



CLARE VALLEY GOURMET FESTIVAL

Clare Valley Wine & Grape Association

Post-Event Report

15 – 18 May 2026

1. Executive Summary

The 2026 Clare Valley Gourmet Festival ran from 15–18 May across 28 participating member venues delivering more than 45 events. This returned to a 4-day long weekend format, introduced in direct response to feedback from attendees and members following 2025.

The event delivered a strong overall result. Attendance came in at 6,780, close to the 7,000 target, with 86% of visitors coming from outside the Clare Valley region. Overnight visitors made up the majority of attendance. A detailed economic impact report will be available later.

Attendee satisfaction was high. 88.75% of survey respondents rated their experience as satisfied or very satisfied, with atmosphere and entertainment scoring the highest of any measure (4.71 out of 5). The Net Promoter Score averaged 9.22 out of 10, a strong endorsement from people who attended. The 4-day format was well received, particularly among returning visitors who had found the previous 10-day format confusing and drawn out. A recurring theme in open-ended feedback was inconsistency in the experience across participating venues, where some delivered exceptional hospitality, food quality and atmosphere, others fell short of attendee expectations. This is an area of focus for 2027.

The marketing campaign performed strongly across every channel. Social media reach grew significantly year on year, the Meta advertising campaign reached over 373,000 people including 108,000 interstate, and the festival website recorded 35,144 sessions in May, up 17% on the same month in 2025. The CVWGA email database grew by a net 689 subscribers between January and May 2026, a meaningful turnaround from a net reduction of 38 subscribers in the second half of 2025. The event returned a small profit, supported by efficiencies gained through increased in-house capability.

Two transport products performed at opposite ends of expectations. The Hop On/Off Shuttle exceeded its ticket sales target of 300, selling 406 tickets. The Gourmet Bus Trail sold 168 tickets with 70 VIP add-ons against a target of 250. Now in its second year and operating with a changed format, the trail is still a learning process and it is worth noting that ticket sales more than covered costs. Continued refinement of the product structure and member experience will be a focus heading into 2027.

This report outlines performance against KPIs, findings from both the attendee and member surveys, a full marketing review, and recommendations on pages 12 and 13 to carry into 2027 planning.

2. Event Overview

Format

Following strong feedback from both attendees and members after the 2025 event, the festival moved from a 10-day format to a focused 4-day long weekend. The 2026 event ran from Friday 15 May to Monday 18 May, with each day carrying a distinct theme to guide both member programming and attendee planning.

- Friday 15 May — The Launch: exclusive dinners, winemaker experiences and welcome events.
- Saturday 16 May — Festival Favourites: the biggest day of the festival, featuring the Gourmet Bus Trails, individual winery events, food, music and the Hop On/Off Shuttle service, followed by after-party live music events in the evening.
- Sunday 17 May — The Recovery Party: a more relaxed day featuring the Gourmet Bus Trails, family-friendly events and regional markets.
- Monday 18 May — Meet the Maker Monday: long lunches, winemaker experiences and farewell celebrations.

What Was New in 2026

The redesigned Gourmet Bus Trail ran on both Saturday and Sunday, offering guests a curated experience across three wineries per route including a Gourmet tumbler, tote bag, queue-jumper access and a winery purchase offer. A VIP add-on was available on each bus, limited to 10 guests, providing a 20–30 minute exclusive winery experience and direct interaction with the winemaker.

Trail scheduling was built around member-nominated arrival times, giving venues control over when guests arrived and how that fitted with their broader event program. Briefings and operational checklists were distributed regularly to member contacts via email and were also available through the Members Portal.

Both a printed program and online program were produced, continuing the return of printed collateral that was well received in 2025.

Linger Longer Campaign

Running alongside the festival but separate from it, the Linger Longer campaign encouraged visitors to extend their stay in the region beyond the long weekend. Members who opted in promoted their post-festival events under the Linger Longer banner through CVWGA social media channels, the consumer newsletter, and a dedicated Linger Longer page on clarevalleygourmet.com.au. Members who loaded their events into ATDW had those listings automatically feed through to the dedicated page, making it straightforward to participate without additional administrative effort.

