



COOL CLIMATES: VALUE-ADDING TO FOOD AND WINE PRODUCTS



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Executive Summary

Australia's cool climate regions are undergoing a food and wine renaissance. New varieties of grapes are being planted, and chefs are experimenting with the development of regional cuisines. Wine and food tourism are the 'buzz' words for many regions as they diversify from agricultural pursuits. The country with the finest history of this type of activity is Italy. Each region focuses on its own produce, and the relationship between the food and wine in these areas is fundamental not only to tourism, hospitality and agriculture, but to customs and lifestyle as well.

The focal point of this Fellowship was to investigate the relationship between cool climate food and wine. Over the last fifty years Australia has watched its wine industry grow to be one of the world's strongest, and our food scene to be among the most diverse in the globe. The challenge has been to integrate these industries. With the growth of the slow food, food miles, organics, and similar movements there has been a strong move to develop robust regional food and wine links focusing on growing and producing the highest quality ingredients. Our challenge has been to develop product that accentuates, and aligns with the wine varieties our climate allows. To complement this we also need to look at other suitable food friendly grape varieties that could be grown successfully in our climate.

The skills gaps that were addressed within this Fellowship focussed on the development of complementary cuisine to that of current and future wine styles, and production techniques of cool climate Australia. The Fellow investigated grape varieties not yet currently produced commercially but with climatic potential, the value-adding of presently produced crops and products, along with the discovery and development of further suitable products for our climatic region.

Austria, Italy, and Alsace (France) were chosen to research methodologies that could be advantageous to the industry, as these regions of Europe are recognised as being of a similar climate, have many grape varieties yet to be developed in our country, and their cuisine relies upon the seamless relationship between food and wine.

With the assistance of a number of Austrian, French, and Italian wine growers and restaurateurs, Australian wine importers, the FederDoc of Friuli, and the food and wine section of the Italian Institute of Foreign Trade (ICE), Lennard was privileged to be given access to numerous establishments, time with producers, retailers, and food and wine journalists.

Throughout this Fellowship Lennard clearly identified that international interest in food and wine tourism is growing rapidly. As this growth continues, the customer demographic is changing. 'Customers' now demand premium product, sourced from the best producers, but not at any price. In Europe the emergence of 'bio' or organic production is growing steadily. People are voting with their wallets, and purchasing not on price, but on product. All markets and supermarkets visited on this Fellowship had large and growing organic sections. The Australian industry needs to develop food and wine strategies around its regions, its quality, clean environment, but still considering a reasonable price point.

This report identifies the importance of food and wine tourism strategies, and the requirement to develop educational methodologies for our chefs, to allow them to understand how integral wine is to food and vice versa. This would also include the development of a Fellowship between primary producers and chefs or cooks associations.

The report also suggests the introduction of new varieties of vines and foodstuffs that are compatible with our climate, and gastronomic style. The encouragement of a schools-based program encouraging freshness and variety in foodstuffs is also recommended.

Lennard intends to promote these activities through his educational position, his role on the national executive of the Australian TAFE Tourism and Hospitality Educators Association, his links with the wine and food industry, and by strengthening networks developed while undertaking this Fellowship.