

## Research Article

# Assessment of Vineyard Water Status by Multispectral and RGB Imagery Obtained from an Unmanned Aerial Vehicle

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**Abstract:** Multispectral and conventional cameras, RGB (red, green, blue) imager, onboard unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) provide very high spatial, temporal, and spectral resolution data. To evaluate the capacity of these techniques to assess vineyard water status, we carried out a study in a cv. Monastrell vineyard located in southeastern Spain in 2018 and 2019. Several irrigation strategies were applied, including different water quality and quantity regimes. Flights were performed using conventional and multispectral cameras mounted on the UAV throughout the growth cycle. Several visible and multispectral vegetation indices (VIs) were determined from the images with only vegetation (without soil and shadows, among others). Stem water potential was measured by pressure chamber and the water stress integral ( $S\psi$ ) was obtained along the season. Simple linear regression models that used VIs and

green cover canopy (GCC) to predict  $S\psi$  were tested. The results indicate that visible VIs best correlated with  $S\psi$ . The green leaf index (GLI), visible atmospherically resistance index (VARI), and GCC showed the best fits in 2018, with  $R^2 = 0.8, 0.72, \text{ and } 0.73$ , respectively. When the best model developed with the 2018 data was applied to the 2019 data set, the model fit poorly. This suggests that on-ground measurements of vine stress must be taken each growing season to redevelop a model that predicts water stress from UAV based imaging.

**Key words:** multispectral images, RGB images, stem water potential, UAV, vineyard, water stress

## Introduction

Grapevine water status is major determinant for vine performance and wine composition (Jackson and Lombard 1993) potentially affected by many soil and environmental factors interacting with the vine physiology and the vineyard management. In arid and semi-arid areas, irrigation (i.e. the watering regime and its salinity level) plays an important role in determining vine water status (Mirás-Avalos and Intrigliolo 2017).

Efforts have therefore been made to improve water use efficiency and crop yields, moving towards a more sustainable agricultural water management. The concept of precision viticulture (PV) seeks to describe the in-plot vineyard spatial variability to provide recommendations with the objective of improving management efficiency in terms of quality, production and sustainability (Matese and Di Gennaro 2015). One of the techniques that pursues a sustainable agricultural water management is regulated deficit irrigation (RDI), which consists of replacing only part of the potential grapevine evapotranspiration during some previously established phenological periods. Therefore, RDI is a standard practice in Mediterranean viticulture, as an effective means of regulating the water status of

grapevines under a pressing water scarcity scenario (Romero et al. 2010). The effect of RDI depends on vine phenological stage and plant water stress, as generated by water restrictions and soil and climatic conditions. The application of RDI can mitigate the negative effects of climate change on grapevine productivity and fruit ripening (Buesa et al. 2017), while ensuring the sustainable use of water resources.

Implementation of proper RDI strategies demands the monitoring of grapevine water status; there are different methods to achieve this goal. These include: 1) a more direct determination of plant water status, such as stomatal conductance, stem water potential ( $\Psi_{\text{stem}}$ ), leaf water potential, pre-dawn leaf water potential ( $\Psi_{\text{pd}}$ ), and carbon isotope composition measurements; and 2) sensor monitoring systems collecting a large number of indirect measurements over a period of time, such as transpiration measurements, trunk diameter fluctuations, and leaf and canopy temperatures (Acevedo-Opazo et al. 2008b). Some authors have proposed midday  $\Psi_{\text{stem}}$  measurements as a significant physiological indicator of water status for irrigated and rain-fed grapevines (Acevedo-Opazo et al. 2010). These measurements are manual, time-consuming, and may be unrepresentative of the spatial variability of water status over the whole farm.

There are many available tools which are used for PV. One of them is the use of remote sensing imagery data from satellites, airplanes, balloons, helicopters, and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) (Boukoberine et al. 2019) to collect spatial data. UAVs with lightweight, high-quality geometric and radiometric sensors allow users to obtain very high spatial (centimetric) and temporal resolution data (Pádua et al. 2017). Spectral reflectance data from on-board sensors have been used to monitor biochemical and biophysical attributes, such as biomass, leaf pigment contents, canopy water status, crop coefficient, and crop evapotranspiration (Zarco-Tejada et al. 2005, Acevedo-Opazo et al. 2008b, Berni et al. 2009, Baluja et al. 2012, Ballesteros et al. 2015). Spectral data are usually employed as a

mathematical combination of two or more bands to generate vegetation indices (VIs) based on visible or RGB (red, green, blue), red-edge, and near infrared (NIR) regions of the electromagnetic spectrum, among others (Pôças et al. 2015, Romero et al. 2018). The visible part of the spectrum is characterized by low reflectance, due to the strong absorption of foliar pigments such as chlorophyll and carotenoids. The NIR region is characterized by high reflectance, and the thermal domain canopy is characterized by its temperature. As stomata close under pressure stress, transpiration stops and leaf temperatures rise. Thus, leaf or canopy temperatures can be used as a predictor of plant stress (Costa et al. 2010). Recent studies to detect grapevine water stress have used thermal measurements obtained from aerial imagery. Some of them used several multispectral VIs, but few used RGB VIs, as the visible part of the spectrum is characterized by low reflectance (as mentioned above) (Möller et al. 2007, Rodríguez-Pérez et al. 2007, Rossini et al. 2013, Zarco-Tejada et al. 2013, Pôças et al. 2015). Möller et al. (2007) used thermal and visible images to develop models for estimating  $\Psi_{\text{stem}}$ . However, RGB VIs were not computed and RGB imagery were used only as supporting data. Rodríguez-Pérez et al. (2007), Zarco-Tejada et al. (2013), and Rossini et al. (2013) used the photochemical reflectance index (PRI), suggesting its use as good indicator for water stress monitoring. PRI uses the 530 and 550 wavelengths of the visible region electromagnetic spectrum. Pôças et al. (2015) also used hyperspectral reflectance indices to predict vineyard  $\Psi_{\text{pd}}$ .

Most research studies have adapted methodologies developed in traditional remote sensing methods (using satellite imagery) including the utilized VIs and bands. Nevertheless, the enormous increase of spatial resolution has opened new opportunities to use other bands and VIs, primarily focusing on the visible spectrum (Ballesteros et al. 2018). No reported studies have analyzed the use of VIs derived from the visible bands to predict water status, compared with the traditionally used

multispectral and thermal VIs. Nevertheless, in this study RGB VIs, in addition to multispectral VIs, were studied as predictors of grapevine water status due to lower cost of RGB cameras and easier photogrammetric treatment, compared with multispectral and thermal products.

