

A champagne industry turns water into wine

AMID the doom and gloom of low summer rainfall, plummeting dam levels, miniscule allocations and dying lakes, there are still some real positives flowing in Australian irrigation. This is especially the case in the area of technology advancement and the research effort that's striving to keep irrigators profitable and sustainable throughout this supposedly drying continent.

In this issue, we've tried to present a mix of both the highs and lows of Australian irrigation since our last issue at the beginning of winter, when the Southern Hemisphere's largest irrigation conference and trade show had just wrapped up in Melbourne to rave reviews.

Now it's back to reality and facing the nuts and bolts of what it really means to do more with less and still make a quid, no matter what you grow or use water for.

Our cover story on page 5 details the strides that researchers are making for irrigators by harnessing the technology of the now-commonplace mobile phone.

Just as *Irrigation & Water Resources* was about to hit the press, news of another project – this time in Western Australia – came across our news desk.

The project, which aims to improve the water and energy efficiency of the wine industry in Australia and to reduce its environmental impact, was launched in September.

The Swan Catchment Council of WA has been funded by the Federal Government to implement the Resource Efficiency for Smaller Wineries project in an attempt to improve the environmental performance of these small to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

Swan Catchment Council sustainable production co-ordinator Keith Pekin said previous research had shown that wineries crushing less than 500 tonnes of grapes per year usually did not have the economies of scale to implement sustainable management practices.

Most wineries in WA and the vast majority throughout Australia fit into this – and, therefore, the SME – category. It is estimated that to make just one litre of wine, the average small vineyard/winery uses approximately 600 litres of water in the vineyard.

Energy use is also an issue, with small wineries estimated to use about three kilowatts of power to produce one litre of wine.

In partnership with Sittella Wines in the Swan Valley, the Swan Catchment Council has developed a comprehensive monitoring system and software package to manage the data from extensive monitoring equipment.

"This will establish exactly how much and where water and energy is used throughout the different areas of production," Mr Pekin said.

And while we're on the subject of wine, here's cheers to Sentek Sensor Technologies for donating the \$1000 prizemoney it received from the SA Water-sponsored Royal Adelaide Show's Water Savings Innovation Competition to the SA Country Women's Association Emergency Aid Drought Relief Program.



Brad Cooper
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