



Sustainable Winegrowing in Barossa - one step ahead

Case study: Eden Hall Wines

With sustainable production fast-becoming a baseline expectation of many wine customers, Barossa growers Eden Hall and Thorn-Clarke are getting on the front foot, having successfully passed a third-party audit of their Sustainable Winegrowing Australia (SWA) workbook.

With scores under 20% away from “best practice” as defined by South Australia’s leading viticultural academics and technologists who peer-review the SWA program, Eden Hall and Thorn-Clarke (along with Henschke) can proudly say they’re Barossa’s top three most sustainably run vineyards.

And they say their actions in participating in SWA are not only mitigating climate change and benefiting the environment – they’re also improving the business’ bottom line.

More holistic than organics

Says Eden Hall General Manager, Graeme Thredgold: “There’s a big push for organics. But when we say to customers’ we’re doing things an organic grower would – but we’re actually going further – their ears prick up. We’re not just reducing chemical use. There are many other aspects to farming sustainably”.

By following the program’s seven chapters, as well as reducing chemical use SWA Barossa growers also focus on managing soil health, nutrition and fertilizer management; pests and diseases, biodiversity, waste management, social relations and economic sustainability.

Graeme said the vineyard owners, David and Mardi Hall have always had a strong vision to work in harmony with the environment through a series of different practices and programs.

It was 18 months ago that planning started to establish an off grid powered vineyard site, building on their current environmental footprint. The construction of a large implement shed and office on site is now fully self-sufficient. This means that there is now no imported power or water supplied to the property.

By installing more than 60 solar panels and an extensive investment in a battery backup generation system, the business is now operating completely off grid which has improved our SWA score.

“It’s a holistic approach,” says Eden Hall viticulturist Dan Falkenberg (who was 2018 Barossa Viticulturist of the Year).

“The SWA program provides us with a system to measure our environmental and business stewardship as a whole” says Dan.

We are revegetating creek lines; improving water quality and fighting salinity. We’re using less water by utilising soil moisture monitoring and building soil health by applying straw mulch undervine and also make our own compost on site – we also have a Low Flow Bypass system on our dam that allows for environmental flows.

We have established native perennial grasses in our mid-rows to enhance biodiversity and provide habitat for beneficial predatory insects, and we utilise sheep on a rotational grazing system in the vineyard during winter and early spring to reduce tractor hours and passes which cause compaction – let alone the savings in diesel costs.

I like to concentrate on long-term solutions to problems, and our team at Eden Hall is making positive headway in this direction through careful management and applying innovative and agroecological techniques that will evolve with the ever-changing climate. The use of agricultural chemicals and similar inputs will be reduced, though not necessarily eliminated. Consequently, our landscapes will develop diversity and resilience, further reducing our carbon footprint for agricultural inputs. It is now agreed that truly sustainable farm practices must be economically, ecologically and socially sustainable. SWA is an extension of our business that will help us create greater resilience, says Dan.

Improving the bottom line

Says Graeme: The SWA program is helping us to demonstrate our environmental commitment and this in turn makes the brand more attractive to potential business partners and consumers. It helps to demonstrate and develop the awareness of our sustainable farming practices. Consumer awareness and desire to know where their food is coming from and how it is produced is important.

The SWA program helps. It’s gives us something tangible.

Says Dan: I believe the SWA program is a very useful inclusion to viticultural management providing vital data about the business and its performance on all levels, this in turn will provide a cycle of continuous improvement and best practice that will benefit the business into the future.

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For more information contact:

Nicki Robins

Viticultural Development Officer Barossa

Grape & Wine Association

nicki@barossa.com | 08 8563 0650 | 0426 252 396

Facebook: [BarossaWine](https://www.facebook.com/BarossaWine) Web: barossa.com | barossawine.com

Eden Hall Wines: <https://edenhall.com.au/>