Participation

28 member venues participated in the 2026 festival, delivering more than 45 events across the four days. The Gourmet Bus Trail operated across multiple routes on both Saturday and Sunday, with participating venues confirmed and briefed ahead of the December 2025 deadline.

Official event registration gave participating members a listing both on the festival website and in the printed Gourmet program. Members provided all event details and copy, and had final approval of their listing before it went to print.

3. Attendance & Visitor Profile

Attendance

Total attendance for the 2026 Clare Valley Gourmet Festival was 6,780 — 3% below the 7,000 target but a strong result for the first year of the redesigned format.

Visitor Origin

Origin	% of Attendees / Approx. Visitors
Clare Valley (local)	14% — 949 visitors
Adelaide (city & suburbs)	50% — 3,390 visitors
Elsewhere in SA	21% — 1,424 visitors
Interstate & International	15% — 1,017 visitors

Intrastate visitors — Adelaide plus regional SA — accounted for 71% of attendance, comfortably exceeding the SATC KPI of 60%. Interstate and international visitors came in at 15%, just below the 16% target.

Overnight Visitors

77% of survey respondents were overnight visitors. Applying that figure across total attendance gives an estimated 5,880 overnight visitors to the region across the festival period.

Average length of stay: 2.1 nights.

Visitor Spend

Spend Category	Average Per Person	Estimated Total
Accommodation	\$250	\$3,087,000
Food, drink & other	\$238	\$1,613,640
Combined	\$488	~\$4.7 million

Based on survey responses the festival generated an estimated \$4.7 million in visitor expenditure for the Clare Valley region over the festival period.

Days Attended

Saturday was the standout day, attended by 91% of survey respondents. Sunday followed at 64%, Friday at 41%, and Monday at 8% — consistent with the day-theme structure and the concentration of key transport products on the weekend days.

Group Profile

Attendees travelled predominantly in groups — 35% came in groups of seven or more, and 27% came as couples. Solo attendance was minimal at just over 1%. The festival is firmly a shared social experience, which has implications for how it is marketed and what the on-site experience needs to deliver.

4. KPI Scorecard

The following summarises performance against the KPIs established in the 2026 Marketing Plan. 28 Member Venues registered 47 different events.

KPI	Target	Result
Total unique attendees	7,000	6,780 — Near miss
Intrastate visitors	60%	71% — Exceeded
Interstate & international visitors	16%	15% — Near miss
Gourmet Bus Trail tickets	250	168 + 70 VIP add-ons — Below target
Hop On/Off Shuttle tickets	300	406 — Exceeded
YOY website sessions (clarevalleygourmet.com.au)	Increase	+36% Apr, +17% May — Exceeded
YOY social media engagement	Increase	+159% IG, +199% FB — Exceeded
Budget	Break even or profit	Small profit — Achieved

Notes

Total attendance at 6,780 was 220 visitors short of the 7,000 target — a 3% gap that is well within a reasonable margin for an event of this scale in its first year of a redesigned format.

The interstate visitor result at 15% represents approximately 1,017 visitors against a target of 1,200. The Meta advertising campaign reached 108,091 interstate people, suggesting awareness was not the barrier. Accommodation availability, travel distance and competing events in May are likely contributing factors.

The Gourmet Bus Trail result reflects the challenges of a product in evolution. Now in its second year with a changed format, ticket sales more than covered costs and the VIP add-on sold 70 of an available pool across the trail. The Hop On/Off Shuttle significantly exceeded its target, confirming strong attendee appetite for flexible transport options.

Social media and website performance exceeded targets across every measurable metric, with the festival website delivering its strongest ever traffic result. The event returned a small profit.

2025 KPI Comparison

25 Member Venues registered 28 different events (across the Festival Weekend)

KPI	2025 Target	Result
Total unique attendees	10, 500	6,554 — Below Target
Intrastate visitors	6,500 (61%)	3, 741 (57%) — Below Target
Interstate & international visitors	1,000 (9.5%)	928 (14%) — Near miss
Gourmet Bus Trail tickets	800	230 — Below target
Hop On/Off Shuttle tickets	N/A	N/A
YOY website sessions (clarevalleygourmet.com.au)	Increase	28% decrease — Below target
YOY social media engagement	Increase	+599% — Exceeded
Budget	Break even or profit	Small loss — Near miss

5. Marketing Performance

The 2026 festival was supported by the most comprehensive marketing campaign the association has delivered to date. A significant portion of content production and coordination was managed in-house, contributing directly to the event returning a small profit.

