



By ASHLEY WALMSLEY

It was the first time Andrew Pengilly could remember lifting the wires in the Chardonnay 2011-12 crop. The head viticulturist for the 121-hectare (300-acre) Tyrrell's Wines based in the Hunter Valley, NSW, embraced the extra job as a sign the once-struggling crop was on well and truly on its way to improvement.

The remarkable turnaround in grape yield came from getting down to the root of the problem, quite literally.

Working with Shane Fitzgerald from Queensland-based Total Grower Services and the Petrik System, Mr Pengilly took a closer look at the troubled vineyard's soils.

Each block at Tyrrell's is assessed for vigour, cropping levels and overall health on a regular basis.

The chardonnay block in question had been declining for some years since being planted in 1980. The crop had previously never performed to top-shelf standard.

Issues within the crop included fruit sunburn due to poor leaf coverage and short cane growth; stunted vine growth; very small leaf formation; short internode lengths;

poor bud formation; and smaller than average bunch size.

The block's cropping levels were averaging 1.8t/ac instead of the required 2.5t/ac.

"We require this chardonnay fruit to end up in our Vat 47 label. Previously the fruit has ended up in our lower-end wines," Mr Pengilly said.

Landmark-Rutherford agronomist Nigel Wagstaffe suggested using Petrik products to improve the yields of Tyrrell's heritage shiraz in 2010-11, which was suffering from herbicide damage. With the success of that project, Mr Pengilly believed it was again time to look at the soil of the block.

Soil samples were taken and a set fertiliser regime recommended using Petrik Digestor and Green Manure to adjust the soil's chemistry. A low rate of chicken manure was also applied.

Irrigation was not required due to the wetter than average season.

It took a growing season (October 2011 to February 2012) for the results to be known. Cropping levels went from 1.8t/ac to 2.4t/ac, thus the need to lift the wires.

Mr Pengilly said the struggling crop traditionally would have

Hunter Valley success boosts Tyrrell's trophy

TYRRELL'S Wines continues to fill the trophy cabinet and reinforce its reputation for quality. The company won four trophies and 13 gold medals at the 2012 Hunter Valley Wine Show lunch in August.

Along with trophies for Premium Vintage Dry Red, Current Vintage Semillon and Current Vintage Dry White, Tyrrell's was awarded The Ryan Family Trophy for most successful exhibitor of young wines, courtesy of the recently released 2012 semillons.

"We took a gamble with the 2012 semillons and finished picking a week later than most to ensure we got real flavour in the

wines," Tyrrell's managing director and fourth-generation winemaker, Bruce Tyrrell said.

"I believe the 2012s are the best whites since 2009."

While it was the semillons that took centre stage, Tyrrell's chardonnays continued to shine, taking out three of the five gold medals awarded for the variety at the show.

The Hunter Valley Wine Show is considered one of the best regional wine shows in the country.

Tyrrell's Wines also won the newly introduced Wine of Provenance Award to celebrate the greatest wines of the region

and their ability to age, improve over time and show a sense of place and style.

"Receiving this award is a testament to the work we have been doing to further enhance the quality and definition of our top wines particularly the reds," Mr Tyrrell said.

"I would have given up every other medal and trophy to be the first to be awarded these Wines of Provenance, as I believe the award rewards those wines that show a sense of place and have the ability to live and improve with real age, something not all wine regions can achieve."

undergone a soil sample before additives such as lime, gypsum or potash were applied as per the recommendation from a fertiliser company.

The company had previously relied on granular fertilisers as well.

The results have prompted something of a change in thinking about Mr Pengilly's approach to soils.

"Applying the correct and right amount of fertiliser instead of applying a trace element granular does not have the same affect," he said.

"The Tyrrells' theory is that if the soil is correctly balanced then the marriage between the soil and the vine ends up in a fine glass of wine.

"Everybody has their own theory

and management style to combat their existing problems; the great thing about the wine industry is that people (vineyard managers) are not afraid to pick up the phone and ask other managers of their experiences in their specific situations."

Mr Pengilly said he would continue to use the Petrik products.



Tyrrell's Wines have 121 ha of vineyards within the Hunter Valley with emphasis on chardonnay varieties.



Adjustments to soil health resulted in the cropping levels rose from 1.8t/ac to 2.4t/ac.