

Reaping the rewards for being off the grid



Dan Falkenberg and Graeme Thredgold with the extensive battery back up at Eden Hall.



Graeme Thredgold, general manager and Dan Falkenberg, vineyard manager with the solar panels on the implement shed at Eden Hall.

By Emma Clark

An Eden Valley vineyard has gone off the grid to operate, with their sustainability an inspiration to business and individuals.

Eden Hall's general manager, Graeme Thredgold 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 programmes.

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 there is now no imported power or water supplied to the property.



Making their own compost has become a big venture for Eden Hall and Dan Falkenberg takes great pride in what he makes.

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.

In addition to the power investment, the installation of four 50,000 litre water tanks, which collects runoff from their large shed, now gives them access to additional valuable rainwater for vineyard and domestic uses.

Vineyard manager, Dan Falkenberg recognises the investment made but also sees the benefits to the environment.

"It is a very sustainable and environmentally friendly system," said Dan.

"There are no future power bills and the impact on the environment is minimal with a reduction in diesel use and carbon emissions which ties in well with all our viticultural and land management practices."

Chatting to Graeme and Dan you soon discover their passion for "environmental stewardship and doing their bit" for the environment.

It starts at the front gate of the property and it's something they are very proud to share.

"From the beginning we have always had a plan to improve, conserve and reduce our impact on the environment and we have come on in leaps and bounds," said Graeme.

Eden Hall's commitment has been considerable with the revegetation and fencing of creek lines that flow into the Marne Saunders catchment and a fully functioning low flow bypass system on the dam, to ensure environmental flows continue in the catchment.

The planting of thousands of native trees and shrubs endemic to the area enhances biodiversity in and around the vineyard, which has improved the aesthetics and provides habitat for various native bird species.

They also employ innovative land management practices where native perennial

grasses have been established in the vineyard mid-rows, which provides a drought tolerant approach to viticulture.

The deep-rooted characteristics of native perennial grasses improve soil health and permeability, thus reducing the dependency on irrigation.

They are also an important native insectary plant for providing predatory insects with habitat, reducing the need for insecticide application thus reducing chemical usage.

"They are a perfect fit for viticulture in a changing climate," said Dan.

As a mixed farming enterprise Eden Hall also utilise sheep in the vineyard during the winter months.

Sheep are grazed on a rotational system thus reducing the reliance on tractors and diesel consumption.

Dan has also embraced the opportunity to make his own compost on site, around 400 tonnes is produced annually.

"We generally use recycled waste for the compost... winery waste, straw, mushroom compost and chicken manure," said Dan.

"We have been producing compost for seven years now and have gradually built the small amount of 20 tonne initially, to this year 400 tonne and we hope to increase this further in the future.

"We can blend it to our specific soil type, there's a science behind that and the key focus is on soil health."

Graeme said from using their own compost you can see the difference in the vineyard with an improvement in vine health and wine quality.

Many of the above methods are regenerative and biological farming practices that are conducive to environmental best practice.

An audit last year accredited the Eden Hall vineyard as being in the top tier of vineyard

sites in the Barossa, to operate under the Sustainable Winegrowing Australia (SWA) programme.

"There's massive interest, not just about the vineyard, it is everything we do... the power, water, viticulture practices and of course our high-quality wine," said Graeme.

"Sustainability is of key importance"

While their water situation is not unique, Dan adds it puts a different perspective on vineyard management.

"You have a very limited water resource out here, which is exacerbated in drier periods like we are experiencing at present, so we have to apply careful management practices on how water is utilised, and soil health is a big key part of that," said Dan.

Dan adds the way they manage their vineyard and property is a very thoughtful process, economically, socially, and holistically.

Revegetation and other projects are pivotal to the whole scheme.

"With everyone now so conscious of how humans are impacting the planet, what we are doing as a business, falls in line with that vision of working with nature not against it," said Graeme.

"From a marketing perspective it is a good fit and builds on our brand story and position."

Reflecting on their methods, Dan acknowledges the advancements adding, "Viticulture is a challenging industry and to be successful in the future will require vignerons to be innovative in their land management practices and embrace the environment and technology.

"The addition of the new off grid power system has now added to our overall approach to viticulture, and continues our efforts and thoughts on how we can do things better into the future."