Green cover canopy (GCC) is a geometric parameter which provides information about vegetative growth level or canopy vigor. It can be determined from RGB imagery data and is usually related with the leaf area index (LAI), biomass, plant height, and canopy volume, among others (Ballesteros et al. 2015, 2018). Nevertheless, to the best of our knowledge, it has not yet been shown to be related to vine water status. In this study, we evaluate the relationship between GCC and grapevine water status measurements. The objective of this study was to analyze the use of multispectral and RGB VIs and GCC to characterize spatial and temporal variations vineyard water status as a first step of future models that will be developed to estimate vineyard water status according of its location and variety, among others. High frequency multispectral and RGB imaging at high spatial resolution was used to determine VIs as potential predictors of vine water status. The proposed methodology is complementary to field determinations with pressure chamber measurements. In order to obtain a wide range of vine water status conditions, several irrigation regimes were tested including different water salinity levels in order to better taken into account different potential sources of variations for vine water status.

## Materials and Methods

**Site location and experimental design.** The research was undertaken during the 2018 and 2019 growing seasons in a commercial vineyard located in Fuente-Álamo, Albacete, Spain (38° 43' 43.3''N, 1° 28' 12.6''W; elevation 820 m a.s.l.; see Fig. 1). The soil was sandy loam (55.64% sand, 27.73% silt, and 16.63% clay) with variable depth from 35 to 50 cm. It had 1.2% organic matter, 47.7% active

CaCO<sub>3</sub>, electrical conductivity (EC) of 0.39 dS/m, pH of 8.86, and bulk density of 1.17 g/cm<sup>3</sup>. The irrigation water analysis showed an EC of 1.26 dS/m and pH of 8.37.

The climate was defined as continental Mediterranean (“Climate zones. National Geographic Institute (NGI)” 2020), with hot and dry summers and daily maximum summer temperatures close to 40 °C, mainly in July and August. The weather station was located 10 km from the experimental plot. Annual rainfall at the experimental site was 406 mm in 2018 and 550 mm in 2019, while rainfall from April to September was 230 mm and 400 mm, respectively. The total annual reference evapotranspiration (ET<sub>o</sub>) was 1171 mm in 2018 and 1270 mm in 2019, while ET<sub>o</sub> for the growing season was 834 mm and 879 mm, respectively. Growing degree days (GDD) from April to harvest was computed as the sum of the average daily temperature above a threshold of 10 °C (Amerine and Winkler 1944). GDD at the harvest was 1904 up to 10<sup>th</sup> October 2018 and 1868 up to 7<sup>th</sup> October 2019.

The study was performed in a 0.6 ha subplot of a 6.5 ha commercial vineyard. The vines, planted in 2007, were cv. Monastrell on 110R rootstock. They were planted in north–south oriented rows and trained to a double Guyot system on a vertical trellis. The row x vine spacing was 3 m x 1.5 m (2,222 vines/ha). Two 2-bud spurs and two 60–90 cm canes were retained during pruning each year. In July, green shoots were trimmed from each grapevine, according to local growing practice. The plot was irrigated with self-compensating dippers spaced by 1 m, with a dripper discharge of 4 l/h.

Due to water restrictions under a pressing water scarcity scenario, the annual available water to irrigate was set as 1000 m<sup>3</sup>/ha by the water managers in the study area. Six treatments (T1-T6) and four replicates for every treatment were considered as experimental design. Every treatment and replicate were randomly placed along the experimental area (Fig. 1).

Each replicate involved four rows with 10 vines. The two outer rows were considered as buffers. Also, the most external vines of every row were considered as buffers. The characteristics of different treatments were the following: T1 was rain-fed, T2 was irrigated with standard-quality water, T3 was irrigated adding sulphates ( $\text{Na}_2\text{SO}_4$  and  $\text{MgSO}_4$ ), T4 was irrigated adding sodium chloride ( $\text{NaCl}$ ), and T5 and T6 were irrigated adding sulphates and  $\text{NaCl}$  respectively, but irrigation events started at veraison. Salts were added to T3, T4, T5, and T6 up to irrigation water reaching an EC of 5 dS/m. Irrigation in T2, T3, and T4 began when  $\Psi_{\text{stem}}$  reached -0.8 MPa. In 2019 season, the experimental design was simplified, as T5 and T6 were not applied because agronomic and grape quality differences with the others salted treatments (T3 and T4) were not observed. Since the aim of the present study is to correlate different grapevine water status determinations, the fact that T5 and T6 were not used for the 2019 data analysis does not affect the robustness of our results.

**Grapevine water status measurement.** Grapevine water status was assessed by midday  $\Psi_{\text{stem}}$  six times in 2018 and seven times in 2019 (Table 1) on two leaves (one leaf per vine) per replicate plot with a pressure chamber (Model 600, PMS Instrument Company, Albany, OR, USA). Previous observations showed that the variation in  $\Psi_{\text{stem}}$  among leaves of the same grapevines was very low (coefficient of variation lower than 5 %). Therefore, increasing the number of vine measurements instead of increasing the number of  $\Psi_{\text{stem}}$  determination per vine was performed, as measurements have to be carried out within one hour (Intrigliolo and Castel 2010). Field determinations for  $\Psi_{\text{stem}}$  were carried out on the same days that aerial images were collected (Table 1), and measurements were always carried out on the same selected vines. Indeed, considering the wide range of irrigation treatments explored, vine water status was assessed in a total of 48 and 32 vines, in 2018 and 2019, respectively.

$\Psi_{\text{stem}}$  characterizes the grapevine water status at the moment of determination, however, the spectral response of leaves shows the accumulated effect of water deficit duration and intensity from the beginning of the cycle to the moment of determination, represented by water stress integral ( $S_{\psi}$ ), computed as the sum of vine water potential measurements during the study period (Buesa et al. 2017). It was calculated, as in equation (1), as the summation of the difference of average of two consecutive measurements of  $\Psi_{\text{stem}}$  ( $\bar{\Psi}_{i,i+1}$ ) and the least negative value registered during the season ( $c = -0.35$  MPa in both seasons), multiplying it by the number of days between one measurement and the next ( $n$ ). The possible limitations of the  $S_{\psi}$  may occur when the number of days between two consecutive readings is high. It might have sudden and punctual changes in the water status that may not be noticed, but the water stress integral is the result of the crop water “history”, as well as the canopy spectral response. It represents the accumulated water status of the vineyard from the beginning of the cycle until the measurement is taken. Therefore, the main objective of this manuscript is to relate the canopy spectral response with the  $S_{\psi}$ .

$$S_{\psi} = \left| \sum_{i=0}^{i=t} (\bar{\Psi}_{i,i+1} - c) n \right| \quad (1)$$

