

This work began as a joint project with industry over a decade ago using infrared spectroscopy with the AWRI helping wineries confirm that bulk wine purchases were the same as the wine sampled before purchase.

Other methods to tackle counterfeiting

As Wilkes notes, the “tools for confirming suspicions” of counterfeit wines developed by the AWRI are based on chemical analyses. However, further strategies have been initiated to tackle wine counterfeiting targeting other stages of the wine production process. He points to innovative labelling techniques, like 3D barcodes and RFID (radio-frequency identification), that enable wines to be authenticated and traced. Wilkes says that while the AWRI doesn’t work in this space, there are “huge numbers of commercial providers out there who are offering innovative labelling and database solutions to help track wine”.

On the topic of labels, Wilkes says some fake labels are so detailed and deceptive that a chemical test on the wine inside the bottle is needed to prove one way or another if the wine is fake or not.

Wilkes says there has also been recent progress in the area of data integrity; “blockchain is a very secure form of accounting. What they’re doing is ensuring a traceable record from beginning to end of a supply chain”. This is very effective “if you’ve got the correct tools in place to follow it”, adds Wilkes.

Targeting smaller producers

It can be more difficult for lower-end producers to provide anti-counterfeiting measures, says Wilkes.

“With some expensive wines there are apps to check the label of your wine - but if you’re talking a [less-expensive] everyday drinking part of the market, there’s nowhere near as much a financial drive for someone to put that technology in place, because the profit per bottle is quite small”.

Wilkes says it makes sense the more popular a wine is, the more likely it will be counterfeited, but this doesn’t mean we should discount the labels that no one hears about.

“For someone wanting to target something where they can make a lot of money selling something quite quickly, [cheaper, lesser-known] products are an

interesting target; while [counterfeiters] may only be making a few more cents per bottle, if they can sell enough of them, they make a lot of money,” says Wilkes.

Sometimes, confirming a wine’s authenticity goes a long way to protecting a wine region or producing country’s reputation. Wilkes points out someone could take a substandard wine, put an Australian label on it, call it Australian, and use the Australian connotation to charge more for the wine than it would be worth if the label showed its true origin.

“That’s another form of counterfeiting and one we need to be concerned about because it impacts our overall image in the market: Australia [is seen] as a high quality producer of safe products. It’s attacking the Australian brand image,” Wilkes says.

With the broad variety and fast growing technology on offer in the wine counterfeiting space, from blockchain to chemical analysis, Wilkes remarks, “we can show the traceability of wine from grape to glass, and those tools are incredibly powerful and effective.” **GW**

Two new ways to prevent wine fraud



Just as wine fraud techniques by fraudsters are becoming more sophisticated, wine fraud detection techniques are on the improve.

Science is stepping in with research aimed at developing new techniques to identify exactly from where grapes from which a particular wine is made are grown, using methods looking at trace metals and isotopic ratios of elements in the wine. This research, carried out by scientists from CSIRO and the Australian Wine Research Institute, is aimed at identifying the unique characteristics from different winemaking locations. This involves looking at the water that

grows the vines, the underlying geology and the characteristics of the air in the area.

This scientific research is directed not so much at the counterfeiting of particular labels, although it may well have a role to play, but at a high level, the fraudulent labelling of wine as Australian or from a particular geographical area, when it is not.

On another front, the Australian wine industry’s defences against counterfeiters in export markets was improved in 2018 when Wine Australia (WA) was granted new powers to safeguard the industry by being allowed, for the first time, to disallow shipping approvals of particular batches of wine, in addition to the existing option to suspend or cancel licences. This allows WA to grant or refuse a particular product for export which, although not an express power

in relation to intellectual property, broadens the scope of matters which WA is able to take into consideration in exercising its new power.

WA is also reported as seeking updated power to verify the credentials of exporters so as to ensure the bona fides of potential and existing exporters.

Whilst it may be a big step to suspend or cancel an export licence, it provides a more targeted, modest power to disallow a particular export product, with the producer having rights of review.

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