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Page 1 of 2

Tech trial a win for SA grape growers

MICHELLE ETHERIDGE
REGIONAL REPORTER

NEW technology will be trialled in the Riverland in the hope of finding ways for winegrape growers to retain a competitive edge and battle the effects of climate change.

The trial, costing about \$270,000, will feature a range of systems rolled together to study methods of reducing the amount of water, sprays, diesel and labour needed to grow crops efficiently.

Riverland Wine executive chair Chris Byrne said growers were being challenged to be “more and more competitive”.

“One way we can do that is to reduce the cost of growing winegrapes,” Mr Byrne said.

The project would use a range of equipment, including drones capturing images of vineyards’ strengths and weaknesses, technology to sense moisture in canopies and soil, and cameras attached to tractors to monitor vineyards’ growth stages.

“These devices already exist but have never been integrated into a single digital platform so growers can use them to make better decisions in the vineyard,” Mr Byrne said.

Pulling together data in areas such as yields, quality and maturity, would place growers in a better position to counter climate change.

“This is an initiative on their part to mitigate any harm that may come from too many hot days in a row, or not enough rain,” Mr Byrne said. Technology will be installed at a local vineyard, with the aim of testing a “dashboard” to let growers read data results more easily.

The project is a partnership between the State Government, Riverland Wine, Wine Australia and the University of Adelaide. The State Government will contribute \$134,000, with the two industry groups matching that commitment.

Mr Byrne said academics from the university’s engineering and computer mathematical science division were working with the local industry. “Our hope for this is it will become a lead project that will enable us to secure more funding from the Federal Government for a much more detailed multi-year trial,” he said.

Primary Industries Minister Tim Whetstone said results from the six-month pilot would be shared among the state’s wine regions.

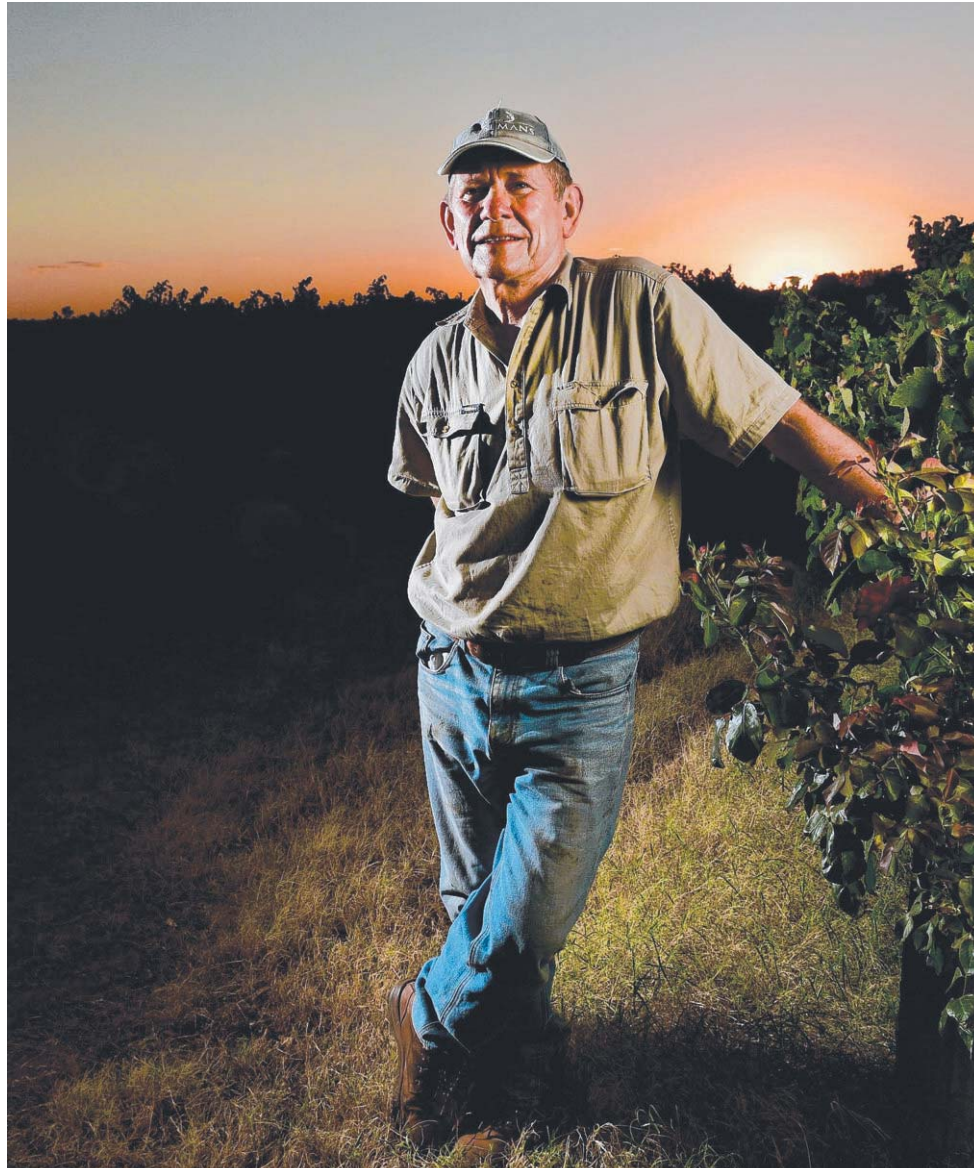


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HI-TECH: Riverland Wine executive chair Chris Byrne.

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