



FOR LIFE

keeping water flowing

LIFEstory

Pipeline provides lifeline to new vineyard

By Melissa Pouliot for GWMWater

Nested in the wheat and barley fields of the Wimmera, with views of Mt Arapiles on one side and the Grampians National Park on the other, is a vineyard that has everyone talking.

Barangaroo Boutique Wines, established by Chris and Sheila McClure, is only a stone's throw from where Chris's great grandparents settled and is named after their family farm.

Their vineyard is one of only three in Victoria and 50 in Australia growing Vermentino – a warm climate white variety from Italy.

But if it wasn't for the Wimmera Mallee Pipeline, this burgeoning vineyard would not exist.

When Chris and Sheila planted their first wines in 2005 construction of the Wimmera Mallee Pipeline had been announced and the first pipes had been laid at Halls Gap.

Knowing the pipeline, hence a secure water supply, was on the horizon – the couple knew they would have to start planting to take advantage of what piped supply could help deliver.

"It takes three to four years between planting and production so we wanted to get started so we could tap into future pipeline opportunities," Chris says.

But it was a giant leap of faith. The following two years were among the worst drought years on record.

The couple, who by then had lost many of their plantings, remained positive and Chris says 2008 was 'a pretty good year'. And they were elated in December when GWMWater awarded the construction tender for their area; Supply System 6.

Then came Black Saturday on February 7, 2009. With temperatures reaching up to 48 degrees Celsius, they cut their grapes to the ground. They had no water and were relying upon what they could cart in on trucks.

"There was quite a bit of uncertainty during those years and although we knew the pipeline was coming, it seemed a long time coming," Sheila says.

A year later came a setback of a different kind. Record floods in the region washed through the vineyard, causing vine trellises laden with fruit to fall over and water damaged their house.

Fast forward to 2013, with the Wimmera Mallee Pipeline complete and delivering precious growth water to regional industry, and it's a whole different story.

The 2.5-hectare vineyard is almost at full production and Chris says they can finally sleep at night.

They have expansion plans on the drawing board and are about to release their first Cabernet Sauvignon. Their Vermentino is also proving popular with customers and winemakers who want to buy the grapes so they can 'play around' with this exciting new variety.

“Although 2013 was actually an extremely dry year, the pipeline gives us confidence to keep moving forward knowing water is available. Things are definitely looking positive. At the end of the day, if it wasn’t for the pipeline, we wouldn’t be where we are today.”

Barangaroo Boutique Wines cellar door is open Thursday to Sunday and on public holidays 11am and 5pm each day. The wines are also available at many Wimmera outlets and from the Natimuk Farmers Market, the annual Grampians Grape Escape, Hamilton Harvest on the Hill, the Wimmera Machinery Field Days and Horsham Spring Garden Festival.

