



REX'S PRACTICAL TIPS #18

FUNDAMENTALS MARK II

I write of fundamentals again, but this time I'm motivated by those of you who are pushing the boundaries of viticultural land out into new territory.

Over the last few years we have seen the expansion of viticulture in Marlborough, Central Otago, Martinborough and Hawkes Bay onto land that previously would not have been looked at twice.

I'll use some specific examples but really this article is general in nature and about getting good advice early in your project. Some years ago we saw the expansion of viticulture into areas prone to frost. There was the odd inevitable disaster but none that could not be solved with technology and money. We are now seeing expansion into areas of salt laden soils, physically fragile silty clay sodic soils, and steep loess soils.

Many of these steep soils are at first glance relatively cheap, so there is

something left in the kitty to bring in the big machinery. In no time at all we are seeing hill and gully morphed into plantable downland. It's regrettable that in some cases this transformation, that's given the wonderfully euphemistic name of "landscaping", is done with little thought to the tens of thousands of years of sorting and structural development that nature has taken to form the soils.

The soil is an environment that we can have very significant positive, and negative, impact on. It's the environment that arguably makes our distinctive aromatic wines what they are. If you pulverize it to dust, scrape it off, stack it up, mix it up and spread it around again, you run the risk of destroying its' microbial life, oxidizing the organic matter, dramatically changing its chemical and physical structure and losing a great deal of it in the next blow or heavy rain.

Without good advice and a well thought out plan to help nature right these

transgressions, these "landscaped" vineyards run the risk of reduced yields, poor flavours, uneven development and not performing to budget.

Don't get me wrong, I'm not saying not to "landscape", but if you're going to do it, it needs to be done under the advice of a competent soil scientist or soil engineer with backup and long term advice from an expert vine nutritionist.

At Misty Valley Nursery we keep a list of competent experts who work independently of chemical or fertilizer companies. We will happily give you these contacts if you drop us an email with "soil advice" in the subject line.

Nobody should contemplate "landscaping" without first talking to the experts and making a calculation of the real cost.

And now here's the take home message.

The same advice applies to anyone who is contemplating buying land beyond the current boundaries of experience. A few dollars spent now on the very best expert advice is just crumbs on the bakery floor compared to the potential long term output of their vineyard. The only chance you have of getting it right is before you plant the first vine

Rex.



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