

Grazing sheep in NSW vineyards

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What did we do

Assist viticulturists to make informed decisions about introducing sheep into their vineyard by providing information from experienced operators.

Why did we do this

- business diversification
- economic sustainability, e.g. on-site restaurant, sale of meat/wool
- under-vine weed control
- reduced herbicide use and tractor passes
- improved soil health

Pros of grazing sheep in vineyards

- reduce costs and labour
- reduce herbicide use
- fewer tractor passes
- under-vine weed control
- manage vineyard growth and vigour
- enhance biodiversity
- improve soil health
- improve grape quality
- increase airflow under and within the vines (reduce disease incidence)



Figure 1. Wiltipoll sheep and the single cordon vine height in the background.



Figure 2. Merino sheep provide effective weed control.

Preparing the vineyard for sheep

- ensure suitable fencing and infrastructure are in place for perimeter and interior areas, for example wire and/or electric
- select your option of:
 - having the vine cordon at ≥ 1.2 m
 - selecting a stocky breed such as Babydoll sheep
 - only grazing when vines are dormant
- ensure biosecurity measures are completed for agisting sheep
- access to suitable pasture to graze, otherwise the vines will be eaten
- access to suitable drinking water

Cons of grazing sheep in vineyards

- some additional management practices for sheep, for example drenching and shearing
- moving the sheep out of the vineyard during veraison
- increased infrastructure investment, i.e. fencing, vineyard cordon height, irrigation height
- biosecurity risk with agisted sheep
- potential vine and trellis damage
- sheep breed selection is very important and needs to suit your enterprise i.e. gentle breed selection to reduce trellis and vine damage.



Figure 3. The leaves have been eaten off the younger vines, while the bunches are not eaten as they are too tart for the sheep.



Figure 4. Stocky Babydoll sheep in a vineyard with a raised irrigation line for them to move under while grazing.

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