

MEDIA RELEASE 19th May 2008

A beacon of hope for disheartened irrigated wine growers...

"Growers can potentially save up to 50% off their water usage" Bruce Chalmers

At a time when the Murray Darling system is experiencing its lowest flows in decades and irrigators are trying to come to terms with little or no water allocations and high water prices; a ground-breaking publication offering practical assistance is being distributed free of charge to irrigated winegrowers across the Murray Darling Basin. The DVD, *Sustainable Viticulture: growing for our future* was released today and provides valuable information on improving irrigation efficiency in a bid to help viticultural businesses become more sustainable and to reduce pressure on the ailing river systems.

Chalmers Vineyard, an industry leader in sustainable practice, shares its experience, explaining how it has been achieving water use figures of around half the regional average by using a combination of techniques which have been refined over the last 7 years.

"We've been working with Chalmers over the years to really perfect the irrigation system design, management and maintenance with a view to achieving absolute maximum efficiency" said David Bell, Regional Manager at Water Dynamics Mildura. "The results have been outstanding, the irrigation scheme together with all the other things Bruce is doing are really setting new efficiency standards."

Strategies such as irrigating smaller amounts daily and only at night using drip irrigation to save wastage from run-off and evaporation, boosting organic carbon in the soil to maximise water retention, eradicating weeds, reducing soil compaction, capturing every drop of natural rainfall, under-vine mounding, fertigation and no-tillage are all discussed and illustrated in the documentary.

The DVD was devised in response to hundreds of phone enquiries about the dramatic water use reductions at the Chalmers Euston vineyard and following a successful field trip organised by Murray Valley Winegrowers Inc of around 200 local wine grape growers.

Bruce Chalmers said "I thought if it was easy for everyone to see how much water we are saving, and they all tried some of these methods too... If they managed to save even 10% or 20% of their annual water usage, the result would be a massive reduction across the industry and a huge relief for the Murray Darling river system."

Methods outlined in the DVD will have application in irrigated vineyards right across Australia with the major wine companies already showing interest in using the DVD as an educational tool for their growers.

A fellow industry leader in sustainability is Foster's Group whose National Viticulturist Richard Hamilton said "Fosters saw this initiative as being both timely and of benefit to the industry particularly as it ties in with our own sustainability research and practical applications including our "Fosters Footprint" environmental program. We will distribute it to all our contracted growers in irrigated areas as well as our company viticulturists. The range of techniques shown will not apply to all growers however the ideas should enable the majority to modify their own practices and achieve a reduction in water requirements."

2000 copies of the DVD will go out to growers via established grower networks in the Murray Valley, The Riverland and the Riverina/MIA from May 19th. The project was made possible by the donation of time and expertise by Bruce Chalmers and funding from the Federal Government through the Grape and Wine Research and Development Corporation in association with critical contributions from industry corporate sponsors Water Dynamics, Netafim, Fosters Group, Mangan Developments, Soilworks, Plaspipes and Microcontrol Engineering.

"As an environmentalist and educator I see this project as a shining example of promoting sustainable primary industry and a way forward for struggling irrigators" said Arron Wood, 2007 Prime Minister's Environmentalist of the Year. "We need to take the initiative and become innovators, world leaders in sustainable practice to ensure a green and prosperous future for us all. After all, a healthy environment equals a healthy bottom line."

For more information, to arrange an interview or to obtain copies of the DVD please contact Kim Chalmers kim@chalmerswine.com.au 0400 261 932

