



Thirtyninebelow Ltd, Hawkes Bay

Managers for Mills Reef

Paul McEvoy and Doug Stewart are majority shareholders in Hawke's Bay based vineyard management company Thirtyninebelow Ltd. They currently manage 80 hectares of vineyards including all of Mills Reef's vineyards in Hawkes Bay.

Paul (Macca) was first exposed to BioAg when Thirtyninebelow took over management of Mills Reef Mere Road vineyard and the Mills Reef Trust block, which are located on the renowned Gimblett Gravels, three years ago.

Mills Reef embraced a biological fertility approach several years ago under the guidance of BioAg Director Steven Haswell and were consequently early adopters of BioAg systems.

Macca comments on the differences he has observed, "I can't point to any one thing in particular – it is a combination of factors. The vines are in better balance and there is less variation in rows and blocks even where soils vary quite a bit. Vine health and disease resistance is better – robustness if you like. We are more confident knowing that the vines are not as prone to pest and disease pressure which takes the heat off the timing for spraying – we have a large area to cover and having that confidence in the health of the plants is really reassuring".

Macca believes the benefits from BioAg show up within in the first season and then there is continued improvement. "I see it in the leaves, the soil and the sward. At the end of the season our leaves hold by comparison. Even after three reasonable frosts this autumn (2010) the leaf was hanging on".

Macca is forthright on the subject of cost, particularly in an industry impacted by the current market challenges, "BioAg is at the high end but it is an investment too for the future. We need to produce quality and quantity. We aim for 3 ½ to 4 kg's per vine of the highest possible quality. I feel with BioAg I can carry the volume with confidence and meet premium harvest criteria. The winemakers want depth of flavour and character. This season for example our Cabernet came in at 24.5 brix, 3.5 pH, and TA of 5". Macca observes more even ripening and no greenness at harvest.

With regard to quality Macca observes that the Mills Reef wines are winning plenty of awards. "Talk to Tim Preston – he makes the wine and he's pretty happy" he suggested.