

Darrell Fiddler, Farm Manager

DeBortoli Wines, Griffith, NSW

Since 1928, De Bortoli Wines has been a cornerstone of the Riverina region's wine industry. Based in Bilbul, just northeast of Griffith, the family-owned business has evolved into a leader in both viticulture and broadacre farming, combining tradition with innovation to build a diversified and sustainable operation.



DeBortoli Wines: A Tradition of Innovation

De Bortoli Wines, based in Bilbul just northeast of Griffith, has long been a staple of the Riverina Region's wine industry. Renowned for their award-winning wines, the business has expanded into broadacre cropping, managing 800 hectares of irrigated summer crops, alongside wheat and barley in winter. Their operations also include 200 hectares of vineyards, making them a key player in both viticulture and agriculture in the region.

While De Bortoli's winemaking journey began in 1928, their broadacre cropping enterprise started 14 years ago, born from a commitment to sustainability. Seeking to recycle wash-down water from their winery, the company integrated irrigation farming into their operations. This innovative approach not only optimised water use but also enabled the production of crops essential to their diversified operations.

Overcoming Challenges with High-Flow Irrigation

Darrell Fiddler, farm manager at Bilbul notes that water management has been a critical focus for De Bortoli, particularly the opportunities afforded by high-flow irrigation. Darrell understood that higher water flows could drive more efficient use of water and productivity gains, but their farms were not set up for such flows.

The company collaborated with Murrumbidgee Irrigation to address this, resulting in significant improvements. Murrumbidgee Irrigation consolidated outlets and De Bortoli reconfigured some paddocks, a partnership which delivered high-flow systems, enabling shorter irrigation times, reducing water waste, and improving overall efficiency.

"Being able to modify water orders with a single phone call and an hour's notice allows us to adapt quickly to unexpected rainfall or changing conditions".

Darrell's proactive stance on irrigation has extended to hosting research with Deakin University, aiming to improve water efficiency further. This partnership produced Australia's first commercial aerobic rice crop, showcasing how advanced technologies like linked sensing and automation can revolutionise irrigation practices.

The Role of Modernisation

Looking ahead, Darrell sees automation as key to future success. The potential to integrate Murrumbidgee Irrigation's water management systems with the farm's soil moisture monitoring technology could enhance precision irrigation further, ensuring water delivery aligns perfectly with crop requirements.

Darrell recently contributed to the trial phase of MI Connect, Murrumbidgee Irrigation's innovative tool designed to replace their existing water ordering platform, further emphasising the importance of automation and efficiency.

"MI Connect is fantastic—it's so easy to open the app and see all your flow rates at once," Darrell explains. "Instead of driving 40 kilometers to check a specific outlet, you can immediately see if its flow rate has dropped."



Rice paddocks in Griffith, NSW.

“The Murrumbidgee Irrigation Operations Centre is outstanding—the team listens to growers and provides solutions promptly, making water management seamless

A Partnership Built for the Future

The relationship between De Bortoli and Murrumbidgee Irrigation reflects a shared vision of sustainability and growth. From en-route storages that ensure water availability to customer-focused service, MI's initiatives have been pivotal.

De Bortoli Wines continues to innovate, blending tradition with cutting-edge practices in both viticulture and agriculture, ensuring their legacy thrives for generations to come.

“MI’s proactive planning and customer-driven approach show they’re committed to supporting growers. Their innovations in water delivery and infrastructure make them a vital partner for our operations,”



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Staying ahead of the game, using our modernised system to drive efficient operations and enable our region to grow in a time of less water.

