Australian Vine Accreditation Scheme -
Introduction

CHRIS WEEKS
Weeks Consulting Pty Ltd

Introduction
At the ASVO seminar in 1993 Laffer and Lester told us the wine industry needed a further 14,200 ha of vineyards to meet wine demand by year 2000. In the period 1993 to 1996 inclusive AVIA has provided around 30 million vinifera wine variety cuttings. If 80% survive to become vines planted at 1,600/ha this represents the 14,200 ha needed. This ignores other cuttings, estimated at between 5 and 25 million, taken outside AVIA. Time to stop or at least reassess the situation?

It is not my intention to foreshadow the redundancy of AVIA nor the irrelevance of the topic of my paper; vineyards will need continuing replanting, upgrading and improving and when they do we want the best and most certain planting material available; i.e. the future will demand greater emphasis on quality rather than on quantity.

During my first vintage as a winemaker (1973) we received batches of grapes of two distinctly different types, both claiming to be Malbec. Obviously at least one 'variety' was lying and was not Malbec (which was verified subsequently by Trouel). More recently, the increasing emphasis on truth in wine labelling was one motivator for the then Wine and Brandy Producers Association of South Australia initiating a National Vine Accreditation Scheme.

Guidelines for the scheme were drawn up by a widely representative committee which described but did not define what it meant by a 'National Vine Accreditation Scheme'. I attempt to remedy this with:

'A strategy to improve grape vine planting material through a coordinated program using quality assurance principles and administered by AVIA'.

Approach and assumptions

Procedures to implement the scheme are based on the ISO9002 elements—with emphasis on the more technical rather than system management elements.

The essence of the QA approach is:

- Customer focus (quality is defined in terms of customer expectations)
- Process control (quality must be built in, not inspected in at the end).

Customer expectations for quality vine planting material are:

- Clone identification; trueness to type with respect to variety, clone, characteristics (yield, vigour, juice composition)
- Pest and disease status as close to ‘free’ as possible (quarantine origin, virus indexed etc.)
- Vigour; the cutting or rootling or graftling will actually grow!

Processes which need to be controlled are:

- Establishment of germplasm
- Maintenance and multiplication (AVIA)
- Propagation (nurseries)

Thus the task was approached and ‘manuals’ were developed to address the processes in two stages, namely AVIA activities and nursery processes.

The procedures manuals were designed around:

- Vine improvement flow chart; lists processes, standard operating procedures, quality control procedures
- A hazards analysis exercise, to identify risks and critical controls.

Expected outcomes of this QA approach

- Will get better vine planting material, especially with respect to reliability, consistency (and avoid problems of the past)
- Will get what you ask for
- Will have a system, a machinery, capable of responding to change and implementing new methods, new information.

 Unreal expectations or limitations

Vine material will not automatically be ideal for your situation. You will get the clone you order, so the buyer must still decide which clone or rootstock is best for his own situation. Information to assist this decision is sadly not readily available and there is an urgent need for a catalogue of clonal characteristics.

Vines cannot be guaranteed to be disease-free. The disease status of the vine planting material should be known with a high degree of confidence and the production procedures, tests performed and test results should be known with some certainty. The notion of caveat emptor is no longer acceptable nor applicable.

Andrew deLaine will now explain how this scheme will be implemented.