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The Real Review



Felton Road Wines owner Nigel Greening with winemaker Blair Walter.

“This is the future”, said Nigel Greening, owner of Felton Road Wines, as he fiddled with his cellphone to activate a video. The screen showed a robotic flying machine.

“The drone is tomorrow’s tractor,” enthused Greening. It was a drone on a grand scale designed to spray cow dung onto grapevines from a great height. Felton Road is an organic/biodynamic wine producer, a regime that forbids the use of artificial fungicides, pesticides and herbicides—although it can employ drones to spray cow dung.

Planning a picnic in Felton Road’s vineyard? Check that it is a no-spray day first.

“It is faster and possibly more cost-effective than conventional spray methods,” enthused Greening, who went on to explain how the drone’s propellers help to distribute the dung efficiently throughout the vine canopy. Tractor-towed spraying machines compact the soil while the drone doesn’t make so much as a dent on it. A GPS on the drone follows its instructions to the letter to give the vines an accurate coverage every time.

A search on Google revealed several New Zealand companies offering ‘agricultural drones’. Aerolab’s latest creation is designed to sow seeds, spray crops and spread fertilisers with “unmatched accuracy and efficiency. It has a 50-litre tank with a flow rate up to 22 litres a minute, and an 80-litre spreader tank of 150kg/minute. Packages start at NZD \$33,000”.

I would imagine they’d do a pretty good job of bird-scaring in the weeks before vintage. They might also be effective in scaring off unauthorised picnickers.