**Aerial imagery acquisition and processing.** High-resolution multispectral (8 cm ground sample distance; GSD) and RGB (2 cm GSD) images were collected on the same days that  $\Psi_{\text{stem}}$  was determined (Table 1). The UAV used was a quadcopter md4-1000 (Microdrones Inc., Kreuztal, Germany) mounted with a multispectral SEQUOIA sensor (Parrot, Paris, France) and an RGB SONY ILCE-5100 digital camera (Sony Corporation, Tokyo, Japan). The multispectral SEQUOIA sensor measured four bands: green (550 nm with a 40 nm bandpass filter; BPF), red (660 nm, BPF 40 nm), red-



edge (735 nm, BPF 10 nm), and NIR (790 nm, BPF 40 nm). The sensor has a 4.8 x 3.6 mm charge coupled device (CCD) and a pixel size of 3.75 x 3.75  $\mu\text{m}$ . The resolution of the image was 1280 x 960 (columns and rows, respectively) with a focal length of 3.98 mm. The sensor of the SONY ILCE-5100 camera was a complementary metal oxide semiconductor (CMOS) Exmor® type APS-C (23.5 x 15.6 mm) with pixel size of 4 x 4  $\mu\text{m}$ . The image size was 6000 x 4000 (columns and rows) and its focal length was 20 mm. Flights were always performed near solar noon at a height of 80 m above ground. Eight targets were uniformly distributed within the flying area for geo-referencing and sensor geometric calibration. The positions of the target centroids were determined using the Leica Global Positioning System (GPS) 1200 (Leica Geosystems AG, Heerbrugg, Switzerland) linked to a Global Navigation Satellite System (GNSS) permanent reference station. The estimated accuracy of the global navigation satellite system real-time kinematic (GNSS-RTK) was 0.01 m in planimetry and 0.015 m in altimetry.

Images were automatically acquired following a flight plan computed using the Microdrones Photogrammetric Flight Planning software (MFLIP) (Hernandez-lopez et al. 2013). Before each flight, radiometric calibration was performed using the Aircalib calibration panel (Airinov, Paris, France) for the multispectral sensor. Blurred images were automatically detected and eliminated (Ribeiro-Gomes et al. 2016). Geomatic products (i.e., orthoimage, digital surface model (DSM), and point cloud) were obtained using the Agisoft Metashape Professional version 1.6.1 software (Agisoft LLC, St. Petersburg, Russia).

Segmentation of well-illuminated vegetation in the orthoimages was performed using a modified version of the LAIC (leaf area index calculation) computer vision software (Córcoles et al. 2013), named GEO-LAIC for RGB imagery treatment and MS-GEO-LAIC for multispectral imagery. This software also made it possible to determine the GCC (Fig. 2). The GCC was computed for each vine

according to the methodology proposed by Ballesteros et al. (2014). The software used for the extraction of geomatic information for each vine was QGIS version 3.4.1 software (QGIS Development Team, 2019, QGIS Geographic Information System. Open Source Geospatial Foundation Project. <https://qgis.org>).

**Calculation of VIs.** Sensitiveness of salts treatments on canopy spectral reflectance was previously assessed. There were no significant differences for any seasons and sampling events. Therefore, relationships between water stress integral and considered VIs were studied for all treatments together.

Different VIs were calculated from visible and NIR spectra measured in the RGB and multispectral orthoimages with segmented vegetation. The high resolution images allowed for calculation of a VI for each vine. Band values were computed as the mean of pixel values within its delimited vegetation area with QGIS version 3.4.1 software (QGIS Development Team, 2019, QGIS Geographic Information System. Open Source Geospatial Foundation Project. <https://qgis.org>). Nevertheless, the average of grapevines bands within its replicate plot was band value of each replicate plot of the study, because in the data analysis of this study were used average values for each replicate plot not at the grapevine level.

**Statistical analysis.** Pearson's correlation coefficient ( $r$ ) was calculated for the multispectral and RGB VIs listed in Tables 2 and 3. VIs that were highly correlated ( $r \geq 0.95$ ) were not considered. Pearson's correlation analysis was determined between the different VIs and GCC (as predictors) and  $S_{\psi}$ , throughout the entire growth cycle for the 2018 and 2019 seasons. Simple linear regression models were assessed using as predictors multispectral and RGB VIs with  $r$  values of  $>0.5$  in the last dates for 2018 and 2019. The coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) and the relative error (RE) were used to assess the

performance of the obtained models for each irrigation season. The regression trend line between measured  $S_{\psi}$  and simulated  $S_{\psi}$ , using the VI with the best performance as predictor, was also shown to study the trend of the calibrated model to overestimate or underestimate  $S_{\psi}$  values. Validation was performed in the 2019 data to test the obtained models in 2018; for this,  $R^2$ , RE and regression line between measured  $S_{\psi}$  and simulated  $S_{\psi}$  were used to assess the performance.

## Results

**Accumulated water stress obtained under different treatments.** Analyzing the computed  $S_{\psi}$  for each sampling date in the 2018 season (Fig. 3), differences between treatments were not significant until 14<sup>th</sup> August, even though the first irrigation event was on 2<sup>nd</sup> July for treatments T2–T4. Differences between T1 (rain-fed grapevines) and the rest of treatments were significant on 14<sup>th</sup> August (at the beginning of veraison), at 1282 GDD and when the total applied water was 291 mm from rainfall and 55 mm from irrigation. As expected, for that date, T1 showed the highest water stress, with an average  $S_{\psi}$  of 28.9 MPa\*days. The lowest  $S_{\psi}$  average value was 19 MPa\*days for T2 (irrigated with standard-quality water). The rest of the treatments showed mean values close to 23 MPa\*days, in the case of T3 and T4 (irrigated with added sulphates and NaCl, respectively), and close to 26 MPa\*days for T5 and T6 (irrigated with added sulphates and NaCl respectively, with watering starting at veraison). In addition, significant differences appeared between T2, T5, and T6, due to the later start of irrigation events. No differences were observed between T2, T3, and T4. Therefore, the results indicate that there were no differences resulting from the two salt types (i.e., T3 *versus* T4 and T5 *versus* T6). In the last two sampling dates, the treatments  $S_{\psi}$  values had the same trend as on 14<sup>th</sup> August. Differences between T1 and the rest of the treatments were significant on 19<sup>th</sup> September (at berry ripening) at 1720 GDD

and when the total applied water reached 337 mm from precipitation and 99 mm from irrigation. T1 showed the highest water stress, with an average  $S_{\psi}$  of 64.3 MPa\*days, while the lowest  $S_{\psi}$  average value was 35.3 MPa\*days for T2; the rest of treatments showed mean values close to 44 MPa\*days for T3 and T4, and close to 50 MPa\*days for T5 and T6.

