

1) THE NATIONAL VINE ACCREDITATION SCHEME



Australian viticultural industries are aware of the advantages of using healthy, genetically superior and pathogen-tested vines for new plantings and vineyard redevelopment.

To ensure the production and traceability of such material, AVIA has developed a Quality Assurance program to enable the supply of AVIA Certified® cuttings, rootlings and graftlings for vineyard establishment.

The **National Vine Accreditation Scheme** provides an audit trail from the point of importation to the vineyard planting, and ensures minimum process controls are adhered to at each production stage. AVIA employs an independent auditor to maintain an impartial and unbiased approach to accreditation audits of the states and nurseries.

A two-stage approach was adopted and procedures manuals written accordingly: -

Part One: The National Vine Accreditation Scheme for Vine Improvement Groups

This volume forms part of the core documentation for quality assurance activities used by vine improvement societies, associations and groups in their production and management of AVIA Certified® propagation material.

Part Two: The National Vine Accreditation Scheme for Nurseries

This volume provides procedures and controls for nurseries wishing to propagate AVIA Certified® grapevine planting material to standards set by AVIA. The volume is a guide and a standard for the types of procedures and controls that vine nurseries are required to adopt, in order to label vine-planting material produced by the nursery under the AVIA scheme as “AVIA Certified®”.

How do I become an AVIA Accredited™ Nursery?

To become AVIA Accredited™, nurseries need to be processing propagation material purchased from one of the State or regional vine improvement groups.

The nursery should contact AVIA to arrange for delivery of Part Two of the Quality Assurance Manual, and arrange a suitable time for an AVIA employee to visit the nursery site to conduct a “Gap Analysis”. This is simply a check of the key quality control areas to identify any gaps that may preclude a nursery from achieving accreditation. This process allows the nursery to address these gaps prior to arranging a full audit.

Following the full audit, successful accreditation brings several advantages to the business: -

- Use of the “AVIA Accredited™” logo for advertising and stationery.
- Access to newly imported patented varieties, “AVIA Elite” varieties and clones and improved clones from selection trials and virus elimination programs
- Industry recognition that your business has a point of differentiation from others and you are serious about providing a quality product.
- Reassurance to the buyer that the propagation material purchased is true to type, healthy and the best available variety and clone.

**11th Australian Wine Industry Technical Conference
“W95 Sourcing and Handling High Quality Planting Material”**

**The Australian Vine Improvement Association
National Vine Accreditation Scheme**

Background

The future of Australia's viticultural industry is dependent on two key factors, the sustainability of domestic, and particularly export markets, and just as importantly (though seldom acknowledged) the availability of healthy propagation material of preferred varieties in sufficient quantities to satisfy industry demand. It was the issue of a reliable supply of healthy propagation material that saw the peak industry bodies collaborate in 1995 through a series of working parties to design a national accreditation program centred around product traceability and compliance with minimum processing standards. The Australian Vine Improvement Association (AVIA) subsequently implemented the concept and today audited nurseries produce the majority of new vines being planted in Australia. The scheme is a product certification program, whereby approved nurseries are entitled to produce a product that is "AVIA Certified". "AVIA Certified" does not necessarily mean that the product is "virus free" or guaranteed to thrive under adverse conditions, it simply means that the product is traceable to its origin, is true to type, healthy and is produced from the best material available.

Implementation- Part One

The accreditation process begins with the state vine improvement groups. Australia has a unique distribution system of six states with incorporated vine improvement committees that maintain sources of vine propagation material and distribute dormant cuttings to the nursery industry. Incorporated vine improvement groups exist in Western Australia, Queensland, Tasmania, New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia, with the state Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries representing the Northern Territory. In South Australia, seven regional groups collectively form that states' vine improvement committee, i.e. the Riverland, Barossa Valley, Adelaide Hills, Clare Valley, Langhorne Creek, McLaren Vale and Limestone Coast regions.

The first phase of accreditation starts with an audit of the activities of the state vine improvement group, beginning with their access to germplasm material. AVIA employees a third party auditor from Quality Assurance Services to maintain an unbiased audit. The auditor uses a concise checklist to ascertain whether the traceability of the material has been maintained, and whether the requirements for product handling have been adhered to.

The checklist identifies each process such that the following are typically examined in detail:

<i>National Vine Accreditation Scheme Checklist Part One – Vine Improvement Groups</i>
Accessing material from germplasm
Field nursery preparation of source area rootlings
Establishment and maintenance of source Areas.
Source area health inspections
Order and supply (allocation of cuttings)
Harvest cuttings
Grading, Labelling, Packaging and Storing.
Hot Water Treatment (Where applicable)
Cool storage
Distribution of Cuttings
Despatch

As each procedure in the checklist is examined, the auditor scores the businesses approach as either satisfactory, needing improvement, or that sector being not applicable. At the conclusion of the audit, the auditor provides a report on the preparedness of the group for accreditation. Assuming accreditation is approved, the group is then permitted to provide the industry with AVIA Certified material for the next twelve months.

