

Green is the new red and white for boutique wine producers

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This is a tale of two wineries. One is in the Central Highlands. The other is on the Bellarine Peninsula. Geographically, they are different. However, in the face of a changing climate their missions are the same — to put sustainability at the heart of farming.

Harcourt has long been Victoria's apple-growing capital, but lately, locally-produced wines and ciders have become one of the area's main

drawcards. Contributing to this growing reputation is TAKE2 member Bress (<https://bress.com.au/>), which, with its embrace of biodynamic agriculture, is no ordinary winery.

"We don't just grow grapes and make wine," says general manager and viticulturist Chris Freeman, describing Bress' mixed farming ethos. "We grow fresh produce for our restaurant, we grow cider apples, we produce honey, we have chickens that produce eggs, we cut hay from our paddocks. We utilise everything where we can, to be both profitable and waste free."

At Bress, eliminating waste from wine production means composting — lots of composting! It's the secret to keeping the vineyard, orchard and market garden nourished and productive, while reducing the need to spray the grapevines. In turn, there's less call for fuel-guzzling machinery.

Additionally, nutrient rich water is recycled from self-watering garden beds, known as wicking beds, and used on the vines as well. "The flow on into the winery is clean, healthy fruit that produces great wines with only minimal winemaking intervention," says Chris. "We continually strive to be leaders in sustainability by working with like-minded people and educating others in what we do."

Situated a couple of hours drive south from Harcourt, just outside Queenscliff, TAKE2 member Basils Farm (<http://www.basilsfarm.com.au/>) is another picturesque winery with diverse interests. Here, overlooking Swan Bay, you'll find vineyards, market gardens, a 'paddock-to-plate'

café, and even llamas. Underpinning everything is a strong commitment to farming that respects natural processes, which, as general manager Kim Dema explains, helps to minimise soil disruption and keep healthy microbes in the ground.

“We also know that our commercial operations use valuable resources such as water and electricity,” she says, “So we want to ensure our practices minimise the use of fossil fuels and don’t waste water.” Technology has proven key to achieving these goals — ranging from wireless probes that monitor soil moisture to solar panels and lithium ion batteries.

Like so many in the agricultural sector, the teams at Basils Farm and Bress are attuned to the challenges of climate change. “Climate impacts our business in many ways,” says Chris, noting that Bress’ grapes are ripening earlier and more rapidly. “A few years back our vintage would last up to three months, starting in February and finishing late April. Now we are experiencing vintages that start in February but finish late March. This puts a lot of pressure on our winery, as we can only process a certain volume at a time.”

With Basils Farm’s peak growing season running from December to February, Kim says hotter temperatures and lower rainfall mean higher irrigation costs. “As we are on town water, that cost increases with the amount of water required, but without irrigating the vines and gardens, the quality will be greatly reduced, affecting our brand and revenue.”

The fact that Basils Farm is uniquely located among heritage-listed wetlands adds another environmental imperative. The area is an important feeding ground for an amazing array of birdlife, including sea eagles, the endangered orange bellied parrot, spoonbills, cormorants and egrets. “We want to protect our surroundings, so the beauty of the flora and fauna and birdlife remain for our guests to enjoy,” says Kim. “Our staff, management and the owners are all passionate about sustainability and ways to reduce the impacts of climate change.”

Similarly, the desire to make a difference is a driving force at Bress, where efforts to better understand the impacts of the business ultimately led to TAKE2. “We feel as if it’s our social obligation,” says Chris. “We are committed to developing and implementing sustainable business practices that will benefit future generations through sustainable growth, both profitably and responsibly.”

Feeling inspired to do more? There are so many ways to reduce your carbon footprint (<https://www.take2.vic.gov.au/actions/>). Big or small, every TAKE2 action counts in the fight against climate change.