

# Grafted Grapevine Standards

**Tessa Nicholson**

Instigated back in 2006 the Grafted Grapevine Standard (GVS) is an important step in the journey to creating virus free vineyards in New Zealand. The impetus for establishing them was the increase in Leaf Roll Virus in certain parts of New Zealand.

Grapevine Leaf Roll associated virus type 3 (GLRaV-3) is economically one of the most important and most widespread diseases of wine grapes. It poses a threat to the New Zealand wine industry's goal of growing quality grapes for premium wine production, as it delays ripening, reduces yield and depresses berry sugar content. Eventually it will kill the vine, given there is no cure. The only remedy is to remove the vine and replant – a cost for growers.

Which is why the GGS is so important. There is very little point in replacing virused vines, if the new vine also contains virus.

With funding from New Zealand Winegrowers, the aim of GGS was to formalise a process where strict protocols were undertaken by nurseries to ensure all material leaving their facility was Leaf Roll Virus free. Testing of material has to be undertaken, and before accreditation is granted the nursery must meet stringent audited criteria. To retain accreditation they also have to be audited annually.

Helping to develop the GGS, is the Vine Industry Nursery Association, (VINA).

Chair Ben Wickham says the standards are a vital cog in the future of New Zealand's wine industry, not only to help in controlling the spread of Leaf Roll Virus, but also in ensuring traceability of the vines themselves.

“This is a key for our industry. We can go back and give you the history on any plant we have sold, providing grower assurance. It is a continuing process of providing traceability of the wine, from the origin of the vine through to the end product in the bottle. That seems to be what export markets are looking for.”

VINA is also concerned that growers who have decided to top graft in recent years may not be aware of the potential virus issues. Given Leaf Roll Virus is not as obvious in Sauvignon Blanc, when compared to red varieties, Ben says there is the potential for growers to be grafting Pinot Noir say, onto Sauvignon and ending up

with a virused vine. Just because it is not obvious in Sauvignon vines, does not mean Leaf Roll is not present he says, as has been proved by research undertaken in Marlborough by Plant and Food.

“If there is the virus in the mother material, it will be automatically transferred to the grafted material. So what may look like a cheap option initially, may end up costing far more in the long run.”

He advised anyone undertaking top grafting to ensure they virus test the budwood and the mother material before proceeding.

Currently there are four New Zealand Nurseries who have been GGS certified, with a fifth about to receive accreditation. These nurseries have all undertaken intensive auditing of their propagation material, with all processes having to fit certain criteria within the standards themselves. Despite being a costly experience for the nurseries, Ben says there is little added cost to the consumer.

“There is little differentiation in cost between the vines which are certified under the GGVS and those that aren’t. But we want to promote the best quality product we can.”

Further details on the GGVS are available on the New Zealand Wine Website.