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Action urged to reduce phylloxera risk

27 June, 2018 by **Andy Young**

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Wine Australia and Vinehealth Australia are encouraging grapegrowers who are considering planting or replanting grapevines to use phylloxera-resistant rootstocks for at least a portion of their vineyard to future-proof their business against phylloxera.

Phylloxera is one of the most serious biosecurity risks for the Australian grape and wine community, with the potential to devastate vineyards and wreak economic devastation on rural communities.

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Wine Australia General Manager of Research, Development and Extension Dr Liz Waters said applying best practice farmgate hygiene and investing in resistant rootstocks should be considered as an insurance policy for grapegrowers across Australia.

“Through our isolation as a nation and strict biosecurity practices, we have avoided much of the devastation that phylloxera has caused in other wine growing regions around the world. However, we can’t ignore the massive risk we face,” Dr Waters said.

“While alone it cannot stop the spread of phylloxera, one of the most effective long-term practices is planting vines grafted on phylloxera-resistant rootstocks so that, if there is an outbreak, the immediate economic impact is reduced.”

Dr Waters acknowledged that planting vines on rootstocks is more expensive than own-rooted material but she urged wine businesses to think of the expense as an insurance policy.

“If there is a phylloxera outbreak, vines on resistant rootstocks will not be affected, reducing the economic impact on the growers and the wider rural community. Even a portion of a property with vines on resistant rootstock offers a buffer against economic devastation. Rootstocks can also provide more immediate benefits by providing resistance to vigour-sapping nematodes and delivering better performance in drought and saline soils.”

While there remains a lot to learn about rootstocks and phylloxera resistance, Dr Waters urged grapegrowers to use Wine Australia's free online [Grapevine Rootstock Selector](#) to pick the best rootstocks for their vineyard and seek expert assistance from their local nursery.

"Choosing the right rootstock can eliminate many long-held concerns about quality. The Grapevine Rootstock Selector tool has extensive information on rootstock and scion compatibility and soil suitability, so that grapegrowers can take advantage of decades of research," Dr Waters said.

Vinehealth Australia Chief Executive Officer Inca Pearce said every available tool was needed to prevent the spread and impact of phylloxera in Australia.

"It's critical that the grape and wine community works together to stop the spread of phylloxera', Pearce said.

"Planting on phylloxera-resistant rootstocks is an important protective measure for long-term sustainability. However, rigorous farmgate hygiene practices and compliance with state quarantine regulations are vital in preventing the further spread of phylloxera.

"We must work together to ensure that the own-rooted vines planted a decade, generation or century ago can continue to produce grapes for Australian wines that consumers around the world enjoy."

Vinehealth Australia provides a range of resources on farmgate hygiene and specific rootstocks with varying resistance to key phylloxera strains at vinehealth.com.au/pests-and-diseases/phylloxera/phylloxera-strains/.

Read more about: [phylloxera](#),

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