



Frankland Estate owner Barrie Smith and vineyard manager Ed Baulch with chardonnay vines budding in spring.

# A re-education in growing organic wine

» **Kenrick Riley** reports from Albany WA where attitudes towards organic are now changing from the palate to the hip pocket.

**L**ATE spring in Western Australia sees a spectacular wildflower display give way to a sea of yellow canola as farmers prepare to harvest the annual oilseed crop. In October, this blaze of colour is the first thing to greet visitors to the Frankland Estate vineyard, an hour inland from Albany, in the State's south-west corner.

Across fields of canola, above a hillside of grapevines – still naked in the spring chill – there is a large, corrugated iron winery, the work-centre for Frankland Estate. Here, huddled among French-oak barrels and stainless steel vats, a new organic program is being implemented for the surrounding vineyard.

Like many farms in the district, Frankland Estate is a 1000 ha mixed operation: merino sheep, beef cattle, cultivation, an expanding vineyard and winery, and an orchard of olive trees. In 1988, owners Barrie Smith and Judy Cullam fenced off 30 ha and popped in their first red and white grape vines. Now, 20 years later, Judy and son Hunter focus on the sheep operation – with a view to organic wool – and work with Barrie, and daughter Elizabeth, in the winery and vineyard under the watchful eye of vineyard manager Ed Baulch.

Converting the 30 ha vineyard to organics has been a long journey. Peering from under a shock of grey, curly hair, Barrie remembers starting an organic home vegie patch 30 years ago. In the vineyard, he initially used herbicides and fungicides but admits to being 'not very good' with chemicals anyway. Having taken a first step, Barrie is now looking at longer-term plans for certifying the winery process, then the

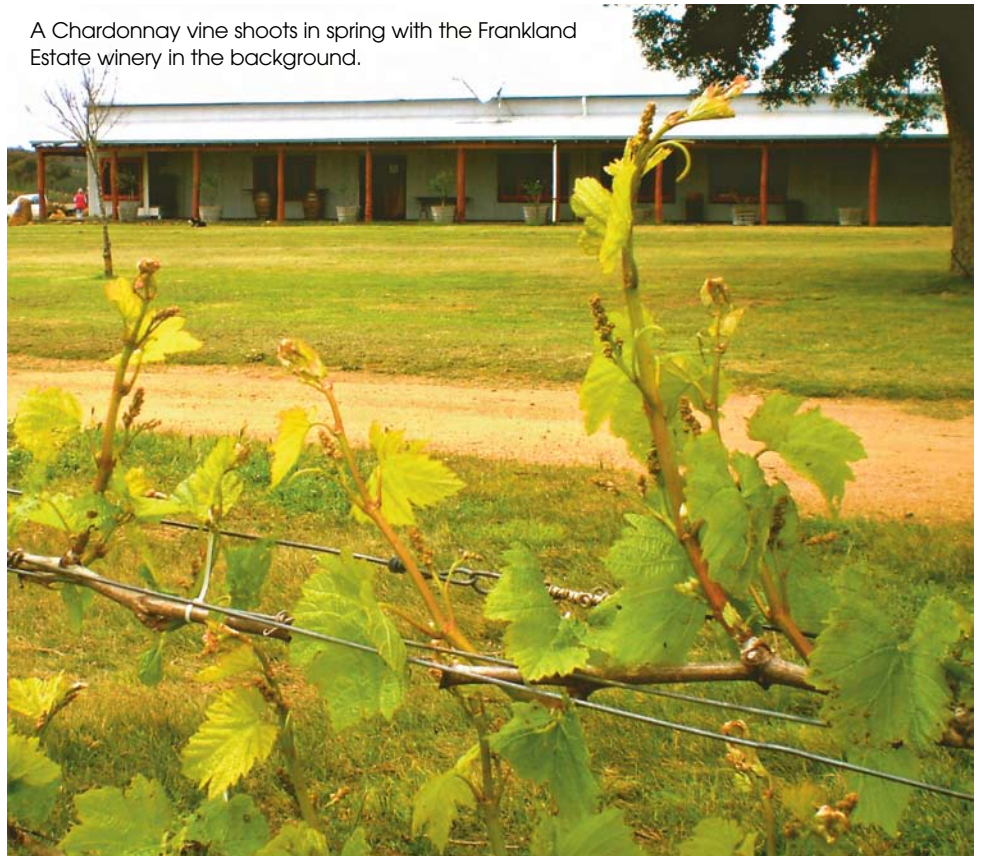
rest of the farm – he knows a Perth butcher wanting organic beef. Eventually Barrie wants to move to biodynamics. "It's a more complete system – a better balance," he said.

For traditionally trained Victorian Ed Baulch, organics has introduced a steep learning curve. He was keen on the idea as a way to improve wine quality and to meet growing demand for organics from

their 15 overseas markets – particularly the US – where most Frankland Estate wine is sold. "Some conventional vineyards use so much fertiliser, their operation is almost hydroponic – and it changes the flavour of the wine." He believes there is a noticeably better 'balance' in the taste from the Frankland crop.

