

Careers in Water Richard Chabrel

From the block to the bike to the mines and back again.

"I grew up on my parent's block at Barmera where we grew wine grapes and, for a time, carnations. Growing up on the block was paradise for a boy like me – fishing in the river, climbing trees and playing with the neighbours' kids and my two older brothers.

"I started working on the block when I was 12 or so, and have helped out with vintage (when the grapes are picked) for almost 20 years now. Until 2015, my Dad had a vintage contracting business so it was always all hands on deck. As a teenager I also did jobs for other blockies like training young vines and cutting apricots.

When I was 12, I went to boarding school in Adelaide for my high school years. After I graduated from year 12 I worked at Bunnings in Adelaide before heading to Perth to work as a paver's labourer and a bike courier. When I came back to South Australia, I went to work for a broad acre farmer in Mintaro and was involved with seeding and harvesting crops as well as establishing a vineyard.

"From Mintaro I moved to Whyalla to work in the mines, operating machinery like dump trucks and dozers. I've also worked at mines at Roxby Downs, Mindarie and Ceduna.



Career pathway fast facts

Position: Grape grower and truck driver

Schooling: Completed year 12 at St Peters College, Adelaide.

Pathway: Gained experience in farming and mining before buying his own block.

Future plans: Buy more land and expand truck fleet.



NRM Education

Supporting environmental sustainability in schools.

"Working in the mines gave me the money I needed to put a deposit down on the block I have now, and I've been able to buy some more land since then. I now have about 50 acres of wine grapes at Barmera, where I live with my partner and son.

"The jobs I do on the block vary depending on the seasons, so there's a bit of variety. I could be pruning, spraying or mowing in the tractor, fixing irrigation leaks or servicing machinery. The work is hands-on and I love the challenges of problem solving and fixing technical issues.

"Part of what keeps me interested in viticulture is new technologies - I can control irrigation from my smart phone and I love that these new systems are making life easier for running a vineyard. We're also invoicing from a tablet app, managing our farm records using cloud-based software and looking at long range climate and weather data which helps with planning farm activities and irrigation. There's definitely more to running a block than just sitting on a tractor these days.

"As well as growing grapes I also have a couple of trucks and I cart grapes, carrots and grain, and my brother and I are still doing a bit of harvesting and trucking grapes for local blockies.

"The Riverland is my home, and I love the hands-on physical work of farming and the independence of being self-employed. My dad and grandfather were grape growers, so I learnt a lot growing up - I guess that's why I've ended up being a blocky too".



Checking out a winery on the Fleurieu Peninsula.



Farm dogs: Tammy and Lilly.



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