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Factors affecting the predisposition of 'Cabernet Sauvignon'
grapevines (*Vitis vinifera* L.) to the physiological disorder, bunch
stem necrosis.

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Abstract

Bunch stem necrosis (BSN) is a physiological disorder in grapes. It results in shrivelled berries with poor quality attributes such that wine produced from grapes with high BSN incidence is of compromised quality. Past research has proposed many different hypotheses to explain the disorder. Literature indicates that conditions during certain stages of development may predispose berries to BSN but results are not consistent as to which stage is the critical one or which factors have the most impact. This study was designed to resolve these points of uncertainty. Treatments that either enhanced or decreased vine vigour, or manipulated the light environment around the fruit zone were applied to field grown 'Cabernet Sauvignon' vines over three seasons. Treatments included root pruning, heading back of canes by 50%, laying down a reflective mulch and two 50% shade treatments applied for three weeks either pre- or post-full bloom (FB). A strong positive correlation was found between vine vigour and the incidence of BSN. Three weeks post-FB, during both the current and previous season, was identified as the critical period within which factors predispose bunches to BSN. Plant growth regulators, including GA₃, IAA and NPA, were applied to bunches on a different group of field grown vines immediately after FB. Application of GA₃ during the critical period, tended to reduce the incidence of BSN, while the effects of IAA and NPA application were less clear and require further research. In a controlled environment (CE) trial, pot-grown vines were placed in CE rooms during one of three development stages. Results showed that treatments applied during the critical three-week period after FB increased the incidence of BSN three fold compared with no change in BSN incidence for vines that were placed in the CE rooms immediately prior to FB or prior to veraison. Collective results from these studies clearly demonstrate that the period immediately following FB is the most critical time in the predisposition of bunches to BSN. It is suggested that competitive dominance of vegetative growth over the developing inflorescence and bunch for assimilates and/or nutrients may be the predisposing factor/s influencing this disorder.

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my grandfather, Dr Owen Haylock (1923 – 2002). Without him in my life, the desire and motivation to even start this thesis would not have been there. Sadly he died before he could see me start this study, but his memory has been with me throughout the four years of this research.

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To all of you, and so many other people I have not been able to thank as it would take a second volume, thank you so much for what you have done for me.

Extended Thesis Summary

Bunch stem necrosis (BSN) is a physiological disorder in grapes that results in unripe shrivelled berries with poor quality attributes. This includes the Brix concentration remaining low, while titratable acidity (TA) remains high. Visual symptoms include not only the shrivelled or flacid appearance of the berries, but necrosis of the rachis, peduncle or pedicels. Symptoms usually occur soon after 100% veraison has been reached and progressively worsens until harvest. Wine produced from grapes with a high proportion of BSN is consequently low in quality and therefore the disorder is of concern to the industry. Past research results are conflicting, with many different hypotheses being proposed to explain the disorder. Although symptoms are not exhibited until after veraison, the literature indicates that conditions during certain stages in development may predispose berries to BSN. However, the literature is not consistent as to which stage is the critical one or which factors have most impact on the disorder. This study was designed to try and identify this possible critical stage in berry development and the factors that impact on the severity of BSN.

For two seasons 50% shade cloth was applied to field grown 'Cabernet Sauvignon' vines. One group received shade for three weeks prior to full bloom (FB) with a second group receiving shade for three weeks immediately following FB. Assessments including juice analyses and non-destructively estimating BSN incidence from veraison to harvest were carried out. Raw BSN incidence data were adjusted for days after 50% veraison and a common Brix/TA ratio in order to accommodate any differences in maturity among treatments and compare the incidence of the disorder across all three seasons where BSN incidence was assessed. In Season Two, plant growth regulator treatments, which included GA₃ (50 mg l⁻¹), IAA (200 mg l⁻¹) and NPA (200 mg l⁻¹), along with a control, were applied to bunches on a different group of field grown 'Cabernet Sauvignon' vines immediately after FB. This was in combination with canopy manipulation treatments of removing laterals from vines and retaining the laterals, that were also carried out immediately after FB and continued through the growing season. In a controlled environment (CE) trial, potted 'Cabernet Sauvignon'

vines were placed in CE rooms for three weeks during one of three stages: immediately prior to FB, immediately after FB and for three weeks prior to veraison. The controlled environment room conditions were set at 23/11°C day/night temperatures for the entire length of the experiment. Day length was 16 hours with an 8 hour night. Photosynthetic photon flux (PPF) was set at $600 \pm 15 \mu\text{molm}^{-2} \text{s}^{-1}$, which is considered to be close to optimum for photosynthesis on grapevines. Contrasting relative humidity (RH) conditions (40 and 80% RH) were included within the treatments.

Shade prior to FB tended to reduce BSN incidence in both seasons in which the shade cloth was applied (Figure A). Assessments carried out in the third season, where shade cloth was not applied, found no change in BSN incidence. Adjusting the data for days after 50% veraison and the maturity ratio made no difference to any of the conclusions drawn for all three seasons.

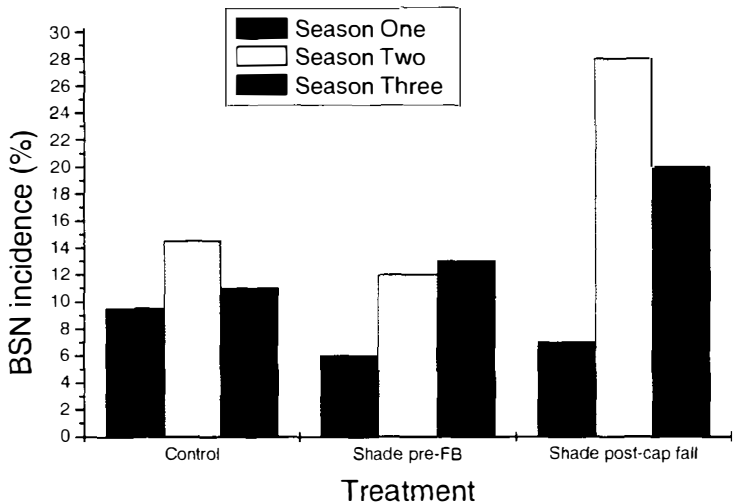


Figure A: BSN incidence (%) over three seasons of control vines and vines treated with 50% shade cloth applied for three weeks prior to FB and three weeks post FB. Shade treatments were only applied in Seasons One and Two. Values are adjusted to a common maturity ratio of 1.8 in order to compare across all three seasons.

