Development of a Quality Assurance Starter Kit for the Grape and Wine Industry

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Introduction
Quality management systems based on the International Organisation for Standardisation's ISO 9000 series of standards continue to attract strong interest from the wine industry. The relevant Australian series is identical and denoted as A S/N ZS/ISO 9000. The authors are aware of at least 11 sites, from eight companies, that are operating with quality management systems certified against the A S/N ZS/ISO 9002 standard. At least another 20 companies are actively developing such systems with some of those proceeding to formal third party certification. Countless others are gaining an awareness and beginning to consider adopting the approach. In general, this appears to be motivated by either stated customer requirements, or a desire to benefit from the potential improvements to productivity that quality management may bring.

What is a quality management system as defined by the A S/N ZS/ISO 9000 standards?
The quality management system described by the A S/N ZS/ISO 9000 standards consists of 20 essential elements of management practice. Essentially, these elements are 'a set of commonsense business objectives that define the contractual, functional, and technical requirements for quality that will ensure a product, process, or system is fit for its intended use.' (Latif 1995). They deal with issues such as management structure, control of production processes, purchasing of goods, testing and verification, and staff training.

A simplification of the main issues addressed by the system is that it requires a company to:
- define the targets or specify the quality requirements for product and materials;
- control the processes that are used in production in order to meet the targets;
- verify and prove that the products conform to the specification; and
- continually check up on the system and review for improvement.

It is no accident that the topics of this seminar mirror these issues. Most commercial producers are familiar with the above issues and are no doubt already addressing them in one form or another—otherwise the business is not likely to remain viable in the long term. It may be that they address these issues on an informal basis and, if so, sometimes it may be tempting, and indeed, seemingly logical, expedient and practical, to ignore the system and 'press on regardless'.

The need for a better way to approach quality management
Quite clearly, the perception persists that quality management is relevant only to large businesses. Recognition of the need to challenge this view and to make quality management implementation less onerous was the driving force for the development of the starter kit known as 'From grapes to glass: the quality management starter kit for the wine industry'© by The Australian Wine Research Institute (AWRI). It was recognised that the kit would have been reduced. The important point is that the A S/N ZS/ISO 9000 standards contain management practices that are relevant and practical.

The A S/N ZS/ISO 9000 standards have gained wide acceptance throughout the world (Golomski 1994). Nevertheless, in recent times, there has been some criticism levelled at the standards, particularly in the popular business press (Anon. 1996). Some observers believe it to be no more than a bureaucratic burden and a waste of business effort, particularly in the case of small businesses. On the other hand, others feel that Australian business is generally naive about quality management and has failed to recognise or respond to the outstanding results achieved by some companies, and do not feel that it will benefit their businesses. Mackowski (1994) asserts that:

'It will not be until management changes this view—or quality management implementation becomes less onerous—that the significant opportunities quality management presents are realised.' (p. 19)

Howard is A S/N ZS/ISO 9000 relevant and of benefit to grapegrowers?
The elements of the A S/N ZS/ISO 9000 standards can easily be related to everyday practice in the vineyard. The potential for saving is immediately obvious when one considers a few examples, known to the authors, of problems that have occurred in the last few years (Table 1). It would be unfair to suggest that these incidents would have been avoided if the vineyard operators had a quality management system in place; however, it is more likely that the risk of the incident occurring would have been reduced. The important point is that the A S/N ZS/ISO 9000 standards contain management practices that are relevant and practical.

From grapes to glass: the quality management starter kit for the wine industry © by The Australian Wine Research Institute (AWRI). It was recognised that the kit needed to be consistent with the spirit and ideals of the system leading to business improvement, rather than following rules for purely dogmatic or bureaucratic reasons.
Having independently recognised the need, the AWRI and SAWBIA joined together in 1995 and established a pilot program with 10 grapegrowers and winemakers of varying sizes in McLaren Vale. The program was given additional financial support from the Office of Labour Market Adjustment of the Department of Employment Education and Training. The pilot program involved the development and implementation of quality management systems for each of the participating companies, whilst at the same time, developing the generic starter kit to be made available to the industry Australia-wide. The aim of the kit is to give industry members a ‘kick start’ in the implementation of quality management systems. Through observation of the pilot program participants, and from the related experience of other companies, we have found a high degree of uniformity in business practices within the industry. This vindicates the view that many of the documents required in the quality system could be prepared in generic form, so that individual companies need only to customise them for their own specific situation. There is no need to ‘reinvent the wheel’ as is so often the case when developing quality documentation.

What is the starter kit?
The kit comprises a range of template style documents, on disk and hard copy, that describe all the elements required in the A S/N ZS/ISO 9000 standard. These include quality policy and procedures manuals, recommended standard forms, folders for storage of manuals, specifications and records, reference documents including bibliography, recommended reading, and the Institute’s publications the Agrochemicals Grid and Analytical Specifications for Export of Wine.

The kit program is expected to be delivered by a limited number of approved facilitators, to small groups of companies on a regional basis. Group delivery has the advantage of peer support and encouragement, as well as significant ‘cost sharing’ reductions. Individual companies may undertake the program on their own, but this will be more expensive. Purchase of the kit includes training sessions and one-to-one on-site assistance to ensure that participants are fully conversant with the requirements of the A S/N ZS/ISO 9000 standards, and the application of the generic documents to their own business. An essential component of the training will be the session on training of auditors, which will provide the company with the skills to immediately commence audits of their own system.

It is not a requirement for companies using the kit to gain certification—that remains a choice for the individual company, and therefore is not included in the purchase price. The kit will provide the tools so that any company successfully completing the program will be equipped with the relevant information and skills to develop and implement a quality management system to meet the requirements of the A S/N ZS/ISO 9000 standards.

### References

- Anon., The quality movement responds... Quality Certification News 3(37): 2; 1996.