



A wine tourism biosecurity sign at Golding Wines in the Adelaide Hills.

Biosecurity signage: the new wave

Traditional biosecurity signs aren't appropriate for wine tourism. In 2017, Vinehealth Australia created a range of tourist-friendly biosecurity signs. Feedback to the signs has been overwhelmingly positive and sales have been strong.

Signage has been used for branding and marketing for centuries. Every winery has a sign at the front gate promoting its name and many have signs indicating car parking areas and the location of the cellar door.

For customers, signage helps with business identification and brand recognition, and conveys useful information such as locations of facilities in a venue and rules of behaviour. Directional signs have even been found to reduce customer stress¹.

In 2017, when Vinehealth Australia was successful in receiving funding to create a responsible visitation campaign for the wine tourism sector, the first step was research. We contracted Square Holes to interview tourists and cellar door owners about biosecurity knowledge and expectations when visiting wine regions.

We found that more than a third of tourists expect to take photos amongst the vines and walk through a vineyard when they visit a cellar door. Females and younger respondents have higher expectations to interact with vines when visiting regions compared with other groups.

"Pests and diseases can be picked up by tourists and spread on tyres, shoes and clothes. And while phylloxera is present in some parts of Australia, many wine regions around Australia are proudly phylloxera free. So for vineyard owners, the safest approach is to ask tourists not to walk or drive amongst our vines," said Inca Lee, Vinehealth Australia CEO.

During the 2017 research, it was also found that a majority of tourists (74%) want to know more about how they can protect the wine industry from

pests and diseases. Education can be used to enhance the visitor experience and promote brand responsibility for biosecurity.

But how can we educate tourists? Of the tourists interviewed:

- 66% said cellar door/visitor centre staff talking to them would be effective
- 65% said signs would be effective
- 46% said information on social media would be effective
- 37% said advertising would be effective

In response, Vinehealth Australia developed a training program for cellar door staff, and a range of wine tourism biosecurity signs for cellar doors and tourism operations, focused on educating

tourists about how they can protect vines from pests and diseases by not walking or driving into vineyards.

The beautifully designed signs also offer other educational messages about the Australian wine industry, including:

- We have some of the oldest vines in the world
- Enjoy our wines, protect our vines
- Be part of our Australian wine story

Industry members agreed that visually consistent signage for consumers is important, and signage in different languages is also key. All signs also include a QR code that is linked to the tourism section of the Vinehealth Australia website.

The large metal signs are designed for driveways, car parking areas, cellar door entrances and other areas where visitors tend to wander into vines.

“We know the traditional biosecurity ‘warning’ signs aren’t welcoming or appropriate for tourist entrances, so we’ve created this range of signs for wine tourism purposes,” Inca said.

Vinehealth Australia recognises the decision to not allow tourists into vineyards unchecked is a difficult one for wine companies.

“We encourage wineries to assess the risks and manage them accordingly before they allow visitors into their vineyards. That means asking your guests where they’ve been in the month prior, providing alternative footwear if necessary and educating them about biosecurity,” Inca said.

“We know how important it is to share our love of wine, and for people to experience the unique places that produce it. We encourage wine businesses to use healthy vines messaging to complement and amplify their brand stories.

“The increase in visitors to our regions means it’s even more important for everyone to understand the risks and how to minimise them. There are simple things vineyard owners can do to reduce the risks. That includes fencing vineyards or planting hedges and putting up signs to prevent access to vine rows.”

Sign sales

Feedback to the signs has been overwhelmingly positive and sales have been strong. Between July 2018 and June 2019, 209 wine tourism biosecurity signs were sold. Figure 1 shows a regional breakdown of wine tourism biosecurity sign sales by number. Additionally, 398 farm-gate biosecurity signs were sold in that period for operational entrances.

Langhorne Creek and Coonawarra associations have completed bulk sign orders on behalf of their regions. Langhorne Creek ordered 15 signs for the region’s 14 cellar door sites and Coonawarra ordered 47 signs for the region’s 33 cellar door sites. There have also been sign orders from interstate cellar doors located in NSW, Western Australia and Tasmania.

Some wineries are buying multiple signs to protect their properties. Henschke has purchased 18 wine tourism biosecurity signs and 10 farm-gate biosecurity signs for their vineyards and cellar door.

Across our business we have three key vineyards where we find visitor entry hardest to control,” Prue Henschke said. “There’s our vineyard near our cellar door, the Hill of Grace vineyard and our Lenswood vineyard. We are placing the wine tourism biosecurity signs at the entrances of these vineyards as one method to help address visitor behaviour.”

Henschke’s oldest vineyards include the Hill of Grace vineyard, planted in 1860, and the Mount Edelstone vineyard, planted in 1912.

“I understand the interest in the vines. It’s a constantly changing crop, from dormancy through bud burst and flowering to harvest. And when you look at the old trunks, they are like sculptures. The structure and the bulk of the trunk is quite beautiful to photograph,” Prue said.

“But our vines are on their own roots and they are irreplaceable. South Australia has some of the oldest commercial grapevines in the world, because we have never had phylloxera. By far the biggest risk for us for spreading phylloxera is humans. Phylloxera can be carried in soil, grapes, leaves or anything that picks up any of these. People can carry the insect on their footwear, clothing or vehicles.

