

Infield Grape Sorter offers huge savings

The new Infield Grape Sorter designed and built by the Aussie Wine Group in South Australia is unique to the wine industry and provides growers and producers with zero MOG (material other than grapes) and big savings, according to company owner, Malcolm Willis.

The Infield Sorter, designed for small and large wine producers, has been tested in Australia and the USA and was released in August 2018. "It delivers zero MOG and whole berries regardless of the harvester being used," Malcolm said.

"It allows both the grower and the winery to make higher quality wine from better quality grapes. The big savings are in the reduction on the set overhead caused by MOG."

The system is designed to work in conjunction with harvesters fitted with a side discharge arm. The Infield Sorter sorter has two different cleaning belts, one handling up to 15 tonne per hour and the other 25 tonne per hour.

Malcolm says the technology allows growers to deliver to the winery clean fruit that has not been macerated and has no contaminants - and is the fruit the winery agreed to purchase.



"Growers who use the Infield Sorter will for the first time be in a position to negotiate pricing with wineries based on fruit quality and not be judged on the fruit/MOG combination that wineries base their pricing on," he said.

"Wineries will be able to receive exactly what they agreed to purchase without the risk of contamination to the fruit, without the risk of winery breakdowns due to wood, harvester parts etc., plus a massive savings on the set overhead cost of MOG."

Malcolm says the consumer market is demanding higher quality wine at reduced prices, putting pressure on wineries to cut costs. "Growers have been forced to change vineyard operating methods, reducing costs and improving efficiencies," he said. "Vineyard operators have improved irrigation methods and reduced water costs and pruning costs by the introduction of machines. Wineries improved extraction rates, demanded higher baumes, released wines earlier and to improve cashflows and lower winery costs.

"But here is one common cost that has remained the same - the cost of MOG. Throughout the world, two to seven percent of MOG is harvested and then put onto trucks. It is then transported to wineries at an additional cost, extracted at a cost by the winery and then the MOG is carted from the winery at another additional cost and dumped or mixed with other matter to form mulch. It's not sustainable, the MOG must stay in the vineyard."

Malcolm says the wine industry has been asking grape harvester manufacturers to produce a machine that can deliver zero MOG to the winery. "The major manufacturers developed a system that does remove MOG, but it is only available on a new harvester and cannot be retrofitted to existing units. And



these units have a three to six percent waste stream. They are limited to the volume they can handle and the maximum capacity is 15 tonne per hour and at this level huge maceration occurs. For the world to effectively change to all new harvesters with inbuilt cleaning systems would take years. In Australia alone at the current rate of harvester sales it would take over 40 years and a massive amount of money.

"There are a lot of used harvesters that work very effectively harvesting the fruit giving an industry clean sample which is the two to seven percent MOG as an average. The industry is demanding zero MOG but the cost of a new harvester fitted with a cleaning system is \$500,000 and growers and contractors cannot justify this spend. The same result can be achieved with only 1/10 of this price with the AWG Infield Sorter.

"AWG was asked to develop a unit to remove MOG in the vineyard, the unit to be fitted to a gondola or a bin trailer, that removes all MOG from the harvested fruit prior to entering the bin or gondola, with zero waste, zero additional maceration and without any loss of harvesting efficiency."

According to Malcolm, there are currently 1,200 used harvesters in Australia with side discharge arms. New Zealand has 500, South Africa 1,000, Chile/Argentina 2,800 and California 3,500. ♦

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