Shade immediately after FB did not significantly affect BSN incidence in the first season, although there was some indication that it may increase the disorder. In the second season shade applied immediately after FB significantly increased the incidence

of BSN and in the third season assessments showed that shade applied after FB in the previous season significantly increased the incidence of BSN (Figure A). When the data were adjusted for days after 50% veraison and the maturity ratio similar conclusions could be drawn.

Various treatments that affected the vegetative growth of vines were also applied to ‘Cabernet Sauvignon’ vines during Seasons One and Two. These included root pruning, which was carried out during the winter months in Season One, heading back of the canes by 50% and the application of a reflective mulch, Extenday™, both of which were applied in Seasons One and Two. A second group of vines were root pruned in Season Three. Point quadrat analysis was carried out on these treatments, as well as the two shade treatments, during Seasons One and Two. Leaf layer number was determined to be a good measure of vine vigour and was also significantly correlated with the incidence of BSN (Figure B). Although point quadrat measures were carried out from FB to harvest, it was determined that the measurement approximately three weeks after FB represented the differences in vigour among treatments after FB the best. It was therefore this assessment which was used. The correlation demonstrated that treatments that reduced vine vigour after FB reduced the incidence of BSN.

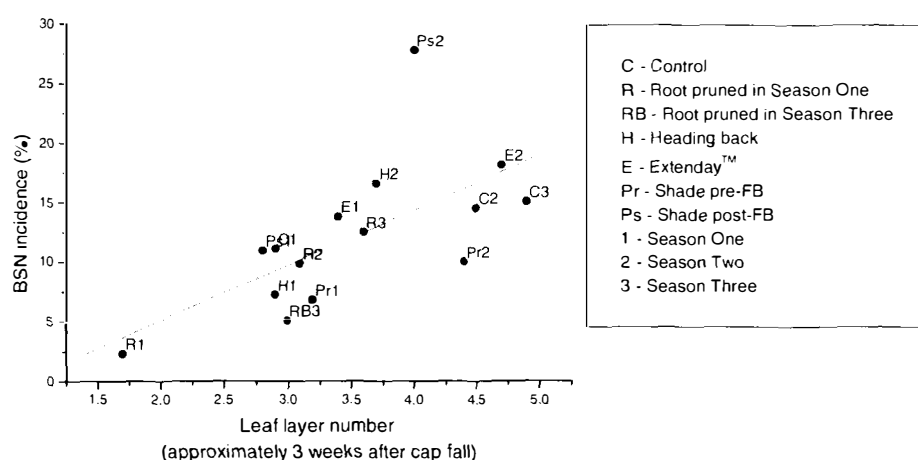


Figure B: Correlation between leaf layer number approximately three weeks after FB and BSN incidence (%) across all three seasons. $Y=4.6x - 4.21$, $R^2 = 0.65$, $p=0.0085$.

Application of GA₃ increased berry size, and consequently bunch weight, delayed maturity and tended to reduce the incidence of BSN (Figure C). Compared to control bunches, application of IAA and NPA tended to reduce BSN incidence in vines where laterals were removed, but not in vines where they were retained. However, BSN incidence in IAA and NPA treated bunches tended not to be different between vines with laterals removed or retained (Figure C). Therefore, any difference in BSN incidence that these plant growth regulator treated bunches had compared to control bunches, may have been due to an increase in BSN incidence of control bunches on vines with laterals removed. Further research is therefore required to determine the effect of NPA and IAA on BSN incidence and the mechanisms involved.

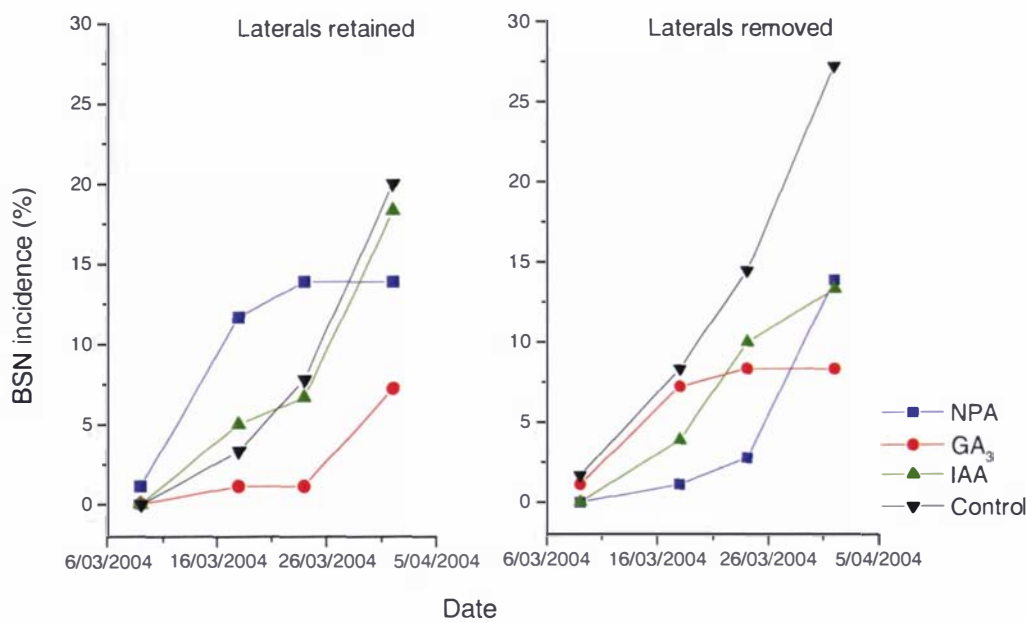


Figure C: BSN incidence from 100% veraison to harvest in Season Two for canopy manipulated vines of laterals retained (control) and laterals removed and plant growth regulator dipped bunches of NPA, GA₃, IAA and control.