“And phylloxera can be present in a vineyard for several years before any symptoms are seen. This is why it’s very important not to walk or drive in vineyards, especially if you have previously been in or near another vineyard interstate.

Sign sales by region

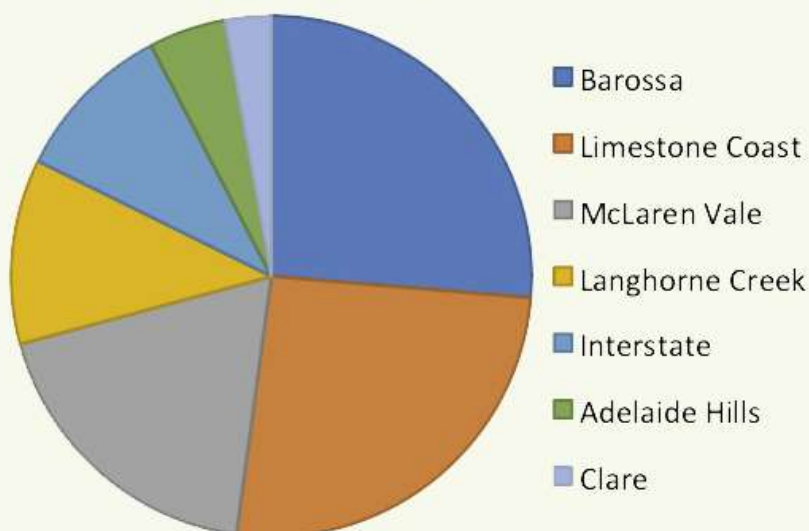


Figure 1. SA regional wine tourism biosecurity sign sales by number from July 2018 to June 2019.

“The wine tourism biosecurity signs help us to share these messages in a clear, simple and classy way.”

As well as investing in signs, Henschke runs VIP tours where visitors can enter the Hill of Grace vineyard accompanied by a Henschke Brand Ambassador. The Brand Ambassadors use this opportunity to educate their visitors about phylloxera and biosecurity topics.

The winery is also using barriers to prevent visitors wandering into vineyards.

“Our Lenswood vineyard is on an unfenced corner and people park on the verge and walk straight in. And during Tour Down Under we see people picnicking in the vineyard. We’re now planting hedgerows of nectar-producing native plants around the vineyard to protect it and to encourage beneficial insects,” Prue said.

“We’ll also put signs up here to educate visitors about the reasons why we don’t want people entering our vineyards. I think the messages on the signs are very well done.”

How to use signs

Ideally, your wine tourism biosecurity signs will be placed between your car parking area and your vines, to prevent entry into your vine rows, particularly if there are no barriers in between.

We also suggest adding biosecurity signage at the roadside entrance of your property, and near the cellar door entrance or any seating areas that are adjacent to vines. You may need several signs located in positions where visitors usually wander into your vines.

Recently, Vinehealth Australia introduced a ‘petite’ sign size for small/boutique wineries. If you are planning a new cellar door or retrofitting signs to an existing cellar door, please contact Vinehealth Australia on (08) 8273 0550 to discuss sign designs, sizes and layouts that promote best practice biosecurity.

For signage to be effective, Plant Health Australia² says:

- signs must be clear, visible and well maintained
- signs should contain simple messages
- signs should be supported with other biosecurity measures such as restricted access points

Limiting the ways in which people can access your property, by shoring up fencing, shutting non-public gates and communicating through signage can all help to minimise the risk posed by visitors.

“It’s impossible to completely eliminate the risks, but you can do many things to reduce risks, putting your business in a strong and sustainable position,” Inca said.

To find out more about our wine tourism biosecurity signs, visit <https://vinehealth.com.au/tourism/operators/posters-signs/>

References

¹https://www.researchgate.net/publication/249623788_Improving_Environmental_InformationEffects_of_Signs_on_Perceived_Crowding_and_Behavior

²<https://www.farmbiosecurity.com.au/toolkit/buy-a-gate-sign/>



A wine tourism biosecurity sign at Charles Melton Wines in the Barossa Valley.



The popular 'Photo Zone' sign and the new 'Please stay on the track' sign featuring an image of a horse.

Photo zones and trails

The selfie culture is a growing biosecurity risk. Some visitors are disregarding private property to get that 'great shot' to share on social media.

Added to that, our tourism sector does not always consider the 'invitation' their images of people walking down vine rows convey to visitors.

In response, Vinehealth Australia has created a 'photo zone' sign to encourage visitors to go to a designated point away from vine rows to get their perfect pic. This will ideally be an elevated point that offers optimal views of your

vines and surrounding landscape. You could build a simple wooden platform to achieve this elevation.

We have also designed signs for walking/cycling/horse-riding trails near vineyards, asking people to stay on the track. Ideally, these signs will be at the beginning and end of tracks, and more signs may be needed along the track if the trail is longer than 1km.

The image of the horse was a recent addition to this sign in response to a request from Horse SA for biosecurity signs to place along the Kidman Track.

"There are quite a few trails that go through wine regions, including this one, so it's important to get the message out that riders should stick to the track provided," said Horse SA executive officer Julie Fiedler.

"To educate riders, we find information on signs and maps is the most effective, along with digital tools. Riders can unknowingly enter unfenced private properties if they wander off tracks, damage native vegetation and spread weed seeds. So we really like the 'Stay on the track' sign as it's a strong, all-encompassing message for general traffic control along our trails."