

'People power' needed in tough economic times



By RENEE DE CICCO

INVESTING in people should be a priority, particularly when the wine industry is going through difficult times, Adelaide Hills based viticulture consultant Mary Retallack says.

With her consultancy business, Retallack Viticulture, launched in May, Ms Retallack has a strong focus on networking, and is dedicating Fridays to informal meetings with people who also want to extend their wine industry knowledge, interests and contacts.

"The industry has invested in me in a range of ways and this is my way of giving back to the industry," she said.

"I'm really interested in investing in people and supporting the development of networks between people in the industry. I enjoy empowering people through sharing information and skills, especially given that the industry's going through tough times."

Ms Retallack grew up on a fruit block in the Riverland, and her professional wine industry experience spans 14 years, involving practical, extension and consultancy roles in Australia and overseas.

She has grabbed leadership opportunities with both hands; she is a current recipient of the Australian Rural Leadership Program wine industry sponsored scholarship, and has participated in the second intake of Future Leaders – Succession for the Australian Wine Sector program, and the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry's scholarship, Pathways to Rural Leadership.

Ms Retallack is keen to encourage the next wave of wine industry professionals to make the most of these types of opportunities.

"My involvement in leadership programs over the past few years has given me a different perspective, both in my personal outlook and my outlook of the industry, as well as broadening my skills,



Mary Retallack says networking is a key part of her new consultancy business, Retallack Viticulture.

expertise and confidence to pursue these interests," she said.

"We need to encourage a diverse range of people in leadership roles, including people who can draw experience from other industries."

Ms Retallack sees industry challenges as opportunities.

"It gives us the chance to reposition ourselves in a more sustainable way, review the use of our natural resources, and find innovative solutions to difficult problems," she said.

At Retallack Viticulture, Ms Retallack's key focus is helping grapegrowers to become winegrowers.

She says growing healthy vines, meeting quality targets, optimising productivity while maximising financial margins, understanding the value chain, and building long-term relationships between growers and fruit purchasers all fall under this focus.

"Being a winegrower involves putting all of these links together," Ms Retallack said.

The business offers a range of services,

including vineyard management and technical advice, review of business financials, developing business plans and future plans, vineyard appraisal, technical advice, vineyard restructuring options, benchmarking, training, extension, expert opinion reports, and networking.

Running her own business has given Ms Retallack more flexibility to pursue her interests of working one-on-one with growers in the vineyard, through to working at the strategic level in her role as a non-executive director of the Grape and Wine Research and Development Corporation, and everything in between.

Her extensive contact network gives her a pool of experts and resources to call on to answer clients' queries.

She says it might be seen as risky to set up a business in the current financial climate, but she thinks if someone can provide a tailored service offering practical solutions and make it though difficult times, the business should prosper in better times.

Details: Retallack Viticulture viti.com.au

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Market conditions create extra chance

IT has been a tough year for Australian winegrowers with climatic conditions and falling global demand adversely impacting on the bottom line for many producers.

The global financial crisis continues to curtail demand from major importers, such as the United States and United Kingdom.

During the past 12 months, demand for Australian wine has fallen by 14 per cent in value terms. This has been caused by a number of factors, and the GFC has definitely been one of them. However, there are indeed other commodities that are being hurt by the economic slowdown.

According to a recently released Rabobank report, even chocolate is suffering from the trading down phenomenon.

These increased price sensitivities of consumers come on the heels of an unprecedented trend of trading up where consumers were once willing to spend a lot more for small luxuries and premium products.

From the late 1990s until 2007, the trend for chocolate consumers was to trade up to even more luxurious goods. Chocolate companies developed new strategies to supply the chocolate-loving community with indulgences in higher priced products and premium brands.

Unfortunately for those cashing in on the trading up trend, it seems that chocolate – much like wine – is not immune to recession. There is now the beginning of a trend of consumers trading down in the chocolate market.

In 2009, it is expected that the global chocolate volume will decline moderately and shrink more than in previous financial crises. However – also much like in the wine industry – not all chocolate manufacturers are likely to suffer.

For some chocolate makers, the new market conditions may represent an extra chance for growth which was not present before the GFC. Private labels or supermarket brands are gaining share in all fast-moving consumer goods categories and certain chocolate segments, such as tablets or seasonal chocolates.

Some companies criticised for not having luxury products in their portfolios are doing better during the GFC because they have lower priced options for the current market trend of trading down.

The leading brands and strong private label suppliers are likely to come out of the current downturn in a stronger position than before. For chocolate – as with wine – it seems that the businesses that will do best in the current global climate are those that produce good quality, well-priced products in a method which makes best use of economies of scale.

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