In the controlled environment (CE) studies, vines that were placed in the CE rooms immediately prior to FB and prior to veraison did not demonstrate a difference in BSN incidence compared to control vines. However, vines that were placed in the CE rooms after FB had an approximate three fold increase in BSN incidence compared to all other vines (Table A). Relative humidity did not impact on the disorder.

Table A: Mean BSN incidence (%) for bunches from vines placed in the CE rooms at either one of three stages. Stage One – pre-FB, Stage Two – post-FB, Stage Three – pre-veraison. Means for vines not placed in the CE rooms also included (control).

Stage	14 March 2005	24 March 2005	30 March 2005
One	8.3	24.5 b	26.5 b
Two	38.8	69.4 a	76.0 a
Three	6.9	15.6 b	27.0 b
Control	4.5	14.3*	24.2*

Means within a column with a different letter are significantly different from each other at $P \leq 0.15$ (LSMeans, SAS).

*Control means not used in statistical analysis

Results from these studies clearly demonstrate that the period immediately following FB is the most critical time in the predisposition of bunches to BSN. Conditions during this time not only affected the incidence of BSN in bunches of the current season, but also in the following season. It is suggested that competitive dominance of vegetative growth over the developing inflorescence and bunch for assimilates and/or nutrients at this development stage may be the predisposing factor/s. Therefore management techniques that reduce vegetative growth during the time immediately after FB, such as root pruning during dormancy, can reduce the incidence of BSN.

Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	iv
Extended Thesis Summary	vi
Table of Contents	xi
List of Figures	xiv
List of Tables	xix
List of Plates	xxii
List of Appendices	xxiii
List of Abbreviations	xxiv
1 Literature Review	1
1.1 History	1
1.2 Taxonomy	1
1.3 Physiology	2
1.3.1 Inflorescence	2
1.3.2 Flower	4
1.3.3 Pollination	5
1.3.4 Berry growth and veraison	5
1.3.5 Ripening	7
1.3.5.1 Cation accumulation	9
1.3.5.2 Plant growth substances	10
1.4 BSN	10
1.4.1 Symptoms	12
1.4.2 Causes	17
1.4.2.1 Environmental	17
1.4.2.2 Mineral nutrition in vine and berry	19
1.4.2.3 Plant growth regulators	25
1.4.2.4 Cultivars and rootstocks	25
1.4.2.5 Canopy development	25
1.4.2.6 Xylem development	27
1.4.3 Application of substances	28
1.4.3.1 Potassium	28
1.4.3.2 Calcium	28
1.4.3.3 Magnesium	29
1.4.3.4 Nitrogen	30
1.4.3.5 Plant growth regulators	30
1.5 Summary	32
2 General Materials and Methods	35
2.1 Vine vigour	35
2.1.1 Point quadrat	35
2.1.2 Dormant canopy measurements	35
2.2 Veraison	36
2.3 Analyses of berry juice	36
2.3.1 Brix concentration	37
2.3.2 Titratable acidity and pH	37
2.3.3 Acid and cation determination	37
2.4 Harvest	37
2.5 Seed number and weight	38
2.6 Bunch stem necrosis (BSN)	39
2.7 Data handling and statistical analyses	39
2.7.1 Data handling	39
2.7.2 Experimental design	40
2.7.2.1 Field trial	40
2.7.2.2 Controlled environment room experiments	41
2.7.3 Statistical analyses	41
2.7.3.1 Test statistics	42

2.7.3.2	Treatment comparison testing	42
3	Vigour and Light Effects on BSN	44
3.1	Introduction	44
3.2	Materials and Methods	48
3.2.1	Plant material	48
3.2.2	Treatments	48
3.2.3	Statistical analyses	51
3.2.4	Assessments	51
3.2.4.1	Vine vigour	51
3.2.4.2	Veraison scores	52
3.2.4.3	Cation analyses	52
3.2.4.4	Gas exchange measurements	55
3.2.4.5	Harvest measurements	56
3.2.4.6	Seed number and weight	56
3.2.4.7	BSN incidence	56
3.3	Results	59
3.3.1	Vine vigour	59
3.3.1.1	Point quadrat	59
3.3.1.2	Dormant canopy measurements	73
3.3.2	Veraison	82
3.3.2.1	Season One	82
3.3.2.2	Season Two	85
3.3.2.3	Season Three	88
3.3.3	Petiole, rachis and berry cation analyses	91
3.3.3.1	Leaf petiole cation concentrations	91
3.3.3.2	Berry cation concentrations	94
3.3.3.3	Rachis cation concentration	99
3.3.4	Juice analyses	103
3.3.4.1	Brix	103
3.3.4.2	Titrateable Acidity (TA)	106
3.3.4.3	Maturity ratio – Brix/TA	108
3.3.4.4	Calcium concentration	109
3.3.4.5	Magnesium concentration	111
3.3.4.6	Potassium concentration	112
3.3.4.7	Ammonium concentration	114
3.3.4.8	pH	116
3.3.4.9	Malic acid	118
3.3.4.10	Tartaric acid	119
3.3.5	Gas exchange	121
3.3.5.1	Season One	121
3.3.5.2	Season Two	121
3.3.6	Harvest	124
3.3.6.1	Bunch weight	124
3.3.6.2	Bunch length	126
3.3.6.3	Bunch width	126
3.3.6.4	Peduncle diameter	127
3.3.6.5	Total number of berries per bunch	128
3.3.6.6	Mean healthy berry weight	128
3.3.7	Seed number and seed weight	129
3.3.8	Bunch stem necrosis	130
3.3.8.1	Season One	130
3.3.8.2	Season Two	134
3.3.8.3	Season Three	139
3.4	Discussion	147
3.4.1	Vegetative growth	147
3.4.1.1	Vegetative growth and BSN	155
3.4.2	Berry quality	161
3.4.3	Root growth	167
3.4.4	Nutrient analyses	169
3.4.5	Xylem development	172

