



A Winning Approach

Marlborough's Young Viticulturist of the Year took top national honours for biosecurity planning

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For Sustainable Winegrowing New Zealand (SWNZ) vineyard members, having a vineyard biosecurity plan in place will be a requirement for certification from the 2026 audit season onwards. As part of the Young Viticulturist of the Year national final this year, the six contestants were tasked with creating a biosecurity plan for an unfamiliar vineyard, as well as developing a plan for implementation. Anna Kelland, Viticulture Technician for Constellation Brands in Marlborough, won this section of the competition with a well-researched, thorough plan and guidance for implementation.

About 65% of SWNZ vineyard members indicate they already have a biosecurity plan in place for their vineyards ahead of the 2026 deadline. Anna's view is that although this is another task and may take some time and resource for growers to implement, it is justifiable given the potential consequences of not being prepared for a serious incursion. "Requiring a basic plan will make sure everyone is on the same page. Industry-wide biosecurity awareness will benefit us all. It's also a good opportunity to learn more about the threats that could come into the country." Developing a basic vineyard biosecurity plan also provides a professional development or training opportunity for up-and-coming leaders, along with experience in risk analysis, planning and risk mitigation. Coming into the Young Vit competition, some elements of biosecurity were new to Anna but as pest and disease monitoring is part of her role at Constellation she had a head start and knew where to find the relevant information.

"It was a big task, and we only had a short time to research, put together a plan and the associated budget. I initially focused on research and understanding the background information to inform

the process of developing a plan."

COST-BENEFIT OF BEING PREPARED

Part of the task involved reviewing options, undertaking a cost-benefit analysis, and calculating return on investment in a worst-case scenario of a biosecurity incursion taking out 50% of the crop, within five years of a biosecurity plan being implemented. Anna said there was a clear return on investment. "Even with some capital investment and ongoing costs of implementation, it's a solid investment and you can't justify ignoring it. The assumption in the task was that having the plan in place would protect your vineyard, but even if it prevented just some of the damage and crop loss in a real-life situation, you'd still be better off than not having those mitigations in place."

Developing a plan is all very well, but unless it is implemented it doesn't reduce biosecurity risk to a vineyard. "It's about getting everyone involved, getting that buy-in. Education, communicating with staff and contractors about why we are doing this, their role in the plan, and making it accessible to everyone is really important, and use mechanisms that work for the people you are working with. For example, there are some really high-tech systems out there, but if most of your staff are older and don't use apps, it may not be a practical solution for your business. Making it accessible to workers and building on familiar processes will help it succeed."

Asked about the key learnings she took from her research, Anna noted the far-reaching impacts that serious biosecurity incursions can have on primary producers, communities and the country as a whole. "The broad reach of some of these exotic pests and diseases won't affect just viticulture and the New

Zealand wine industry, but also the wider horticulture sector and our economy. And the knock-on effects - vineyards mothballed, people out of jobs, impacts on the environment and native species. Also figuring out what's involved in a large biosecurity response - the role of MPI and NZ Winegrowers, the impacts of movement controls, potentially not being able to move grapes or equipment between regions at harvest. The impacts can really snowball."

ADVICE FOR DEVELOPING A PLAN

For those getting started with developing a biosecurity plan, Anna recommends spending time doing some research as a first step. "A good place to start is the NZ Winegrowers website, resources, factsheets and guides. I'd also recommend reading wider, to understand the implications of biosecurity threats beyond just the vineyard level. Go to conferences, talk to other industry members who have experience with biosecurity plans. Think about the risk pathways relevant to your vineyard - for example,

Picton and Napier are port towns, which means cruise ship passengers coming into vineyards are a potential biosecurity risk pathway. While some aspects of biosecurity planning will be pretty standard to all vineyards, different approaches are also needed to manage different risk pathways, and these will vary for businesses depending on their operating models." When asked for any final thoughts on biosecurity for the wine industry, Anna's response was clear: "Know your enemy - especially when it could decimate your industry."

New Zealand Winegrowers congratulates Anna and all the Young Viticulturist national finalists for their fantastic work on the biosecurity project in the competition.