At the point of dispatch from the vine improvement group, AVIA Certified material is clearly marked, and labelled with colour coded tags showing the Variety, Clone and Source Block identification code. The source block identification code and batch numbers provide the supplier the necessary information to be able to trace the material to its source. Each vine improvement group is audited annually to ensure continual compliance.

Implementation- Part Two

Grapevine nurseries purchase material from the vine improvement groups, and continue the traceability through their system by recording the Docket number of goods received, and maintaining the source area reference numbers for each variety and clone purchased. The propagation processes must adhere to stringent guidelines, which are again documented in the auditors' checklist. Typically the nurseries procedures are summarised in the following checklist:

<i>National Vine Accreditation Scheme Checklist Part Two- Grapevine Nurseries</i>
Establishment and Maintenance of Private Source Areas. (Where Applicable)
Private Source Area Inspections. (Where Applicable)
Allocation of cuttings, Order & Supply
Harvest Cuttings -Private Source Block (Where Applicable)
Grading, Labelling, Packaging and Storing Cuttings. (Where Applicable)
Hydration/ Water Quality –Cuttings
Chinasol Treatment (Optional)

Hot Water Treatment- Cuttings (Where Applicable)
Cool-Down Tank: Water Quality- Cuttings
Cool Store- Cuttings
Grafting and/or Own rooted vines
Callus Room / Callus Pit / Callus Box
Waxing
Potting
Planting -Field Nursery
Lifting Field Nursery
Hydration/ Water Quality- rootlings
Hot Water Treatment of rootlings (Where Applicable)
Cool-Down Tank: Water Quality- rootlings
Cool Store- Rootlings
Grading & Packing
Despatch & Distribution

Following a successful audit for compliance to minimum standards at each of the above procedures, the auditor makes a recommendation to AVIA based on the information sighted and processes viewed whether accreditation should proceed. This business is then approved by AVIA for the production of an AVIA Certified product. The business is audited annually, and the accreditation renewed for another twelve months if all aspects of the scheme are found to be in compliance. In this way a business is prevented from becoming accredited, then allowing standards to slip to an unacceptable level while still claiming to be AVIA Accredited. To prevent misuse or misrepresentation of the logo, nurseries are only permitted to use the AVIA Certified logo on a product where the rootstock and scion are both sourced from an accredited vine improvement group supply, and all necessary protocols followed during its propagation. A product not meeting these criteria must be sold with a plain label with no reference made to the AVIA National Vine Accreditation Scheme. Intentional misuse would constitute a breach of the terms and conditions for the use of the logo, and would result in the business losing its accreditation.

Benefits of Accreditation

Businesses have different reasons for becoming accredited, however there are common incentives across the industry. Many businesses have commented that they are pleased with the systematic approach the accreditation has encouraged them to adopt, and the ability to trace the AVIA Certified material easily whenever there is a question relating to its origin or handling. This has led to an increased protection against litigation in the event of alleged product failure, and additional confidence that material supplied is true to label. Accredited nurseries are eligible to deal with material covered by Plant Breeders Rights (PBR) or private royalty agreements, as the accreditation provides a ready means to audit the number of units sold and capture the appropriate royalty for remittance to the breeder. Companies seeking contractual arrangements for securing large quantities of vine material are attracted to businesses that have the ability to supply AVIA Certified material. This gives the nursery a superior product line and a point of differentiation over nurseries that do not deal in AVIA Certified material. Part of the cost of the accreditation program covers the rights to use the AVIA Certified logo, which gives a distinct visual recognition of the product, and a recognition by the customer that the business takes extra care and pride in the propagation of their order.

Future Directions

In the future more discerning customers will insist on preferred suppliers that have a third party audited, quality assurance scheme in place, in the same manner as other

suppliers of horticultural produce have adopted. The increase in demand for premium to icon wines will also drive the demand for high health propagation material of the best clones for each application. Vignerons who remain complacent about choosing their source of planting material and clonal selections are going to produce large quantities of ordinary quality fruit that will be increasingly difficult to market. In contrast, the prudent investors will continue to be discerning about their choice of vine supplier, will ask for clones by name and will be aware of the risks associated with use of material of unknown disease status or origin. Suppliers of AVIA Certified material therefore can be confident of consistent future sales, as they provide the best available material in the variety, clone, quantity and quality that the customers are seeking.