3.4.6	Plant growth regulators	172
3.4.7	Summary	173
4	Source-Sink Relationships and BSN	175
4.1	Introduction	175
4.2	Materials and Methods	180
4.2.1	Plant material	180
4.2.2	Treatments	180
4.2.2.1	Canopy manipulation	180
4.2.2.2	Plant growth regulators	180
4.2.3	Statistical analyses	181
4.2.4	Measurements	181
4.2.4.1	Vigour	181
4.2.4.2	Veraison development	182
4.2.4.3	Berry juice analyses	182
4.2.4.4	Harvest measurements	182
4.2.4.5	Bunch stem necrosis	183
4.3	Results	184
4.3.1	Vigour	184
4.3.1.1	Point quadrat analyses	184
4.3.1.2	Dormant canopy measurements	184
4.3.2	Veraison development	185
4.3.3	Berry juice analyses	188
4.3.4	Harvest measurements	190
4.3.5	Seed number and seed weight	191
4.3.6	BSN incidence	191
4.4	Discussion	194
4.4.1	Plant growth regulators	199
5	Controlled Environment Studies	211
5.1	Introduction	211
5.2	Materials and Methods	214
5.2.1	Plant material	214
5.2.2	Experimental design	215
5.2.3	Leaf area and growing points	217
5.2.4	Photosynthesis	218
5.2.5	Sap flow measurements	218
5.2.6	BSN incidence	219
5.3	Results	220
5.3.1	Leaf area	220
5.3.2	Growing point number (GPN)	222
5.3.3	Photosynthesis	226
5.3.4	Sap flow	228
5.3.4.1	Peduncle sap flow	228
5.3.4.2	Cane sap flow	235
5.3.5	Bunch stem necrosis	240
5.4	Discussion	244
5.4.1	Canopy development	244
5.4.2	Photosynthesis measurements	245
5.4.3	Sap flow	247
5.4.4	BSN	255
6	General Discussion and Conclusions	261
6.1	Critical timing	261
6.2	Nutrient	264
6.3	Plant growth regulators	267
6.4	Future research	271
7	Appendices	275
8	References	291

List of Figures

- Figure A: BSN incidence (%) over three seasons of control vines and vines treated with 50% shade cloth applied for three weeks prior to FB and three weeks post-FB. Shade treatments were only applied in Seasons One and Two. Values are adjusted to a common maturity ratio of 1.8 in order to compare across all three seasons. vii
- Figure B: Correlation between leaf layer number approximately three weeks after FB and BSN incidence (%) across all three seasons. $Y=4.6x - 4.21$, $R^2 = 0.65$, $p=0.0085$. viii
- Figure C: BSN incidence from 100% veraison to harvest in Season Two for canopy manipulated vines of laterals retained (control) and laterals removed and plant growth regulator dipped bunches of NPA, GA₃, IAA and control. ix
- Figure 1: Stylised drawing of a grape inflorescence/bunch showing the parts: peduncle, rachis and pedicel. 4
- Figure 2: Central Diagram: Appearance of berries at 10-day intervals revealing the two successive sigmoidal growth curves of a grape berry, designated 'berry formation' and 'berry ripening'. Three generalised x-axes are shown – days after flowering, approximate juice °Brix values during ripening, and developmental growth stages using modified E-L system. The key growth stages and the approximate timing of the accumulation of major solutes are shown. At bottom: Scale drawings of anatomical features in the longitudinal sections of developing grape seeds at days 4, 14, 28, 42 and 98 days after flowering. Figure and caption from Dry and Coombe, (2004). 6
- Figure 3: Time line indicating physiological stages, dates when treatments were applied, and dates of measurements and assessments carried out on field grown 'Cabernet Sauvignon' vines during Seasons One (2002/2003), Two (2003/2004) and Three (2004/2005). Note that not all factors were measured in all seasons. 58
- Figure 4: Mean leaf layer number (LLN) of vines for main treatments for Seasons One and Two. 59
- Figure 5: Leaf layer number (LLN) assessments carried out in Seasons One, Two and Three. Control B and root pruned B are treatments that were applied in Season Three. All other treatments were applied in Season One. LLN values for each of the three years have been superimposed on a common date scale. F = approximate flowering date, V = approximate 50% veraison date. 62
- Figure 6: Mean percentage gaps (PG) within vine canopy area of main treatments for Seasons One and Two. F = 50% flowering, V = 50% veraison, H = harvest date. 64
- Figure 7: Percentage gaps (PG) for Seasons One, Two and Three. Control B and root pruned B are treatments that were applied in Season Three. All other treatments were applied in Season One. PG values for each of the three years have been superimposed on a common date scale. F = approximate flowering date, V = approximate 50% veraison date. 67
- Figure 8: Mean percent interior leaves (PIL) within vine canopy area for main treatments for Seasons One and Two. F = 50% flowering, V = 50% veraison, H = harvest date. 68
- Figure 9: Percent Interior Leaves (PIL) for Seasons One, Two and Three. Control B and root pruned B are treatments that were applied in Season Three. All other treatments were applied in Season One. PIL values for each of the three years have been superimposed on a common date scale. F = approximate flowering date, V = approximate 50% veraison date. 71
- Figure 10: Effective cane number (ECN) for Seasons One and Two. Statistical analyses carried out on log_e of ECN in Season Two. Season One LSD = 1.63, Season Two (log_e) LSD = 0.168. 74

