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## Membrane technology gets nod from AWRI

**P**ROCORK has launched a closure it claims will eliminate taint while allowing winemakers the benefits of using traditional cork.

The technology revolves around membranes applied to each end of the stopper designed to significantly reduce flavour modification - reducing the amount of chemicals entering the wine.

"This regulates the passage of oxygen through the cork and retains moisture in it to prevent breakage," said former CSIRO scientist and ProCork founder Gregor Christie when he launched the new product at the Australian Wine Industry Technical Exhibition in Melbourne.

The closure has also been given a gong from The Australian Wine Research Institute in a commercial closure trial 18-month progress report.

"Our own internal testing over the past couple of years has consistently shown ProCork to be the best performing closure under all circumstances and these results reinforce that testing," Dr Christie said.

The AWRI trial, which started in September, 2002, compares the performance of natural reference 2 and 3 corks, screwcaps and ProCork's membrane cork.

Dr Christie said the new technology would enable natural cork to be used by winemakers with a high certainty the membrane would reduce off-character imparted by the cork and allow true flavour development.

The AWRI results at 18 months showed free SO<sub>2</sub> levels dropped by almost 50 per cent for the reference 2 and 3 closures, but only 33pc for the ProCork closures.

The level of free sulphur dioxide in wine is considered to be critical to the stability of the wine and provides protection against oxidation and therefore accelerated development.

Using chemical analysis, it was determined the ProCork samples contained a mean of 26mg/L of free SO<sub>2</sub>, compared with 23mg/L, 19mg/L and 21mg/L for the screw cap, reference 2 and 3 cork respectively.

ProCork's seal of approval coincides with the signing of a distribution agreement between the company and wine and packaging group Vintners Pty Ltd (a subsidiary of Vinpac International).

As part of the deal, a ProCork machine has been installed at the company's South Australian factory as the final stage of the cork production process. It can apply seals at a rate of more than 8000 corks per hour.

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# ProCork membranes ready to assault US market

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Vintners imports sales and operations manager Luke South said the technology was a step in the march towards making wines free from closure-derived faults.

"We have no doubt ProCork will be perceived as an excellent alternative closure in what is a very competitive market," he said.

Dr Christie said in the past four years, the Australian cork market had grown from 600 million to more than 800m, and represented only a small part of the global market - estimated at

about 35 billion corks.

He said the company would target a similar distribution deal in the United States to the Vinpac arrangement.

"ProCork is a closure with the potential to help winemakers around the world provide customers with a better product, and taking it there is our next challenge," Dr Christie said.

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