



Mission Estate, Hawkes Bay, New Zealand

May 2010

Caine Thompson is the Viticulturalist for Mission Estate in Hawkes Bay. The company owns 40Ha of vineyards and Caine oversees a further 120Ha of vines for about 12 other vineyard owners who are contract growers for Mission Estate. Mission Estate is in the early stages of converting to certified organic production.

Caine began working with Steven Haswell, BioAg Director in 2004 towards improving the soil biology and consequently vine health in the vineyards and has been using BioAg programs for the last three seasons (commenced Oct 2007). Caine observes “We are seeing steady and continued improvement across the board – certainly a much greater uniformity, fewer extremes – we are lifting our whole game plan. We have quite a variation in soil types within vineyards and blocks particularly on The Gimblett Gravels so it is pleasing to see a reduction in growth vigour on the stronger ground and an improvement in vine vigour and fruit production on the really bony bits”.

Caine comments further, “I was educated to think that to maintain quality we had to thin to keep down to a certain number of kilos per vine. My thinking on that is certainly changing and I have the confidence to hold more fruit on the vines to achieve greater yield and better quality. With better ‘balance’ in the vines more fruit is going into Reserve, less into Estate. I think BioAg offers quality inputs at a fair price – they provide nutrition for the soil and plants which in turn provides natural fungal and disease defences. I have a personal interest and strong belief in following a sustainable path – we simply have to be friendly to the earth, people and environment – to adopt a holistic approach”.

When asked about the transition to certified organic production Caine replies “Yes, it just makes sense. We know the potential detrimental effects of pesticides and herbicides. People use the argument of aesthetics and ease of management as justification. We are finding that looking after the soil is looking after the plants. Our soils are now more ‘spongy’ so have more aeration and more water holding capacity so we use less water”.

Caine Thompson has a Bachelor of Applied Science degree in Horticulture and won both “Viticulturalist of the Year” and the “Young Horticulturalist of the Year” in 2009. He is a partner in Spatial Solutions Limited, a company which has developed innovative crop and soil mapping technology.