Figure 11: Pruning Weights (PW) for Seasons One and Two. Season One LSD= 0.324, Season Two LSD = 0.509.	77
Figure 12: Mean Effective Cane Pruning Weights (ECW) for Seasons One and Two. Season One LSD= 0.231, Season Two LSD = 0.202.	79
Figure 13: Veraison development for Season One for treatments applied to Cabernet Sauvignon vines in the field.	83
Figure 14: Veraison development for Season Two for treatments applied to 'Cabernet Sauvignon' vines in the field.	85
Figure 15: Veraison development for Season Three for treatments applied to 'Cabernet Sauvignon' vines in the field.	89
Figure 16: Veraison development in Season Three for Season One and Season Three root pruned 'Cabernet Sauvignon' vines with their controls.	90
Figure 17: Mean petiole magnesium concentration (mg l^{-1}) for each treatment in Season One. LSD, for comparison among treatment means at post-veraison sampling time, was derived using SAS 8.2.	92
Figure 18: Mean petiole calcium concentration (mg l^{-1}) for each treatment in Season One. LSD, for comparison among treatment means at post-veraison sampling time, derived using SAS 8.2.	93
Figure 19: Mean petiole potassium concentration (mg l^{-1}) for each treatment in Season One. LSD, for comparison among treatment means at post-veraison sampling time, derived using SAS 8.2.	94
Figure 20: Mean berry magnesium concentration (mg l^{-1}) from dried samples taken pre-veraison in Season One. LSD, for comparison among treatment means, was derived using SAS 8.2.	95
Figure 21: Mean berry calcium concentration (mg l^{-1}) from dried samples taken pre-veraison in Season One. LSD, for comparison among treatment means, derived using SAS 8.2.	97
Figure 22: Mean berry potassium concentration (mg l^{-1}) from dried samples taken pre-veraison in Season One. LSD, for comparison among treatment means, derived using SAS 8.2.	98
Figure 23: Mean rachis magnesium concentration (mg l^{-1}) from dried samples taken pre-veraison in Season One. LSD, for comparison among treatment, means derived using SAS 8.2.	99
Figure 24: Mean rachis calcium concentration (mg l^{-1}) from dried samples taken pre-veraison in Season One. LSD, for comparison among treatment means, derived using SAS 8.2.	101
Figure 25: Mean rachis potassium concentration (mg l^{-1}) from dried samples taken pre-veraison Season One. LSD, for comparison among treatment means, derived using SAS 8.2.	102
Figure 26: Mean Brix concentrations of treatments for six weeks following 100% veraison to harvest in Season One.	104
Figure 27: Mean Brix concentrations of treatments from one to five weeks after 100% veraison in Season Two.	105
Figure 28: Mean titratable acidity (g l^{-1}) values of treatments for six weeks following 100% veraison to harvest in Season One.	106
Figure 29: Mean titratable acidity (g l^{-1}) values of treatments from one to five weeks after 100% veraison in Season Two.	107
Figure 30: Mean maturity ratio of treatments for six weeks following 100% veraison to harvest in Season One.	108

Figure 31: Mean maturity ratio of treatments from one to five weeks after 100% veraison in Season Two.	109
Figure 32: Mean calcium concentration (mg l^{-1}) of treatments for six weeks following 100% veraison to harvest in Season One.	110
Figure 33: Mean calcium concentration (mg l^{-1}) of treatments from one to five weeks after 100% veraison in Season Two.	110
Figure 34: Magnesium concentration (mg l^{-1}) of treatments from 100% veraison to six weeks after in Season One.	111
Figure 35: Mean magnesium concentration (mg l^{-1}) of treatments from one to five weeks after 100% veraison in Season Two.	112
Figure 36: Potassium concentration (mg l^{-1}) of treatments for six weeks following 100% veraison to harvest in Season One.	113
Figure 37: Mean potassium concentration (mg l^{-1}) of treatments from one to five weeks after 100% veraison in Season Two.	114
Figure 38: Ammonium concentration (mg l^{-1}) of treatments for the six weeks from 100% veraison to harvest in Season One.	115
Figure 39: Mean ammonium concentration (mg l^{-1}) of treatments from one to five weeks after 100% veraison in Season Two.	116
Figure 40: pH of treatments for the six weeks from 100% veraison to harvest in Season One.	117
Figure 41: Mean pH of treatments one to five weeks after 100% veraison in Season Two.	117
Figure 42: Malic acid concentration (mg l^{-1}) of treatments from 100% veraison to six weeks after in Season One.	118
Figure 43: Mean malic acid concentration (mg l^{-1}) of treatments one to five weeks after 100% veraison in Season Two.	119
Figure 44: Tartaric acid concentration (mg l^{-1}) of treatments from 100% veraison to six weeks after in Season One.	120
Figure 45: Mean tartaric acid concentration (mg l^{-1}) for treatments one to five weeks after 100% veraison in Season Two.	121
Figure 46: Raw, veraison adjusted and standard maturity adjusted BSN incidence (%) of all treatments in Season One at the second assessment.	133
Figure 47: BSN incidence (%) in Season Two from 100% veraison to harvest.	135
Figure 48: Raw, veraison adjusted and standard maturity adjusted BSN incidence (%) of all treatments in Season Two at harvest.	138
Figure 49: Progression of BSN incidence of all treatments in Season Three from 100% veraison to harvest.	140
Figure 50: Raw, veraison adjusted and standard maturity adjusted BSN incidence (%) of all treatments in Season Three one week prior to commercial harvest. * adjustment was unable to be made due to juice analyses not being carried out on these treatments.	144
Figure 51: BSN incidence (%) from 100% veraison to one week before commercial harvest in Season Three. LSD bars are at 5% significance level.	145