Analyzing the computed  $S_{\psi}$  for each sampling date of the season 2019 (Fig. 4), differences between treatments were not significant until 29<sup>th</sup> July. In the previous sampling dates, the irrigation treatments had not started yet. Differences between T1 (rain-fed) and T2 (irrigated with standard-quality water) were observed on 29<sup>th</sup> July (at phenological phase of closed bunch), at 1043 GDD and when the cumulative irrigation water was 15 mm. For that day, T1 showed an average  $S_{\psi}$  value of 12.3 MPa\*days and T2 of 7.4 MPa\*days. Differences between T1, T2, and T4 with average  $S_{\psi}$  values of 21.9, 12.9, and 18.9 MPa\*days were detected, respectively, on 14<sup>th</sup> August (at veraison) at 1289 GDD and with total applied water of 240 mm from rainfall and 19 mm from irrigation. Differences between T1 and the other treatments were the most significant, with an average  $S_{\psi}$  value of 35.5 MPa\*days for T1 and lowest mean value of 19.1 MPa\*days for T2 on 28<sup>th</sup> August (at beginning of berry ripening) at 1468 GDD and with total applied water of 259 mm from rainfall and 40 mm from irrigation. The same trend appeared in the last sampling date, with the highest average value for T1 (47.6 MPa\*days) and the lowest mean value for T2 (23.6 MPa\*days). Significant differences between T2, T3, and T4 (added salts) were not observed. Therefore, it was shown that irrigation with added salts did not influence the grapevine water status, as was previously observed in 2018.

**Correlation of the VIs and analysis of the VIs and GCC with  $S_{\psi}$ .** Analysis of Pearson's correlation between the different multispectral VIs for 2018 and 2019 seasons showed that MCARI1, MCARI2, MSAVI, MTVI3, MSR, and SRI had correlation coefficients higher than 0.95, revealing a

high level of multicollinearity. Therefore, the multispectral VIs considered were NDVI, GI, GNDVI, MCARI, RDVI, and TCARI/OSAVI.

Analysis of Pearson's correlation between the different RGB VIs for 2018 and 2019 seasons showed that  $\gamma$ , NGRDI, Ikaw, ExR, ExB, ExG, ExGR, and RGRI had correlation coefficients higher than 0.95, revealing a high level of multicollinearity. Therefore, the RGB VIs considered were  $\rho$ ,  $\beta$ , GLI, and VARI.

For selected VIs, Table 4 shows  $r$  values for the relationships between the most significant multispectral and RGB VIs (with  $r$  values  $> 0.5$  in some dates) with  $S_{\psi}$  in the 2018 season. Generally,  $r$  values were higher at the last sampling dates for both types of VIs. Moreover,  $r$  values were higher for RGB VIs. The GCC, which is considered a geometric parameter and not such as a spectral VI, showed a good relationship with grapevine water stress. Therefore, canopy growth or grapevine vigor is highly influenced by the accumulated water stress. After Pearson's analysis, we studied simple linear regression models of the multispectral and RGB VIs with  $r$  values of  $>0.5$  in the last three or two dates. In the case of multispectral VIs, we considered NDVI, GNDVI, and RDVI. For RGB VIs, we considered GLI, VARI, and the geometric parameter GCC.

Table 5 shows the  $r$  values for the relationships between the most significant multispectral and RGB VIs (with  $r$  values  $> 0.5$  in some dates) with  $S_{\psi}$  in the 2019 season. Generally,  $r$  values were higher in the last sampling dates for both types of VI, as occurred in 2018. Nevertheless, some multispectral VIs only showed  $r$  values of  $>0.5$  in the last sampling date (18<sup>th</sup> September 2019): NDVI, GNDVI, and TCARI/OSAVI. In the case of RGB VIs, as in 2018, GLI, VARI, and GCC had  $r$  values of  $>0.5$  in the last three sampling dates (but lower than those in 2018); except for GCC, with a  $r$  value of 0.31 on 18<sup>th</sup> September. GLI also had  $r$  values of  $>0.5$  on the 16<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> of July.

**Simple linear regression analysis.** In order to determine a model to predict grapevine water status, simple linear regression analysis between the multispectral VIs NDVI, GNDVI, and RDVI and the RGB VIs GLI, VARI, and GCC and  $S_{\psi}$  was evaluated for each sampling date in 2018. Table 6 shows the statistical analysis for obtained RGB linear models in the 2018 season. The statistical analysis of multispectral VIs predictors was not detailed as  $R^2$  values were lower than 0.5. Therefore, multispectral VIs offered weak results. According to the  $r$  values, the best fits were obtained in the last three sampling dates. The best fit considering RGB VIs as predictor variables was obtained for GLI ( $R^2 = 0.8$  and  $RE = 8.75\%$ ) as a predictor for the last date, 23<sup>rd</sup> August, at veraison (at 1394 GDD) (Fig. 5a). Generated models using VARI as predictor also had good fits for the last two dates, with  $R^2 > 0.5$  and  $RE > 10\%$ . The generated model including GCC as a predictor showed a good fit, with  $R^2 > 0.5$  and  $RE$  close to 10%, for the last three dates and with the best fits on 27<sup>th</sup> July and 14<sup>th</sup> August with  $R^2 = 0.65$  and 0.67, and  $RE = 9.73$  and 10.22%, respectively.

In order to determine a model to predict grapevine water status, simple linear regression analysis between the multispectral VIs NDVI, GNDVI, and TCARI/OSAVI and the RGB VIs GLI, VARI, and GCC and  $S_{\psi}$  was evaluated for each sampling date in 2019. Table 6 shows the statistical analysis for obtained RGB linear models in the 2019 season. Despite the last sampling date, in the case of NDVI and GNDVI, or the last two dates, in the case of TCARI/OSAVI, showing the best fits, neither had  $R^2 > 0.5$  and, so, no multispectral model was significant to predict  $S_{\psi}$  (as in 2018), hence the statistical analysis obtained using multispectral VIs as predictors are not shown. In the case of generated models with GCC as predictor, no date had  $R^2 > 0.5$ . In the case of GLI, the model only showed  $R^2 > 0.5$  on 28<sup>th</sup> August at 1468 GDD (at the beginning of berry ripening). For generated models using VARI as a predictor, only the last two dates had good fit (with  $R^2 > 0.5$ ). In this year, the models did not fit as well as in 2018.

