CSIRO; using SMS to reach growers

LOCAL growers will soon be able to use mobile phones in the field to help with their irrigation scheduling as part of a project undertaken by CSIRO Land and Water researchers at Hanwood.

Under the guidance of Principal Research Scientist, Dr Evan Christen the team are undertaking research into delivering better irrigation scheduling methods utilising SMS text messages so that growers can receive this information where and when they need it in the field. This work has been possible due to the CSIRO involvement with the Co-operative Research Centre for Irrigation Futures.

Dr John Hornbuckle, an Irrigation and Environmental Engineer says data from satellite imagery is being used to provide site specific data on irrigation management. This allows the team to provide the most current and accurate information on how much water vines require and how long to water, with results being sent to growers via their mobile phone using a text message.

While this technology has been around for a long time, CSIRO scientists at Hanwood are the first to actively use it for an irrigation scheduling service.

"It's sat in the scientific domain for a number of years and is showing real potential for semi-real time management," says Dr Hornbuckle, "It is also a relatively low cost method of informing our growers of the evapo-transpiration rate and how much water they should be applying."

A CSIRO field day will be held at Pastro Vineyard, Yenda on April 10 to demonstrate SMS Irrigation Scheduling, drip irrigation distribution uniformity, and vine growth variability and how it effects wine. There will also be tastings of small batch wines made from grapes from various locations around the vineyard.

Other CSIRO research underway in the region in 2008 includes a Grape and Wine Research and Development Corporation-funded study on the treatment and re-use of winery waste water, under the leadership of Environmental Chemist Dr Wendy Quayle, and Dr Michele Arienzo who joined the group last year from the University of Napoli, Italy.The project is looking at cost effective methods to address winery waste water treatment.

Wasterwater treatment is more difficult for smaller wineries and so researchers are developing a wetland-based treatment system with Piromit wines in Hanwood.

Another project being undertaken in 2008 is the collation of information on soil types and their properties, and mapping this data in the MIA, Coleambally and Murray regions. This information will be available via a GoogleEarthTM package so farmers will be able to easily look up the soil types on their own properties.

Pictured - Dr John Hornbuckle, Irrigation and Environmental Engineer, Dr Evan Christen, Principle Research Scientist and Mr Nick Car Post-grad Engineer.

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