

Frenchmen warn of soil danger

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A pair of French viticulturalists who manage their Burgundy vineyard according to the movements of the sun, moon, planets and stars are urging New Zealand to put aside conventional fertilisers and pesticides and give organics a go.

Jean-Philippe and Jean-Guillaume Bret, who swapped conventional viticulture on the 9ha family vineyard for organic and Austrian philosopher Rudolf Steiner's biodynamic methods nine years ago, were speaking at this weekend's Organics Aotearoa New Zealand Conference at Waikato University in Hamilton.

Jean-Phillipe said he and his brother had come to New Zealand to warn viticulturalists, horticulturalists and farmers not to make the same mistakes their European counterparts had made with the over-application of pesticides and fertilisers.

"In just 40 or 50 years we have damaged a lot of water and soil in Europe. A lot of soil in the world is dead because of the intensity. If they tried to reduce pesticides and fertilisers in a small field they would see what difference it makes."

Jean-Phillipe was saddened to hear of an Environment Waikato report that found 75 per cent of the Waikato's waterways were not fit for swimming and blamed a cen-



Natural way:
Biodynamic grape growers Jean-Guillaume Bret (left) and his brother Jean-Philippe Bret recommend organic growing.

tury of intensive farming.

"We love fishing, and intend to do some in New Zealand after the conference. Chemicals used in agriculture and viticulture have polluted a lot of streams in Europe."

Prof Henrik Moller, director of the Centre for Study of Agriculture, Food and Environment

at Otago University who spoke at the conference yesterday, cited a study which found organic farms generally produced three-quarters as much as their conventional counterparts but had better soil capable of retaining water as a result.

Since going organic the Brets' La Soufrandiere vine-

yard has attracted premiums of up to 20 per cent on its 6ha of white wine and 3ha of red.

Biodynamic methods, initiated by Steiner in 1924, include managing farm systems based on the movements of the sun, moon, planets and stars and crop rotation, recycling through composts and liquid

manures, and increasing plant and animal biodiversity.

Jean-Phillipe said biodynamics, which relied on the lunar calendar, also required common sense. If the calendar suggested pruning, yet conventional wisdom deemed it too cold, they would hold off, he said.