Paid Media

Channel	Detail	Result
Meta Ads (Froth Media)	\$2,971.18 ad spend only. Froth Media time & expertise: \$5,000 in-kind sponsorship. 4-phase campaign: Engagement → Hop On/Off → Final Push → Retargeting	373,758 people reached. 108,091 interstate reach. 16,485 clicks at \$0.31 avg. 7,201 landing page views at \$0.41 avg.
Channel 7	Paid TV ad, Spencer Gulf & Broken Hill	Intrastate northern catchment
Adelady	Paid placement	3 million+ monthly users
Greater SA	Paid placement	Regional SA audience
Halliday Wine Companion	Paid feature article + eDM	600,000 monthly visitors

Meta reach more than doubled and clicks more than tripled compared to 2025. The four-phase campaign structure — building warm audiences early then retargeting closer to the event — was a significant improvement on prior years.

The total value of the Meta campaign, combining ad spend and in-kind time, was approximately \$7,971. The results delivered against that investment represent exceptional value by any industry measure.

Sponsorship & Partnership Activations

Partner	Activation
Valley Magazine	Full page ad + full page editorial + quarter page ad
RAA	Member eDM + website feature

Earned PR (Purple Giraffe)

3 press releases and 2 targeted pitches delivered the following:

Outlet	Audience	Type
Winsor Dobbin — Gourmet on the Road	500,000+ subscribers	Editorial
Adelaide Food Central	145,000 Instagram followers	Editorial (social)
SA Tourism Commission	25,000–28,800 followers	Social share
Wine Companion	28,000 Instagram followers	Social share
Adelaide Dining, Play and Go, Australian Good Food Guide, Kids in Adelaide, The Fold, Adelaide Locals, Destination SA	Various	Editorial listings
ABC Radio + 5AA	Metro + regional SA	Broadcast interviews
Wine Wench	4,546 Instagram followers	Bus Trail post-event

Two radio interviews — ABC and 5AA — delivered editorial broadcast coverage to both regional and metropolitan audiences. Wine Wench and Adelaide Food Central were hosted on the Gourmet Bus Trail, with both posting authentic experience-led content that paid placements cannot replicate.

Owned Channels

Social Media

Metric	Result / YOY Change
Combined views (FB + IG)	802,000 — FB +1,400% / IG +299%
Total unique reach	~310,000 — IG +417% / FB +2,200%
Content interactions	5,400 — +159–199%
Link clicks	9,900 — FB +8,300% / IG +65,400%
New followers	+710 — FB +503% / IG +285%

Organic Reels consistently outperformed boosted content for engagement — the content earned its audience, not just bought it.

Email

Period	List Movement
Jul–Dec 2025	-38 net subscribers
Jan–May 2026	+689 net subscribers

Every subscriber added to the owned list reduces future dependence on paid reach and compounds in value year on year.

Website — clarevalleygourmet.com.au

Page	Month	2025 Sessions	2026 Sessions	YOY Change
Total Site	April	15,458	20,993	+36%
	May	29,926	35,144	+17%
Program Page	April	2,336	3,893	+67%
	May	6,189	8,907	+44%
Bus Trail Page	April	1,849	2,811	+52%
	May	1,153	2,101	+82%

The Program Page was the standout performer, sessions up significantly in both months with people spending more time on the page year on year. The Bus Trail page saw strong traffic growth but time on page remains low, suggesting a conversion gap between interest and purchase that is worth addressing for 2027.

Print & Signage

Printed program distributed from 1 April. Roadside signage placed from 1 April. Both well received by members and attendees, continuing the successful return of print collateral introduced in 2025.

6. Attendee Experience

Findings are drawn from 190 survey responses representing an estimated 2.8% of total attendance. While not statistically representative, the volume and consistency of responses gives a reliable picture of the attendee experience.