Figure 52: BSN incidence (%) of the main treatments adjusted to a common maturity ratio of 1.8 in three seasons. Note: root pruning was only carried out in Season One. All other treatments were applied only in Seasons One and Two.	146
Figure 53: Correlation between leaf layer number approximately three weeks after FB and BSN incidence (%) across all three seasons. $Y=4.6x - 4.21$, $R^2 = 0.65$, $p=0.0085$.	156
Figure 54: Percentage of assimilated C^{14} distributed to the bunch from particular areas of the cane at different stages in berry development. Values from Hunter and Visser (1988a). Bunch leaves were not treated with C^{14} .	177
Figure 55: Veraison development for vines with and without laterals removed, and the application of the growth regulators GA_3 , NPA or IAA to bunches.	186
Figure 56: BSN incidence from 100% veraison to harvest in Season Two for canopy manipulated vines of laterals retained (control) and laterals removed and plant growth regulator dipped bunches of NPA, GA_3 , IAA and control.	192
Figure 57: Stylised diagram of training system used for potted vines.	215
Figure 58: Diagram of how conditions changed and related to each other in the CE rooms using the low humidity room as an example. Day/night VPD conditions for the high humidity room were 0.57/0.27.	216
Figure 59: Time line indicating treatment stages, physiological stages, and dates of measurement and assessments carried out on potted vines during the 2004/05 season.	217
Figure 60: Mean leaf area for canes with laterals retained or removed, and placed in the CE rooms pre-flowering (Stage One), post-flowering (Stage Two) and pre-veraison (Stage Three).	222
Figure 61: Mean number of growing points per cane for canes with laterals retained or removed, and placed in the CE rooms pre-flowering (Stage One), post-flowering (Stage Two) and pre-veraison (Stage Three).	226
Figure 62: Twenty-four hour cycle of sap flow through the peduncle of bunches from low (40%) and high (80%) RH treatments with similar leaf areas, and the temperature change in the CE rooms during the early stages of Stage Two (immediately post-flowering). VPD changes follow an identical pattern to that of temperature change. Green arrow indicates lights on, black arrow indicates lights off.	228
Figure 63: Twenty-four hour cycle of sap flow through the peduncle of bunches from low (40%) and high (80%) RH treatments with similar leaf areas and with laterals retained, and the temperature change in the CE rooms during the late stages of Stage Two (approx. three weeks post-flowering). VPD changes follow an identical pattern to that of temperature change. Green arrow indicates lights on, black arrow indicates lights off.	230
Figure 64: Twenty-four hour cycle of sap flow through the peduncle of bunches from low (40%) and high (80%) RH treatments and with laterals removed, and the temperature change in the CE rooms during the late stages of Stage Two (approx. three weeks post-flowering). VPD changes follow an identical pattern to that of temperature change. Green arrow indicates lights on, black arrow indicates lights off.	231
Figure 65: Twenty-four hour cycle of sap flow through the peduncle of bunches from low (40%) and high (80%) RH treatments with similar leaf areas and laterals retained, and the temperature change in the CE rooms during Stage Three (approx. four weeks post-flowering to one week pre-veraison). VPD changes follow an identical pattern to that of temperature change. Green arrow indicates lights on, black arrow indicates lights off.	232
Figure 66: Twenty-four hour cycle of sap flow through the peduncle on vines in the low RH (40%) treatment for canes with laterals and canes with laterals removed, and the temperature	

change in the CE rooms during the later stages of Stage Two (approx. three weeks post-flowering). VPD changes follow an identical pattern to that of temperature change. Leaf area of cane with laterals was 1200 cm ² , leaf area of cane without laterals was 1500 cm ² . Green arrow indicates lights on, black arrow indicates lights off.	233
Figure 67: Twenty-four hour cycle of sap flow through the peduncle on vines in the high RH (80%) treatments for canes with laterals and canes with laterals removed, and the temperature change in the CE rooms during the later stages of Stage Two (approx. three weeks post-flowering). VPD changes follow an identical pattern to that of temperature change. Leaf area of cane with laterals was 1200 cm ² , leaf area of cane without laterals was 1700 cm ² . Green arrow indicates lights on, black arrow indicates lights off.	234
Figure 68: Forty-eight hour cycle of sap flow through the peduncle of a bunch that was girdled at 11:00 (red arrow) and the temperature change in the CE rooms during Stage Three (approx. four weeks post-flowering to one week pre-veraison). VPD changes follow an identical pattern to that of temperature change. Green arrow indicates lights on, black arrow indicates lights off	235
Figure 69: Twenty-four hour cycle of sap flow through canes with laterals from low (40%) and high (80%) RH treatments with similar leaf areas and the temperature change in the CE rooms during Stage Two (approx. three weeks post-flowering). VPD changes follow an identical pattern to that of temperature change. Green arrow indicates lights on, black arrow indicates lights off.	236
Figure 70: Twenty-four hour cycle of leaf area adjusted sap flow through canes with laterals removed from low (40%) and high (80%) RH treatments and the temperature change in the CE rooms during Stage Two (approx three weeks post-flowering). VPD changes follow an identical pattern to that of temperature change. Green arrow indicates lights on, black arrow indicates lights off.	237
Figure 71: Twenty-four hour cycle of sap flow through canes from low (40%) and high (80%) RH treatments with similar leaf areas and the temperature change in the CE rooms during Stage Three (approx. four weeks post-flowering to one week pre-veraison). VPD changes follow an identical pattern to that of temperature change. Green arrow indicates lights on, black arrow indicates lights off.	238
Figure 72: An example of a twenty-four hour cycle of sap flow through canes with laterals intact and canes with laterals removed, and the temperature change in the CE rooms. VPD changes follow an identical pattern to that of temperature change. Green arrow indicates lights on, black arrow indicates lights off.	239
Figure 73: Twenty-four hour cycle of water use of a vine measured by container weight change, sap flow through a cane on that vine, soil temperature and the temperature change in the CE rooms. VPD changes follow an identical pattern to that of temperature change. Green arrow indicates lights on, black arrow indicates lights off.	240
Figure 74: Relative humidity and lateral manipulation interaction effect on BSN incidence at the first, second and third assessments for vines placed in CE rooms during Stage Two (post-flowering).	243
Figure 75: Maximum and minimum daily temperature (°C), rain fall and irrigation (mm) applied in A) Season One and B) Season Two at Moteo, Taradale, New Zealand. No irrigation was applied in Season Two. F – approximate time of flowering, V – approximate time of veraison.	278
Figure 76: Correlation between leaf layer number two months after FB and BSN incidence (%) across all three seasons. $Y=3.2x + 0.64$, $R^2 = 0.75$, $p<0.0001$.	279
Figure 77: Correlation between percentage gaps approximately three weeks after FB and BSN incidence (%) across all three seasons. $Y=-0.46x + 15.5$, $R^2 = -0.59$, $p=0.1856$.	280
Figure 78: Relationship to determine leaf area from leaf diameter, $y = 0.6339x^2 + 2.177x - 10.644$.	283