**Validation process.** To evaluate the model generated in 2018, it was applied to the data obtained in 2019. The best linear regression model of the calibration process in 2018 was GLI, with the best statistics on 23<sup>rd</sup> August (1394 GDD), with  $R^2 = 0.8$  and  $RE = 8.75\%$ . To validate this model, the calibration equation between GLI and measured  $S_\psi$  was applied to GLI on 28<sup>th</sup> August 2019 with 1468 GDD, as it was similar in the GDD at 23<sup>rd</sup> August 2018. The resulting statistical values were  $R^2 = 0.59$  and  $RE = 33.82\%$ . The model underestimated the  $S_\psi$  values when higher  $S_\psi$  values were reached (Fig. 5b). No multispectral models were validated, as their results were not robust ( $R^2 < 0.5$ ).

## Discussion

In both years, differences between the treatments were not clearly observed until mid-August—around veraison—and were mostly found between irrigation regimes, while the application of salt water did not clearly affect grapevine water status. This confirms that the  $\Psi_{\text{stem}}$  measurement is a good indicator for the watering regime imposed, as recently analyzed in a meta-analysis study (Santesteban et al. 2019). On the other hand, the application of salt water did not affect plant water status, probably as the vineyard's sandy soil avoided the important accumulation of salts in the root-zone. The leaf spectral response was also not affected by the water salinity levels. Thus, data from the different combinations of watering and salinity levels were pooled together when relating vine water status with spectral indexes calculated. Studies determining salinity effects on leaf spectral indexes are still scarce and only recently in citrus trees found that only after 8 seasons of continuous application of salty water from treated waste water it could be detected a differential response in canopy multispectral response (Romero-Trigueros et al. 2017). Comparing the two seasons, the  $S_\psi$  values were lower in 2019 than in 2018, due to the lowest  $\Psi_{\text{stem}}$  values computed in last three sampling dates of 2019. In those dates, irrigation and rainfall events

were less frequent but with more intensity, highlighting more than 35 mm from rainfall and irrigation registered in previous days to 28<sup>th</sup> August or more than 100 mm from rainfall in previous days to 18<sup>th</sup> September. A possible reason that the strongest relationships between water stress and the multispectral and RGB IVs occurred on the last measurement dates is that  $S_{\psi}$  considers accumulated water stress throughout the growing cycle, which probably affected the structural and pigment content of the leaves and, therefore, the spectral response; that is, the source of VIs.

In this study, multispectral and RGB VIs were considered as predictors of  $S_{\psi}$ . The VIs having the strongest relationship with  $S_{\psi}$  were NDVI, GNDVI, RDVI, TCARI/OSAVI, GLI, VARI, and the geometric parameter GCC, where the best results were obtained in the visible domain (i.e., with GLI, VARI, and GCC), with the GLI performance at the last sampling date of 2018 being notable. Few authors have used RGB VIs to predict water status (Möller et al. 2007, Rodríguez-Pérez et al. 2007, Rossini et al. 2013, Zarco-Tejada et al. 2013, Pôças et al. 2015) as the visible part of the spectrum is characterized by low reflectance due to the strong absorption of foliar pigments. Möller et al. (2007) used thermal and visible images to develop models for estimating  $\Psi_{\text{stem}}$ . Nevertheless, RGB VIs were not computed and RGB imagery were used only as supporting data. Rodríguez-Pérez et al. (2007), Zarco-Tejada et al. (2013), and Rossini et al. (2013) used the photochemical reflectance index (PRI), suggesting its use as good indicator for water stress monitoring. In this study, PRI was not computed because it requires the 530 and 550 wavelengths of the visible region electromagnetic spectrum and the used RGB sensor only provides wavelengths corresponding to red (670 nm), green (550 nm) and blue (470 nm). Pôças et al. (2015) also used hyperspectral reflectance indices to predict vineyard  $\Psi_{\text{pd}}$ . Their study showed  $R^2$  values ranging from 0.37 to 0.58, having better fit when using VARI ( $R^2 = 0.58$ ). In this study, the best fit of VARI was with 2018's last sampling event for calibration ( $R^2 = 0.72$ ).



Several studies have used multispectral and thermal VIs to determine water status. Baluja et al. (2012) reported that the highest correlations were obtained for NDVI, MSR, SRI, GNDVI, and TCARI/OSAVI predictors, with  $R^2$  values ranging between 0.58 (GNDVI) and 0.68 (NDVI). In the present study, for both calibration years (2018 and 2019),  $R^2$  values using NDVI and GNDVI as predictors were less accurate (0.42 and 0.49, respectively) for the last sampling date of 2018 (19<sup>th</sup> September with 1720 GDD). In 2019, the  $R^2$  values of models generated using NDVI, GNDVI, and TCARI/OSAVI were 0.26, 0.41, and 0.46, respectively, for the last sampling date (18<sup>th</sup> September with 1681 GDD). Poblete et al. (2017) obtained  $R^2$  values for NDVI and GNDVI of 0.35 and 0.31; lower than the obtained values in this study with the 2018 calibration. Romero et al. (2018) obtained  $R^2$  values for NDVI ranging between 0.12 and 0.29 for three sampling dates; lower values than those obtained in the 2018 calibration in this study, and similar to the values obtained in the 2019 calibration. These multispectral VIs can only indirectly detect water status, as they were developed to represent different physiological variables that can change according to different levels of water status (Poblete et al. 2017). In this context, NDVI has been reported to be a good indicator of vegetative vigor, yield, and plant water status (Acevedo-Opazo et al. 2008a), while GNDVI has been reported as a better form to detect chlorophyll pigment concentration, which is modified under stress conditions (Gitelson and Merzlyak 1998).

In the studies carried out by Baluja et al. (2012), Poblete et al. (2017), and Romero et al. (2018), multispectral VIs were related with  $\Psi_{\text{stem}}$  values, which characterizes the grapevine water status at the moment of determination. Nevertheless, unlike the previous works, the computed VIs in this study were related to  $S_{\Psi}$ , which integrates the measured  $\Psi_{\text{stem}}$  at each sampling date to obtain an accumulated value of water stress, which reflects the effect of water deficit duration and intensity. In the case where

instantaneous water stress determination is required, thermal imagery is probably more appropriate; although the associated sensor cost and the difficulty of obtaining an accurate geomatic product increases the cost and decreases the applicability of the methodology (Ribeiro-Gomes et al. 2016). Nevertheless, using just RGB products can offer a good solution for determining accumulated water stress, which is a variable used in vineyard water management; particularly for characterizing vineyard zones which may have suffered from different degrees of water stress. Determination of the actual water status by determining  $\Psi_{\text{stem}}$  is more useful for irrigation scheduling and modulating the irrigation regime, according to the instantaneous water stress suffered by the grapevines.

