Prior to beginning the program we experienced feelings of apprehension with some doubts as to its relevance to a small family operation. Our concerns related to a lack of understanding of the program and worry over the apparent bureaucratic requirements and the potential amount of paper work to complete the program. Initially we questioned the need for a vineyard to have such a program relative to winery.

Following family discussions we agreed to undertake the program. Our expectations for our participation being that we could improve the productivity of our operations and welcomed the opportunity to have input into the design of the kit and in helping to make it more workable. Further it would position our business to be ready for the future in a world where this type of program will be a minimum requirement for vineyard operations.

This program quickly demonstrated to us how much we needed the discipline of records for our operations. The material greatly assists us with business decisions and demonstrates the opportunity it would offer to this type of business by improving our ability to sell fruit to wineries. The program highlighted the inadequacies of our record keeping in the past including records such as fertigation, pumps and time clocks, these being some of the many issues needing documentation.

Early in the program it became clear that all the understanding of vineyard operating procedures was in one or two heads (e.g. pump settings), highlighting the need for detailed manuals so that another operator could step in and complete the practices required for growing and managing production of grapes on our property. A clear benefit of such a manual would be the opportunity to have a holiday secure in the knowledge that the daily operations could be managed by someone else.

We now feel that we are more attuned to future demands on our business. We can provide an audit trial of fruit to suit winery requirements. For example the maintenance of spray diaries is almost universal amongst growers and will become a prerequisite for wineries purchasing fruit.

Considerable time has been spent on the project with many exchanges of ideas. This has resulted in a workable document and our record management, which has always existed, is now formalised and less casual in detail. We are still evolving many facets of the documentation but have been assured that we are nearing the end of the requirements for our vineyard.

The degree of difficulty in preparing documents has not been high but has required large inputs in time. Overall the program has not been as hard as we thought it might be and has proved to be of relevance to our business.

Looking ahead, we are in the throes of certification with our first audit indicating that we are nearly there. The program has clearly improved our systems and we help us work towards a future tighter industry. The program has proved a valuable management tool and we believe it will place us in a position of being a preferred supplier of grapes to wineries.