



**Company:** Summerhill Road Vineyard

**Location:** Bungendore, Australia

**Product:** Agrilaser Autonomic

**Reason:** Grape damage due to birds

**In use since:** March 2016

**Current laser projection area:** 1.9 Ha

## Results

- 80 to 90% less birds
- Immediate effect after installation
- Permanent solution
- Works fully autonomic and autonomous
- Allows more flexible grape harvests

## Situation before

The Summerhill Road vineyard, located within the Canberra Wine District of Australia, grows grapes for the purpose of producing premium quality, cool-climate wines. Birds, such as Starlings, Cockatoos, Currawong, Crows, Rosellas and Wattlebirds, damage the grapes. Without any bird control, this can lead to a significant reduction of crops (1-2 tonne per week) and increased risk of disease (reducing the quality of the fruit). Historically, birds have been controlled via netting. The vineyard was 100% netted (from prior to the fruit ripening till the day of picking), resulting in approximately \$4,000 in annual labour costs.

## Situation after

Since the nets were 15 years old and needed to be replaced, alternatives were evaluated. Decisive advantages of the Agrilaser Autonomic are its silent functioning (in contrast to gas cannons) and relative low price (compared to netting). Installation of the Agrilaser Autonomic resulted in 80-90% bird reduction. Furthermore, grape-eating birds stopped coming to the vineyard altogether, whereas non grape-eating birds, water birds (Ducks) and other wildlife quickly returned after the grapes had been harvested and the laser turned off. This resulted in an increased grape yield and the possibility to harvest later than normal, to create a dessert wine. There is an expectation of future financial gain since bird netting is very costly, both in materials and labour costs. The Agrilaser Autonomic on the other hand, works fully autonomously without the required labour to install and remove the nets annually.

## More information

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**Bird Control Group**



# Higher grape yield, lower costs and better wine

**Interview** Anthony McDougall, Summerhill Road Vineyard

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Wine making is a beautiful, but challenging craft. How does one for instance protect the grapes from hungry birds? The Summerhill Road Vineyard successfully applied the Agrilaser Autonomic. The result: higher yield, lower costs and better wine.

Anthony McDougall is the proud owner and manager of Summerhill Road Vineyard. This Australian vineyard produces premium quality, cool climate wines. However, birds such as Starlings, Cockatoos and Crows disrupt this process. “The damage to the grapes can result in significant reduction of crops, with a potential loss of 1-2 tonne per week”, says Anthony. “Bird damage also increases the risk of grape disease and this can reduce the quality of the fruit to a level where it is not suitable for wine making.”

## **Urgent need**

Previously Anthony protected his grapes with netting each year, even though he’s not fond of the solution. “Bird netting is expensive and one of the most dreaded aspects of owning a vineyard, both from a labour and capital cost perspective. It is a logistical nightmare as it requires four people to install over multiple days to run tractors and spread or collect the nets. Furthermore, nets are very costly and our nets are 15 years old and in urgent need of replacement, at an expected cost of over \$20,000 to replace all of our nets” Anthony commented.

Initially, Anthony experimented with drones and bird humming wire as an alternative, but neither turned out to be effective enough. That’s why Anthony decided to investigate the potential of the Agrilaser Autonomic. “It’s a set and forget option. After the laser had been configured it can cover the entire vineyard without any

further labour costs. Next to that, the Agrilaser is more cost effective than the alternatives.

**“Without the laser we wouldn’t have been able to produce our late harvest wine.”**

**Anthony McDougall**, *Summerhill Road Vineyard*

Anthony said after setting up the Agrilaser Autonomic the bird reduction was significant, even after only a few days. “This reduction continued over the following weeks. After two to three weeks, the birds simply wouldn’t nest in any of the surrounding trees. Initially, the laser had some residual impact, but after a week the water birds and other wildlife returned to the dams. That is great, as they are now keeping the bugs down over the winter while the vineyard is dormant.”

## **Amazing result**

Improved bird control also allows grapes to ripen further for an extended period to produce a dessert wine. Anthony said “Without the laser we wouldn’t have been able to produce our late harvest wine. The end result was amazing. Thanks to the usage of the Agrilaser we achieved better than expected quality, resulting in a clean ferment and increased total yield of grapes.”

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