But there are other factors at play. Ed has watched fertiliser prices double in 12

A Chardonnay vine shoots in spring with the Frankland Estate winery in the background.



months. Plus, after working in major vineyard plantations, he enjoys not being out spraying poisons anymore. "Staff much prefer to work in this sort of environment," Ed said.

His personal organic education came with advice to forget everything he had learnt and start again. Ed realised he had to look at problems anew and learn to treat them differently. So it was off to seminars with Elizabeth Smith and searching out information about organic viticulture. "Its there. You just have to look for it. And don't be afraid to ask for advice," Ed suggests.

At seminars nowadays, organic winegrowers are no longer treated as if they had 'two heads'. "Because of increasing costs, conventional growers all want to know about organics. It's about the hip pocket. But it's also about the market looking for organic wines," Ed said. Barrie nodded agreement, saying there was a great interest in sustainable agriculture generally – and cited a recent European survey which found alarming levels of poison residue in conventional foods.

Ed has stopped the fungicides at Frankland Estate, opting for a foliar seaweed instead. Neem is used for weevils, sulphur for powdery mildew. "There's no downy

mildew this far from the coast. We have a good climate. Our location is helpful in converting to organics." Some weed species get hit with a kero-burner.

Sheep have just been removed from winter-grazing the dormant vineyard. As new vine buds grow through Spring, the heavily-cloved, mid-rows are mulched onto vines with a side-mounted, under-wire mower. Little grows anywhere during WA's summer dry season – except grapes. Winter prunings, once burnt, are now chopped with a flail mower and put back as mulch. The grape-marque residue from crushing might be used for compost. A resident flock of guinea fowl look after the insects. Barrie looks after them in return – incubating a few eggs to replace anything lost to a watchful Wedgetail. Ed reckons it might be more expensive to manage the vineyard's workload organically. "But we are not buying expensive chemicals anymore either. It's early days yet, so it might even out," he said.

Frankland Estate is one of the bigger, small wineries dotted across WA's south-west. But Barrie doesn't think the vineyard's certification will affect their existing market greatly. To produce a fully-organic wine, Frankland would need a separate certification



covering processing in the winery. "And the market already likes our small, family operation – and that we've always had organic principles. We did it (organics) because we wanted to do it anyway."

Ed and Barrie seem to be sorting out a good system. There's a bit more management. But there's a lot of recycling. Many less inputs. And a growing integration of livestock and cropping. Frankland's selection of reds and whites – mostly cuttings from other WA vineyards – are free of diseases affecting many Eastern State varieties. Water-wise, Frankland vines are irrigated for the first four years only. After that, their roots are forced down through the friable, coffee-rock soils into the clay below – where they look after themselves. And look after Barrie and Ed's families. <<<

**KidSnak**  
**NEW**  
**Certified Organic**  
**PURÉED FRUIT SNACKS**  
**FOR CHILDREN AND ADULTS TOO!**

**Now sweetened with Stevia**  
 This totally natural, non-GMO sweetener is almost calorie free, and has been used in Japan for decades. **KidSnaK** is now even more healthy, with no added sugar, no added concentrated fruit juice, no artificial colours or flavours, and no preservatives.

**Great for lunch boxes**

- Available in 65g tubs, 130g tubs, single tubs, two-packs and four-packs.
- Can be stored and eaten at room temperature, or chilled or frozen before eating.
- 99% certified organic fruit

**FOR SALES ENQUIRIES contact**  
 Errol Seymour, Managing Director  
 The Organic Fine Food Company, Bridgetown Western Australia  
 Tel 08 9761 2901 Fax 08 9761 2905  
 Email [admin@organicfinefood.com.au](mailto:admin@organicfinefood.com.au)  
[www.organicfinefood.com.au](http://www.organicfinefood.com.au)

**NASAA**  
 CERTIFIED ORGANIC  
**F&M**  
 ACCREDITED  
 Cert No. 6143

**Body, Hearth & Soul**

**FREE OF**  
 Artificial Preservatives and Additives, Artificial Colours, Artificial Flavours, Herbicides, Pesticides and Animal Fats

**FULL OF**  
 Natural Flavour

**PROCESSOR 419P AUSTRALIAN CERTIFIED ORGANIC**

**Gotta love 100% organic.\***

**Available in these delicious and nutritious flavours:**

- Stoneground Light
- Stoneground Wholemeal
- Stoneground Multigrain
- Heavy Wholegrain

\*Golden Hearth Stoneground Light, Stoneground Wholemeal & Stoneground Multigrain and Heavy Wholegrain are certified 100% Organic by ACO.

**Chose from our delicious range of organic, gluten-free and stoneground breads. Made with 100% organic flour and full of natural goodness!**

**Golden Hearth products are supplied to stores in Brisbane, Ipswich and the Sunshine & Gold Coasts.**

**For more information call (07) 5594 9966**  
[www.goldenhearth.com.au](http://www.goldenhearth.com.au)

**Golden Hearth**