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Setting standards in dried fruit production

A new dried grape industry project will compare growers' viticultural activities over three years to determine the most effective production practices.

The benchmarking project is funded by Dried Fruits Australia (DFA) and Hort Innovation as part of the Dried Grape Innovation and Adoption project.

DFA field officer Stuart Putland said seven producers across Sunraysia – Australia's primary dried grape growing region – were taking part in the program.

"This is the first time the industry has collected comprehensive information on activities undertaken in the vineyard, documenting what growers did, when they did it, how long it took, and what equipment, chemicals and fertilisers they used," Mr Putland said.

"The project will compare new varieties, Sunglo and Sunmuscat, and existing currant and sultana varieties grown on the Swingarm trellis system.

"The data captured will provide more accurate benchmarks of viticultural practices, production per hectare, prices received, and input cost."

Mr Putland said growers would be invited to visit the 10 benchmarking sites at different times over the next three years as part of DFA's field day program.

"Growers and industry staff had their first opportunity to compare practices at a field walk held at David Lyons' block in Red Cliffs last week," he said.

"David and other participants in the project shared how they go about winter pruning, and we discussed what data is being collected about their activities this season.

"At the end of each year, growers will be able to see what these sites have achieved, how their own practices stack up, and if there's anything they can learn."

The industry event also included talks by two very different security experts.

Leading Senior Constable Mark Baumann from Mildura Police discussed the risk of farm thefts, prevention measures growers could put in place, and what they should do if they noticed anything suspicious or became a victim of theft.

Amanda Kobelt, an entomologist from the Department of Environment and Primary Industries, also spoke about pest and disease risks for the dried grape industry.

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