Overall Satisfaction

Measure	Result
Satisfied or very satisfied	88.75%
Very satisfied	70.41%
Net Promoter Score (avg)	9.22 / 10

Experience Ratings

Aspect	Mean Score (out of 5)
Atmosphere & entertainment	4.71
Choice of beverages	4.64
Food & beverage quality	4.62
Ease of planning your visit	4.49
Variety of events	4.43
Organiser customer service	4.39
Choice of food available	4.37
Transport options	4.20
Website information	4.19
Value for money	4.18

****Note:** Score 1 = Poor - 5 = Excellent

Atmosphere and entertainment was the clear standout. Transport, website information and value for money rated lowest, all three are addressable and feature directly in the 2027 recommendations.

What Attendees Loved

The festival's social energy came through strongly in open-ended responses. The most consistent highlights were the quality of food and wine, live music, the variety of venues and the overall atmosphere.

The return to a concentrated 4-day weekend was explicitly praised by returning attendees — several who had been coming for 10, 20 and 30 years noted it was their preferred format.

Key Themes from Open-Ended Feedback

Transport

The most frequently raised issue across the survey. Specific pain points:

- Hop On/Off bus timetables inconsistent between the printed program and website
- Adelaide transfer bus departed early, leaving passengers behind on at least one occasion
- No Hop On/Off service on Sunday — multiple requests for this
- Limited transport options in the evening, particularly for ticketed dinner events
- No Uber or taxi availability flagged repeatedly
- Some Bus Trail guests arrived at venues already at capacity due to walk-in crowds

Gourmet Bus Trail Experience

- Confusion about what was included, some guests expected food and tastings at every stop based on prior year experience, not website or printed brochure in tote bag
- VIP numbers exceeded the 10-person cap at one venue, diluting the exclusive experience
- Two hours per venue felt too long for non-VIP guests with limited activities once a drink was purchased
- The \$20 off \$100 purchase offer was not well received as a value proposition
- Where the VIP experience was delivered correctly it rated well, with several respondents specifically praising the format

Food Quality and Consistency

- Overall food quality rated highly but consistency across venues was uneven
- Pizza and basic food truck offerings were called out as not meeting the gourmet standard
- Repeated requests for more vegetarian and vegan options
- Food menus not available in advance, attendees wanted to know what was on offer before arriving
- Some venues ran out of food or drinks during the day

Facilities

- Inadequate toilet facilities raised consistently, particularly at busier venues
- Long queues affecting the experience at peak times on Saturday

Website and Information

- Website went live with only a fraction of events listed
- Requests for a downloadable PDF program

Saturday Night Gap

- Limited dining options for those without pre-booked events
- Venues and events finishing too early, requests for later trading on Saturday night
- Clare township largely inactive in the evenings

7. Member Experience

Findings are drawn from 11 survey responses from the 28 members who participated in the 2026 festival — a 39% response rate. The themes below reflect the views of those who completed the survey and should be read in that context.

Overall Member Sentiment

Measure	Result
Would recommend participating to another member	Avg. 7.6 / 10
Rated CVWGA promotion as Good or Very Good	8 of 11 respondents
Rated communication as Good or Very Good	9 of 11 respondents
Revenue higher than or same as last year	8 of 11 respondents

The 4-Day Format

Opinion on the 4-day format was divided, though the majority accepted it as an improvement on the 10-day format.

- Several members found it more manageable and preferred the concentrated energy of a long weekend
- Saturday and Sunday were consistently identified as the strongest trading days
- Monday was noted as a low-impact day that may not warrant participation for all venue types

Marketing & Promotion

CVWGA promotion was rated positively overall. Specific feedback:

- Social media activity was noted as strong by multiple respondents
- Members would like to see more venue-specific content in CVWGA social media, individual wineries, events and experiences rather than a focus on the festival experience and transport products
- Roadside signage was noted as difficult to read at driving speed

Communication

Communication was rated well overall, with checklists and briefing documents noted as helpful.

