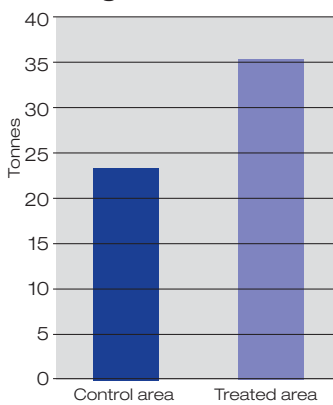
The purpose of these trials was to apply 1 tonne per hectare of Seamungus to measure the effect on crop yields, any quality and nutritional benefits, plus the residual effect on soil organic matter and nutrient levels – from which the cost/benefit analysis of the Seamungus application could be calculated.

The potato trial demonstrated significant benefits from the Seamungus application – not only in terms of a huge yield increase, whilst maintaining similar tuber nutrient levels, but most importantly in improving the quality of the tubers – similar results to those achieved in our other potato trials, reported in our previous newsletter.

Vic reported that the skin quality of tubers was vastly different between the treated and untreated – the treated tubers were smooth-skinned, whereas a high percentage of the untreated tubers had rough and cracked skin. Also, the tuber size was more even in the treated area, whereas the untreated tubers were very uneven.

The Seamungus treated plots yielded 35.4t per hectare of potatoes against the untreated plots yield of 22.7t per hectare – a yield increase of 55.9% – see graph.

Seamungus Trial on Potatoes



Unfortunately these potatoes were not graded, and as such no pack outs were recorded.

Vic concluded that "Even with the unfavourable growing conditions, the trial has shown the remarkable benefits of Seamungus as an additional application on potatoes. However, this being a non-replicated demonstration trial, similar trials should be repeated in the same region, at least twice more". These additional trials are currently underway.

The spinach trial produced similar results from the Seamungus application. Vic reported the following "The treated plants developed a deeper green colour from the control plants which were a paler green, even at harvest. The treated spinach produced approximately 20% higher marketable yield." Vic concluded, "Even though the conditions were not favourable to growing any crop during the spring and early summer period, the trial certainly showed benefits in the application of Seamungus in spinach, such as a more robust root system, better colour and more marketable yield."

The almond trial was the only trial that did not produce a significant economic benefit over and above the cost of the Seamungus application – having said this, there were some very good indicators that the true benefit of the Seamungus application will be seen in the second year.

Vic reported "In almonds, kernels are graded according to size, the larger the kernel, the better the return to the grower. In the small sample collected, the treated plot produced 22% "18-20" size (the largest), 60% "22-24" and 18% smalls. The untreated plot did not produce any 18-20's, just 62% "22-24" and 38% smalls. The yield in both the treated and untreated plots returned the same yield of 2600kg per hectare.

The kernel analysis showed better nutritional levels in the treated almonds, particularly zinc and calcium.

Vic concluded "The overall results of the Seamungus application in almonds have shown 3 distinct advantages:

1. Better early shoot growth
2. Significantly better kernel size.
3. Higher nutrient levels in the kernels at harvest.

Unfortunately in the first year the significantly better kernel size does not return the economic benefit required to justify the cost of the Seamungus application.

The 22% large almond kernels represent 572kg of almonds per hectare, giving an added return of approximately 7 cents per kg or \$40 per hectare.

This trial will continue for a second year to gauge any additional returns.

Unfortunately the carrot trial was not completed, and a new trial has recently commenced.

Given the extremely positive results of these Seamungus trials, further controlled trials are being established on many other crops including grapevines, citrus and olives.

Treated spinach

Untreated spinach



Light Pass Agricultural Bureau Tour

In May 2007, Neutrog hosted a tour of its composting site and Kanmantoo factory for approximately 40 members of the Light Pass Agricultural Bureau – many of which are vineyard owners and operators. This visit was organised by Farmer Johns of Nuriootpa in the Barossa Valley and was led by its staff members Gavin Keller and Paul Schutz.

Neutrog's Managing Director, Angus Irwin and Commercial Sales Representative, Paul Giles, initially met the group at the Mannum Composting Site – bringing along a special guest for the day, Jamie Butterfield, the Curator of AAMI Stadium.

The composting site currently holds approx 5000 tonnes of manure, and is licensed to process in excess of 100,000 tonnes per annum – the manure is in 500 tonne windrows, each at a differing stage of its composting cycle. Each row is clearly marked and identified throughout the process right through to the finished product – this is in keeping with the BFA certification standards, which allow for trace back of all raw materials to their origins.

Each windrow is turned 4-6 times during a composting/ageing process spanning 8-10 weeks. In summer water is added when required. Once completed, this material is screened and then transported to Neutrog's Kanmantoo factory.

To ensure quality controls and standards are met, documentation is maintained throughout the entire process.

Neutrog's Managing Director, Angus Irwin commented to the group that "whilst it is an expensive exercise to go to the lengths Neutrog does in its composting process, the ultimate aim is to produce a high quality end product that is consistent year in, year out. This not only



fits with our premium brand positioning in the market place, but also helps enormously in allowing us to manufacture consistently and efficiently – neither could be achieved with manure which is not composted and supplied on an ad-hoc basis."

The tour then progressed to Neutrog's Kanmantoo factory, where they were met by Neutrog's National Sales Manager, Vince Davey, and broken into smaller groups for a guided walk through the manufacturing facility.

Neutrog is currently processing approx 100 tonnes of pellets each day, and Neutrog's guests were able to follow the process from the incoming composted manure, the mixing and blending process, the steam treatment, the pelleting, the dehydration and cooling, the screening and then through to the bulk storage, packaging and despatch – each process being controlled and monitored by a computer program.

Paul Schutz from Farmer Johns commented "I previously had no comprehension as to the size or extent of the Neutrog operation – the comprehensive manner in which the manures are composted and processed gives me enormous confidence in the quality and consistency of the products Neutrog produces".

Neutrog's guests were then treated to a meal, followed by an address from Jamie Butterfield. Coming from a farming background Jamie told how he took over at AAMI Stadium from his father Doug Butterfield, and after being introduced to the Neutrog range some 10 years ago, he slowly and hesitantly introduced the products into his feeding program. Since doing so he has been amazed at the improved soil structure, root growth and drainage, and sincerely believes that the Neutrog products have played a significant role in making the AAMI Stadium turf one of the country's best playing surfaces.

More recently Jamie used **Seamungus** to help revive the turf after the Robbie Williams and U2 concerts – he was extremely pleased with the result.

Neutrog welcomes tours of its manufacturing facilities by interested agricultural groups. To enquire, please contact Erica Morgan on 08 85385077 or erica@neutrog.com.au