List of Tables

Table A: Mean BSN incidence (%) for bunches from vines placed in the CE rooms at either one of three stages. Stage One – pre-flowering, Stage Two – post-flowering, Stage Three – pre-veraison. Means for vines not placed in the CE rooms also included (control).	x
Table 1: Cation concentration of standards used in cation analyses using AA.	54
Table 2: Mean leaf layer number (LLN) within measured canopies for Seasons One and Two.	60
Table 3: Mean leaf layer number (LLN) of root pruned and control vines for Seasons One, Two and Three. The LLN at the first measurement in Season Two was estimated in order to provide comparable values.	63
Table 4: Mean percentage gaps (PG) within measured canopies for Seasons One and Two.	65
Table 5: Mean percentage gaps (PG) of root pruned and control vines for Seasons One, Two and Three. The first measurement in Season Two was estimated in order to provide comparable values.	68
Table 6: Percent interior leaves within measured canopies for Seasons One and Two.	70
Table 7: Percent interior leaves (PIL) of root pruned and control vines for Seasons One, Two and Three. The first measurement in Season Two was estimated in order to provide comparable values.	72
Table 8: Mean effective cane number (ECN), pruning weights (PW) and effective cane weight (ECW) for treatments in Season One (2002/2003) and Season Two (2003/2004).	75
Table 9: Mean growing point number (GPN), growing point weight (GPW), and mean growing points per cane (GP/C) for Season Two (2003/2004).	81
Table 10: Mean date of 50% veraison development rate of field treatments in Season One. Values obtained from SAS fitted sigmoid curves.	84
Table 11: Mean date of 50% veraison and mean veraison development rate of all field treatments in Season Two. Values obtained from SAS fitted sigmoid curves.	86
Table 12: Mean date of 50% veraison and mean veraison development rate of field treatments in Season Three. Values obtained from SAS fitted sigmoid curves.	89
Table 13: Mean date of 50% veraison and mean veraison development rate of root pruning treatments and their controls in Season Three. Values obtained from SAS fitted sigmoid curves.	91
Table 14: Means of post-flowering and pre-veraison berry magnesium concentrations (mg l^{-1}) in Season Three.	96
Table 15: Means of post-flowering and pre-veraison calcium concentrations (mg l^{-1}) in berries in Season Three.	97
Table 16: Means of post-flowering and pre-veraison berry potassium concentrations (mg l^{-1}) in Season Three	99
Table 17: Means of post-flowering and pre-veraison magnesium concentrations (mg l^{-1}) in the rachis in Season Three.	100
Table 18: Means of post-flowering and pre-veraison calcium concentrations in the rachis in Season Three.	102

Table 19: Means of post-flowering and pre-veraison potassium concentrations (mg l ⁻¹) in the rachis in Season Three.	103
Table 20: Season Three Brix, TA, maturity ratio, pH, and malic and tartaric acid concentrations of the six main treatments in Seasons One and Two. Berries sampled on 6 April, 2005, prior to commercial harvest.	105
Table 21: Means of gas exchange measurements carried out on field grown vines in Season Two. Measurement times are 1) full bloom, 2) two weeks post-FB, 3) pre-veraison. Means shown are least squares means due to unbalanced data sets.	123
Table 22: Harvest measurements carried out on field grown vines in Seasons One and Two.	125
Table 23: Mean seed number per berry and mean seed weight for 'Cabernet Sauvignon' vines in Season Two (2003/2004).	130
Table 24: Unadjusted BSN scores (%) for the two assessments in Season One.	132
Table 25: BSN incidence (%) for all treatments in Season Two.	136
Table 26: BSN incidence for Season Three from 100% veraison to one week before commercial harvest.	141
Table 27: BSN incidence (%) from vines root pruned in Season Three and Season Three control vines assessed from 100% veraison to one week before commercial harvest.	144
Table 28: Mean leaf layer number, percent interior leaves and percentage gaps of control and vines where laterals had been removed.	184
Table 29: Mean total cane number, total vine pruning weight, total growing point number, cane weight, growing point weight and growing point number per cane for control, and vines with laterals removed in Season Two.	185
Table 30: Mean time of 50% veraison and mean veraison development rate for bunches treated with plant growth regulators and vines that have retained their laterals or vines that have had their laterals removed.	187
Table 31: Harvest juice quality measurements carried out on juice from vines with canopy manipulation and with the application of plant growth regulators to bunches.	189
Table 32: Harvest measurements on bunches from canopy manipulated vines and from bunches treated with plant growth regulators.	190
Table 33: Mean seed number per berry and mean seed weight for 'Cabernet Sauvignon' vines in Season Two (2003/2004) for vines with canopy manipulation and plant growth regulator treatments applied to bunches.	191
Table 34: Mean leaf area per cane for canes with laterals retained or removed, and placed in the CE rooms at the three different stages 1) pre-flowering, 2) post-flowering and 3) pre-veraison. Assessments were carried out on 5 November (early Stage One), 5 December (early Stage Two) and 5 January (early Stage Three).	221
Table 35: Mean growing point number per cane for canes with laterals retained or removed, and placed in the CE rooms at the three different stages 1) pre-flowering, 2) post-flowering and 3) pre-veraison. Assessments were carried out on 5 November (early Stage One), 5 December (early Stage Two) and 5 January (early Stage Three).	225
Table 36: Means of gas exchange measurements carried out on potted vines in Season Three for vines placed in CE rooms at either high (80%) or low (40%) RH. Assessment times are during 1)	