- Some information arrived too close to the event
- Bus numbers not communicated to venues early enough

Gourmet Bus Trail — Member Perspective

The trail concept was supported in principle but several operational issues were raised.

- Dietary requirements need to be given earlier
- VIP guest expectations at some venues exceeded what the experience delivered, noting that the \$10 per VIP ticket payment and the parameters of the experience were agreed in advance
- Where the trail worked well, members noted the importance of having a good bus host and confirmed they would participate again

Event Performance

Revenue vs Last Year	Number of Members
A lot higher	3
A bit higher	1
About the same	3
A bit lower	1
No prior year comparison	1

8 of 9 respondents who provided revenue data reported revenue equal to or higher than the previous year.

Other Issues Raised

- The cost of a short-term liquor licence for the two festival days exceeds the cost of an annual licence for some smaller venues — a practical barrier to participation worth exploring with Liquor Licensing SA

8. Recommendations for 2027

1. Transport

- Introduce a limited Hop On/Off Shuttle service on Sunday
- Implement a final confirmation of all bus details, manifests and departure times to bus company one week out from the event to avoid miscommunication on the day
- Explore evening transport options to support ticketed dinner events, a taxi/rideshare partnership, or a venue-coordinated return service

2. Gourmet Bus Trail — Product Refinement

After two years of operating the trail, the following changes will take effect for 2027:

- The Gourmet Bus Trail will operate on Saturday only
- Time at each venue will be reviewed in conjunction with travel time between venues to ensure the day flows well for guests
- Trail format and budget to be formally signed off before member briefings are distributed
- A Video Sales Letter (VSL) to be added to the Bus Trail website page giving clearer information on inclusions, the VIP experience and what guests can expect, directly addressing the conversion gap identified in the 2026 web traffic data
- Dietary requirements and group numbers to be confirmed at least one week before the event

3. Tasting Australia Partnership

Moving forward when Tasting Australia is not running over the Gourmet Weekend we will not partner on Gourmet Events.

4. Food Quality and Consistency

Food standards are a member responsibility and will be treated as such in 2027.

- Members will be required to publish their food menus as part of the event registration process menus to be loaded into ATDW and visible on their event listing before the program goes live
- The member brief will include guidance on what meets the gourmet standard
- Members will be encouraged to include vegetarian and vegan options as part of their food offering
- Venues are responsible for ensuring adequate provisions for their expected crowd

5. Website and Information

The festival website is fed directly from member ATDW listings. Members are responsible for the accuracy, completeness and functionality of their own content. CVWGA has no control over individual member links or listing details. To support members in getting this right:

- The marketing calendar will include all key dates from planning and registration through to program launch and beyond, giving members clear milestones to work to
- All key dates will be communicated early and consistently so members can plan their content and listings accordingly

6. Member Content, Collaboration and Marketing

- The marketing calendar will be the backbone of the 2027 campaign — containing all key planning, registration, program launch and marketing dates so members and suppliers are working to the same schedule
- Members need to be actively engaged with the marketing campaign from the February 2027 program launch — not in the final weeks before the event
- From launch, members will be actively encouraged to collaborate on content — sharing CVWGA posts, contributing their own content, and tagging the association
- Collaboration posts from members will be accepted and amplified through CVWGA channels
- Begin the countdown content series 8–10 weeks out from the event — structured and scheduled from the start
- Rebalance paid Meta spend toward Instagram — the organic multiplier is stronger there and every paid dollar goes further
- Continue and expand the post-festival recap content block — mid and post-festival Reels were the campaign's highest performing content in 2026

7. Saturday Night Activation

- CVWGA will work with food associate members in the Clare township to explore Saturday evening activation
- More food-focused venues will be encouraged to join the association specifically to support the Saturday night gap identified by attendees
- The printed program and website will include a list of dining options available on Saturday evening

8. Linger Longer

- Add a section in the printed program

9. Facilities

Going forward:

- Members with large anticipated numbers on Saturday are required to have a cleaning schedule in place for the duration of the event

9. Liquor Licensing

CVWGA will explore opportunities to advocate with Liquor Licensing SA on behalf of members regarding the cost of short-term event licences — a practical barrier that disproportionately affects smaller venues.