

There has been a lot of interest in Riversun's new variety grapevine importation programme and with the very first fruit now on the vines, key people from New Zealand's wine industry came to Gisborne to look at the crop. Riversun viticulturist Nick Hoskins is pictured with Simon Radburn from Havelock North Craggy Range winery.

Picture by Paul Rickard



Wine industry excited by first crop on imported grapevines

'Multi-million-dollar investment by

by Debbie Gregory

HAVING the very first fruit on newly-imported grapevines is the culmination of a 10-year journey for Gisborne horticultural development company Riversun Nursery Ltd.

Key wine industry people from around the country have been in Gisborne to assess the first crop on the vines of about 60 of the 100 different varieties and clones recently imported from all over the world.

Riversun's executive director Geoff Thorpe says it has been a long and hugely demanding process up to this point, with the release of the imported vines to the industry an historic event.

It is the biggest single release of grape varieties and clones ever in New Zealand and a turning point for the wine industry, he says.

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The importation project required Riversun to make a

multi-million-dollar investment in setting up and running a high-level quarantine centre and plant pest diagnostic laboratory.

Since the first mother vines came out of quarantine almost two years ago, Riversun has been busy bulking up the propagation material to meet pent up demand.

The first fruit from these vines was not expected until next season.

"It has been such a good growing season and the early fruit is exciting enough to warrant us showing the grapes to the industry and then to harvest them," Mr Thorpe says.

Harvest will begin this week and small amounts of wine using microvinification technology will be made from each of the varieties. Some will be made in Gisborne by winemaker Anita

Ewart-Croy of Kew Estate, and some at the Marlborough Research Centre.

Mr Thorpe says it has been a long hard road to get to this point, the third stage of a vine improvement programme started more than a decade ago.

The first stage was to roll out certified vines tested for two major viruses and certified true to variety.

The second stage involved testing for 15 viruses using far more accurate virus-testing technology.

The third stage has been the process of importing the very best material from all over the world and putting those vines through the rigorous process of testing for every virus and fungus possible.

The first vines propagated from the imported material were grafted last spring and will be dispatched to Riversun