



Spur Savvy: Spur pruned Sauvignon Blanc.



Cane : Canopy differences and size of bunches are apparent in this cane pruned vine.

Spur Pruning Trials Prove Fruitful

Last month we took a close look at spur pruning versus cane. Two viticulturists said while spur was better suited to Pinot Noir or some clones of Chardonnay, it possibly wasn't the best option for Sauvignon Blanc. This month we look at an Awatere vineyard that has had great success with spur pruned savvy.

Some of the reasons for not spur pruning Sauvignon Blanc, as explained by viticulturists Dominic Pecchenino and Mike Insley last month include:

- Bud differentiation tends to occur at the base and head of the vine – and at bud burst the climatic conditions are not conducive to fruit initiation on the basal buds
- Spur pruned vines tend to have extra canopy and Sauvignon Blanc is already a vigorous grower
- Bunches tend to be smaller and tighter and therefore more susceptible to disease
- There is increased danger of Eutypa in spur pruning due to the older wood being left

With all of that in mind, we now skip to a three terraced vineyard right on the banks of the Awatere River. The 60 hectares being managed by Glen Pope, is producing fruit for some premium labels. Like everyone else in the region, yield caps have been enforced and Glen says those caps are easier and cheaper to maintain in the spur pruned blocks than they are in the cane pruned.

Currently he has 22 hectares spur pruned. The bunch size is smaller, more open and spread more throughout the canopy.

“I have 45 bunches on my cane pruned blocks, and I have 50 bunches on the spur pruned block. But those 50 bunches are smaller with 15% less berries on them. In the cane pruned I have around 110 berries per bunch. Spur pruned I have 90. The really big bunches in the savvy here tend to come from

buds 7, 8 or 9. But with spur pruning we are only using buds 3, 4 and five, so it is limiting the amount of fruit we have.”

Given he has had to drastically fruit thin this season, he says the benefits of having smaller bunches is a big cost saver. Whereas he was removing up to 25 bunches per vine in the cane pruned areas, he has only had to remove 15 from the spur pruned.

“That is quite a saving, in terms of labour costs.”

There are other financial benefits too, given Glen alternates between spur and cane. The blocks currently spur pruned will this year revert back to cane. Current cane pruned blocks will be spur pruned this year. And given mechanisation can make light work of spur pruning, there are cost savings.

“At the moment everyone is looking for ways of saving money. We have to and we have to look at doing things differently. I can save up to \$1100 a hectare if I spur prune.”

With cordons being laid down only every second year, it means they don’t grow to a large size and are easy enough to remove during pruning.

“If I left a cordon on it would become too big and then it becomes quite hard. There are plenty of options for canes to lay down when we transfer back to cane pruning. If you don’t rotate, you lose any benefits of the pruning costs. Whereas by rotating, every year I am saving money because of the cheaper pruning methods involved with spur pruning.”

It also allows him to prolong the pruning period, without fear of damaging the next vintage’s fruit.

“I would have an extra two week window when I spur prune. I can barrel prune and leave the canes and when it comes to bud burst I can go through and cut every second one off. I don’t have to strip canes out or worry about damaging those furry buds when I wrap the canes. It just makes it so much easier.”

The risk of Eutypa is also mitigated by the rotation system. By removing the cordon every second year, you are effectively cutting out any potential diseased wood.

Reverting back to cane pruning isn’t difficult and he says the canopy shoots tend to be much stronger after a season where they were spur pruned.

“I tend to get more of the big strong shoots in spur pruning, probably about 30% more. So I am growing a bigger stronger canopy and that can be important on some of my exposed areas. And looking closely at the spur vines versus the cane, it becomes apparent that the canopies are quite different. The inside leaves tend to drop off earlier with spur, which can be advantageous if you want to expose the fruit to sunlight.”

Given the cost savings, (\$1100 per ha), the smaller berry numbers and bunches, the ease of mechanising the pruning and the extension of the pruning time frame, Glen says he is a complete convert. Just like his vines.