In the current study, we compared VIs computed from multispectral bands of the Parrot Sequoia and RGB bands from a conventional camera, the Sony ILCE 5100. RGB VIs integrating only information in the visible domain showed better correlations with  $S_{\psi}$ . Moreover, the good performance of these visible VIs was due to the higher spatial resolution, which clearly compensates for the lower reflectance in the visible region, compared with that in NIR and red-edge. The green band is characterized by absorption of radiation by the anthocyanins, water-soluble pigments associated with the resistance of plants to stresses as water deficits (Viña and Gitelson 2011). Blue-band wavelengths refer to a strong absorption by carotenes and xanthophylls which, along with chlorophyll, are used as indicators of physiological states and plant adaptation to stress (Gitelson 2012). Thus, the capability of very-high resolution products in the visible region of the spectrum allows for generating accurate data from the green band, avoiding the need to use multispectral sensors. According to the above results, using RGB VIs to predict  $S_{\psi}$ , instead of traditional multispectral VIs: 1) could reduce costs, as RGB cameras are much cheaper than multispectral ones; 2) could improve the generation of accurate orthoimages, as structure-from-motion software is designed to work with RGB images; 3) sun glint and

hotspot effects are less pronounced in RGB images than in multispectral ones, which decreases the limitation in the hours of operation (Ortega-Terol et al. 2017); and 4) the point cloud generated is much more accurate, making it possible to obtain the geometric characteristics of the plants, which can improve crop monitoring (Ballesteros et al. 2015).

The GCC is considered to be a geometric parameter which provides information about vegetative growth level or canopy vigor. The GCC is usually related with biomass and plant height but, in this study, GCC was related to  $S_{\psi}$ . Better results were obtained in 2018 than in 2019.

The best-calibrated model, which used GLI and computed  $S_{\psi}$  data for a date of 2018, was validated with GLI data from a date in 2019 with similar GDD. The weak performance of the model generated one year and applied to the next one suggests that it is necessary to make complementary use of field measurements with UAV flights every irrigation season. The implementation of the proposed methodology does not avoid using field measurements, such as pressure chamber measurements. However, it allows applying results obtained in just a few points of the plot to the whole plot. Since water potential determinations have to be carried out within a short time (i.e. one hour) to avoid the differential effects of varying environmental conditions during the day, the procedure here developed could be used to map the entire vineyard water status variability from a few on-the-ground point determinations. This is of particular interest for both, obtaining a more representative evaluation of the entire vineyard water status and to determine different zones within the vineyard. Nevertheless, obtaining aerial images from veraison to senesce may be enough to monitor differences in water status. All calibrated models for both seasons showed better performance in the last sampling dates, when the fruit development was at veraison and differences in water status were observed. This was more significative for GLI performance, as it has been previously mentioned, on 23<sup>rd</sup> August 2018 when 1394

GDD. However, field measurements are necessary to quantify it. It is important to highlight that monitoring water status depends on the rain regime, irrigation scheduling, and crop development, making it necessary to determine the most appropriate flight starting date for every individual case.

## Conclusion

The use of RGB cameras onboard a UAV platform allowed us to obtain high spatial resolution images for the monitoring of grapevine water status with better results than when using (more complex) multispectral images. This, together with occasional pressure chamber measurements, permits the monitoring of water status throughout the whole vineyard. The use of conventional RGB cameras increases the applicability of the proposed methodology, due to the lower cost of the system and easier photogrammetric treatment, compared with multispectral and thermal products. Moreover, the results from 2018 showed that canopy growth (represented by GCC obtained from the RGB camera) also had a good correlation with grapevine water status; therefore, it can be used as predictor for the mid-term effects of water deficit.

Because of the poor results obtained when applying a model calibrated for one year to another season, it can be concluded that it is necessary to generate a new empirical model for every season. Nevertheless, only flights close to veraison were necessary in the case study, reducing the number of required flights and, therefore, the cost of application.

Future advances will be focused on implementing other statistical regression models, such as machine learning techniques, to enhance the obtained fits. Furthermore, more efforts will be made to predict the water status in a specific date of any year using a previous generalizable calibrated model by extending the number of analyzed seasons.

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**Table 1** Dates of  $\Psi_{\text{stem}}$  measurements and flights, calculated growing degree days (GDD), and accumulated applied water by rainfall and irrigation in the studied vineyard cv. Monastrell located in southeastern Spain in 2018 and 2019 seasons.

	Sampling date	DOY	Growth stage (Baggiolini scale <sup>a</sup> )	GDD	Applied water (mm)	
					Rainfall	Irrigation
<b>Season 2018</b>	15 <sup>th</sup> June	166	H-I: flowering	396	264	0
	2 <sup>nd</sup> July	183	J: fruit set	614	288	4
	27 <sup>th</sup> July	208	L: closed bunch	989	288	44
	14 <sup>th</sup> August	226	M: beginning veraison	1282	291	55
	23 <sup>rd</sup> August	235	M: veraison	1394	307	70
	19 <sup>th</sup> September	262	N: berry ripening	1720	337	99
<b>Season 2019</b>	19 <sup>th</sup> June	170	J: beginning fruit set	453	233	0
	4 <sup>th</sup> July	185	J: ended fruit set	665	233	0
	16 <sup>th</sup> July	197	K: berry pea size	849	240	0
	29 <sup>th</sup> July	210	L: closed bunch	1043	240	15
	14 <sup>th</sup> August	226	M: veraison	1289	240	19
	28 <sup>th</sup> August	240	N: beginning berry ripening	1468	259	40
	18 <sup>th</sup> September	261	N: berry ripening	1681	428	56

DOY: days over year; GDD: accumulated growing degree days

<sup>a</sup>Baggiolini scale: (Baggiolini 1952)

**Table 2** Multispectral VIs used in the present study calculated using the Parrot Sequoia sensor's set of bands. These VIs were calculated for vineyard cv. Monastrell located in southeastern Spain in 2018 and 2019 seasons.