Stage Two – post-flowering and 2) Stage Three – pre veraison. Values are means of vines with and without laterals.	227
Table 37: Means of gas exchange measurements carried out on potted vines in Season Three for canes with or without laterals removed. Assessment times are during 1) Stage Two – post-flowering, 2) Stage Three – pre veraison. Values are means for vines in high and low RH treatments.	227
Table 38: Mean BSN incidence (%) for bunches placed in the high (80%) and low (40%) RH treatments. Values are means of vines with laterals either retained or removed.	241
Table 39: Mean BSN incidence (%) for bunches from canes with either laterals retained or removed. Values are means for vines in high and low RH treatments.	241
Table 40: Overall mean BSN incidence (%) for bunches in high (80%) and low (40%) RH CE rooms and from canes with either laterals retained or with laterals removed.	241
Table 41: Mean BSN incidence (%) for bunches from vines placed in the CE rooms at any one of three stages. Stage One – pre flowering, Stage Two – post-flowering, Stage Three – pre-veraison. Means for vines not placed in the CE rooms also included (control).	242
Table 42: Approximate BSN incidence overall, only for Stage Two and only for vines assessed with sap flow sensors, night peduncle sap flow rate, day peduncle sap flow rate and difference between night and day peduncle sap flow rates, for vines in the CE conditions during Stage Two.	259

List of Plates

- Plate 1: Rachis of BSN – affected (left) and healthy (right) bunches. Arrows indicate necrotised areas. 13
- Plate 2: Left: healthy stomata opening in the epidermis. Right: necrotised (dead) stomata opening of a rachis, where the primary symptoms of BSN can develop (Theiler, 1975b). 13
- Plate 3: A healthy bunch (left) and BSN affected bunch (right). Necrosis of rachis and shrivelling of berries can be seen in the lower three-quarters of the affected bunch. 14
- Plate 4: BSN affected bunch. The distal end is exhibiting BSN symptoms with rachis necrosis and shrivelled berries. The demarcation between healthy and necrotised tissue is evident. 15
- Plate 5: Necrosis and shrivelled berries on a rachis branch in the middle of a bunch. As the necrosis has not girdled the primary axis of the rachis, berries distal to the branch are not exhibiting visual symptoms of BSN. 15

List of Appendices

Appendix 1: Treatment layout for field trial undertaken in Seasons 2002/2003 and 2003/2004. A) Vigour and light effects trial, B) Plant growth regulator and lateral removal trial.	275
Appendix 2: Spray Schedule	277
Appendix 3: Weather data for Seasons One and Two.	278
Appendix 4: Correlations between point quadrat assessments and BSN.	279
Appendix 5: Harvest juice quality measurements carried out on juice from vines with canopy manipulation and plant growth regulator applications to the bunches.	281
Appendix 6: Modified Hoagland's Nutrient Solution (1/2 strength)	282
Appendix 7: Inflorescence distribution	283
Appendix 8: Leaf diameter/leaf area relationship	283
Appendix 9: Gauge specifications	284
Appendix 10: Stem heat balance theory: Extracted directly from van Bavel (2000) therefore references to sections and figure numbering applies to the Flow32 TM manual and not this thesis.	285
Appendix 11: Means of gas exchange measurements carried out on potted vines in Season Three in the high and low RH CE rooms and for canes with or without laterals removed. Assessment times are 1) Stage Two – post-flowering, and 2) Stage Three – pre veraison.	287
Appendix 12: Mean values for all treatment combinations of leaf area, increase in leaf area between assessments two and three and BSN incidence for the last assessment.	288
Appendix 13: Mean values for all treatment combinations of lateral number, increase in lateral number between assessments two and three and BSN incidence for the last assessment.	289
Appendix 14: Bunch measurements for bunches with sensors during Stage Two and Three. Assessments carried out on 17/12/04 and 20/01/05, respectively	290

List of Abbreviations

ABA	abscisic acid
AD	apical dominance
A_{\max}	light saturated photosynthetic rate
ANOVA	analysis of variance
BSN	bunch stem necrosis
BTOA	benzothiazole-2-oxyacetic acid
Ca	calcium
CaCl_2	calcium chloride
$\text{Ca}(\text{NO}_3)_2$	calcium nitrate
CE	controlled environment
CN	cane number
CsCl	cesium chloride
dT	temperature increase of the sap
EBSN	early bunch stem necrosis
ECN	effective cane number
ECW	effective cane weight
FB	full bloom
GAs	gibberellic acids
GA_n	gibberellic acid _n – n denotes the acid number
Gs	stomatal conductance
GPN	growing point number
GP/C	growing points per cane
GPW	growing point weight
HCl	hydrochloric acid
HNO_3	nitric acid
IAA	β -indole-3-acetic acid
IBA	3-indolebutyric acid
IN	inflorescence necrosis
K	potassium
Ksh	thermal conductance constant for a particular gauge
LCP	light compensation point
LLN	leaf layer number
LSD	Fisher's protected least significant difference
LSE	light saturation estimate
LSMeans	Least significant means
Mg	magnesium
MgCl_2	magnesium chloride
$\text{Mg}(\text{NO}_3)_2$	magnesium nitrate

MgSO ₄	magnesium sulphate
NAA	1-naphthalene acetic acid
NPA	naphthyl-phthalamic acid
PD	primigenic dominance
PIL	percent interior leaves
PG	percentage gaps
Pn	net photosynthetic rate
PPF	photosynthetic photon flux
PW	pruning weight
QE	quantum efficiency
Qf	heat convection carried by sap
RBD	random block design
RH	relative humidity
SAS	SAS system for statistical analysis
SrCl ₂	strontium chloride
SrCs	strontium and cesium
Sr(NO ₃) ₂	strontium nitrate
TA	titratable acidity
TIBA	2,3,5-triiodobenzoic acid
Tr	transpiration rate
VPD	vapour pressure deficit