	Index	Equation	References
<b>GI</b>	Greenness Index	$\frac{R_{530}}{R_{670}}$	(Zarco-Tejada et al. 2005)
<b>GNDVI</b>	Green Normalized Difference Vegetation Index	$\frac{R_{500} - R_{670}}{R_{500} + R_{670}}$	(Gitelson and Merzlyak 1998)
<b>MCARI</b>	Modified Chlorophyll Absorption in Reflectance Index	$[(R_{700} - R_{670}) - 0.2 * (R_{700} - R_{530})] * (\frac{R_{700}}{R_{670}})$	(Daughtry et al. 2000)
<b>MCARI1</b>	Modified Chlorophyll Absorption in Reflectance Index 1	$1.2 * [2.5 * (R_{500} - R_{670}) - 1.3 * (R_{500} - R_{530})]$	(Haboudane et al. 2004)
<b>MCARI2</b>	Modified Chlorophyll Absorption in Reflectance Index 2	$\frac{1.2 * [2.5 * (R_{500} - R_{670}) - 1.3 * (R_{500} - R_{530})]}{\sqrt{(2 * R_{500} + 1)^2 - 6 * (R_{500} - 5 * R_{670})} - 0.5}$	(Haboudane et al. 2004)
<b>MSAVI</b>	Improved Soil-Adjusted Vegetation Index	$\frac{(2 * R_{500} + 1 - \sqrt{(2 * R_{500} + 1)^2 - 8 * (R_{500} - R_{670})})}{2}$	(Qi et al. 1994)
<b>MSR</b>	Modified Simple Ratio	$\frac{\frac{R_{500}}{R_{670}} - 1}{\sqrt{\frac{R_{500}}{R_{670}} + 1}}$	(Chen 1996)
<b>MTVI3</b>	Modified Triangular Vegetation Index	$1.2 * [1.2 * (R_{500} - R_{530}) - 2.5 * (R_{670} - R_{530})]$	(Rodríguez-Pérez et al. 2007)
<b>NDVI</b>	Normalized Difference Vegetation Index	$\frac{R_{500} - R_{670}}{R_{500} + R_{670}}$	(Rouse et al. 1974)
<b>TCARI/OSAVI</b>	Transformed Chlorophyll Absorption in Reflectance Index/Optimized Soil-Adjusted Vegetation Index	$\frac{3 * [(R_{700} - R_{670}) - 0.2 * (R_{700} - R_{530}) * (R_{700}/R_{670})]}{(1 + 0.16) * (R_{500} - R_{670}) / (R_{500} + R_{670} + 0.16)}$	(Haboudane et al. 2002)
<b>SRI</b>	Simple Ratio Index	$\frac{R_{500}}{R_{530}}$	(Jordan 1969)
<b>RDVI</b>	Renormalized Difference Vegetation Index	$\frac{R_{500} - R_{670}}{\sqrt{R_{500} + R_{670}}}$	(Roujean and Breon 1995)

**Table 3** RGB VIs used in the present study calculated using the SONY-ILCE 5100 sensor's set of bands. These VIs were calculated for vineyard cv. Monastrell located in southeastern Spain in 2018 and 2019 seasons.

	Index	Equation	References
$\rho$	Normalized red	$\frac{R}{R+G+B}$	(Saberioon et al. 2014)
$\gamma$	Normalized green	$\frac{G}{R+G+B}$	(Saberioon et al. 2014)
$\beta$	Normalized blue	$\frac{B}{R+G+B}$	(Saberioon et al. 2014)
NGRDI	Normalized Green Red Difference Index	$\frac{\gamma - \beta}{\gamma + \beta}$	(Gitelson et al. 2002)
Ikaw	Kawashima Index	$\frac{\rho - \beta}{\rho + \beta}$	(Kawashima and Nakatani 1998)
ExR	Excess Red Vegetation Index	$1.4 * \rho - \gamma$	(Mao et al. 2003)
ExB	Excess Blue Vegetation Index	$1.4 * \beta - \gamma$	(Mao et al. 2003)
ExG	Excess Green Vegetation Index	$2 * \gamma - \rho - \beta$	(Mao et al. 2003)
ExGR	Excess Green minus Excess Red Index	$ExG - ExR$	(Mao et al. 2003)
RGRI	Red Green Ratio Index	$\frac{\rho}{\gamma}$	(Saberioon et al. 2014)
GLI	Green Leaf Index	$\frac{2 * \gamma - \rho - \beta}{2 * \gamma + \rho + \beta}$	(Louhaichi et al. 2001)
VARI	Visible Atmospherically Resistance Index	$\frac{\gamma - \rho}{\gamma + \rho - \beta}$	(Gitelson et al. 2002)

**Table 4** Pearson's correlation coefficients for the relationships between the most significant VIs with  $S_{\psi}$  (MPa\*days) in the 2018 season for the studied vineyard cv. Monastrell located in southeastern Spain.

	Multispectral VIs			RGB VIs		
	NDVI	GNDVI	RDVI	GLI	VARI	GCC
15 <sup>th</sup> June 2018	-0.06	-0.05	-0.26	0.19	0.07	-0.23
2 <sup>nd</sup> July 2018				-0.19	-0.16	-0.43
27 <sup>th</sup> July 2018	-0.27	-0.26	-0.17	-0.32	<b>-0.56</b>	<b>-0.81</b>
14 <sup>th</sup> August 2018	<b>-0.62</b>	<b>-0.66</b>	<b>-0.67</b>	<b>-0.70</b>	<b>-0.75</b>	<b>-0.82</b>
23 <sup>rd</sup> August 2018	<b>-0.65</b>	<b>-0.67</b>	<b>-0.66</b>	<b>-0.89</b>	<b>-0.85</b>	<b>-0.85</b>
19 <sup>th</sup> September 2018	<b>-0.64</b>	<b>-0.7</b>	<b>-0.59</b>			

**Table 5** Pearson's correlation coefficients for the relationships between the most significant VIs with  $S_v$  (MPa\*days) in the 2019 season for the studied vineyard cv. Monastrell located in southeastern Spain.

	Multispectral VIs			RGB VIs		
	NDVI	GNDVI	TCARI/OSAVI	GLI	VARI	GCC
19 <sup>th</sup> June 2019	1.2e-3	0.11	0.09	-0.24	-0.22	0.08
4 <sup>th</sup> July 2019	-0.28	-0.01	0.11	-0.41	-0.35	-0.37
16 <sup>th</sup> July 2019	-0.37	-0.3	0.35	<b>-0.53</b>	-0.39	-0.4
29 <sup>th</sup> July 2019	-0.32	-0.26	0.32	<b>-0.58</b>	-0.38	-0.34
14 <sup>th</sup> August 2019	-0.44	-0.34	0.35	<b>-0.5</b>	<b>-0.67</b>	<b>-0.53</b>
28 <sup>th</sup> August 2019	-0.35	-0.4	<b>0.63</b>	<b>-0.77</b>	<b>-0.75</b>	<b>-0.57</b>
18 <sup>th</sup> September 2019	<b>-0.51</b>	<b>-0.64</b>	<b>0.68</b>	-0.48	<b>-0.73</b>	-0.31

**Table 6** Statistics of generated simple linear regression models using the most significant RGB VIs\* as predictors in the 2018 and 2019 seasons for the studied vineyard cv. Monastrell located in southeastern Spain.

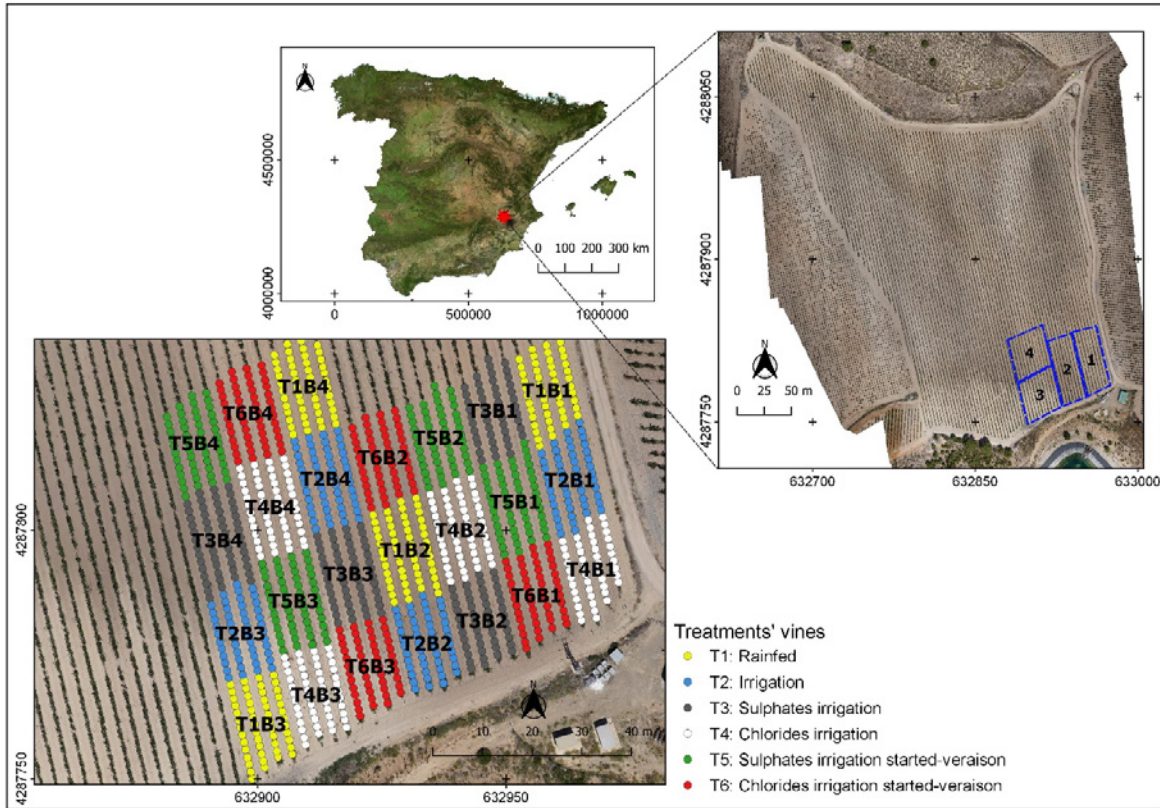
RGB VIs and GCC in 2018 season	GLI				VARI				GCC			
	R <sup>2</sup>	RE (%)	a	b	R <sup>2</sup>	RE (%)	a	b	R <sup>2</sup>	RE (%)	a	b
15 <sup>th</sup> June 2018	0.04	9.14	0.83	0.34	3.5e-3	9.29	0.27	0.42	0.05	9.06	-5.9e-3	0.48
2 <sup>nd</sup> July 2018	0.04	15.27	-9.25	6.62	0.03	15.35	-5.1	5.55	0.18	14.06	-0.11	6.57
27 <sup>th</sup> July 2018	0.11	15.65	-83	23.9	0.32	13.66	-115	24.56	<b>0.65</b>	<b>9.73</b>	-0.74	22.68
14 <sup>th</sup> August 2018	0.48	12.79	-273.75	49.94	<b>0.56</b>	<b>11.78</b>	-209.08	37.05	<b>0.67</b>	<b>10.22</b>	-1.49	45.06
23 <sup>rd</sup> August 2018	<b>0.8</b>	<b>8.75</b>	-479.01	74.42	<b>0.72</b>	<b>10.35</b>	-346.75	46.1	<b>0.73</b>	<b>10.19</b>	-1.78	57.81

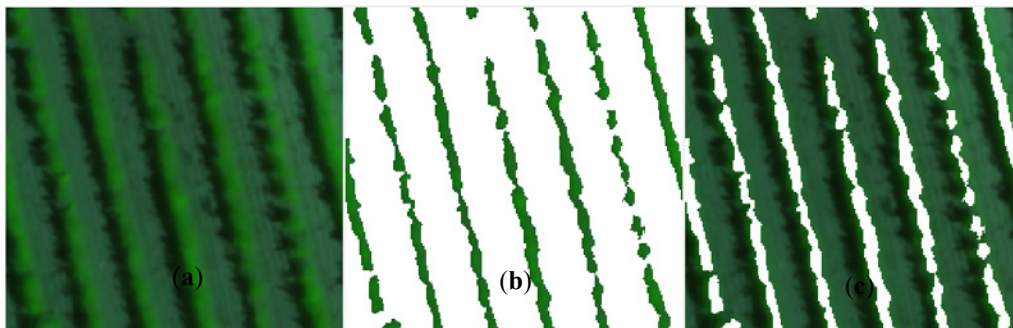
RGB VIs and GCC in 2019 season	GLI				VARI				GCC			
	R <sup>2</sup>	RE (%)	a	b	R <sup>2</sup>	RE (%)	a	b	R <sup>2</sup>	RE (%)	a	b
19 <sup>th</sup> June 2019	0.06	26.67	-4.81	1.04	0.05	26.74	-3.03	0.64	6.7e-3	27.37	6.8e-3	0.43
4 <sup>th</sup> July 2019	0.17	40.03	-57.03	12.02	0.13	41	-47.81	7.69	0.13	40.75	-0.17	5.45
16 <sup>th</sup> July 2019	0.29	28.76	-116.12	21.01	0.15	31.43	-46.51	10.17	0.16	31.31	-0.32	10.2
29 <sup>th</sup> July 2019	0.32	24.38	-252.7	37.58	0.15	27.33	-84.73	15.48	0.11	27.87	-0.39	15.26
14 <sup>th</sup> August 2019	0.25	22.85	-433.9	52.23	0.46	19.43	-297.98	27.67	0.28	22.41	-0.79	30.71
28 <sup>th</sup> August 2019	<b>0.59</b>	<b>18.32</b>	-590.43	94.73	<b>0.55</b>	<b>19.24</b>	-434.1	47.11	0.33	23.53	-2.52	53.22
18 <sup>th</sup> September 2019	0.23	28.88	-505.38	81.4	<b>0.55</b>	<b>22.02</b>	-986.13	49.9	0.09	31.22	-1.36	47.96

R<sup>2</sup>: coefficient of determination; RE: relative error; a and b: coefficients of the generated model's equation ( $S_v = ax + b$ )

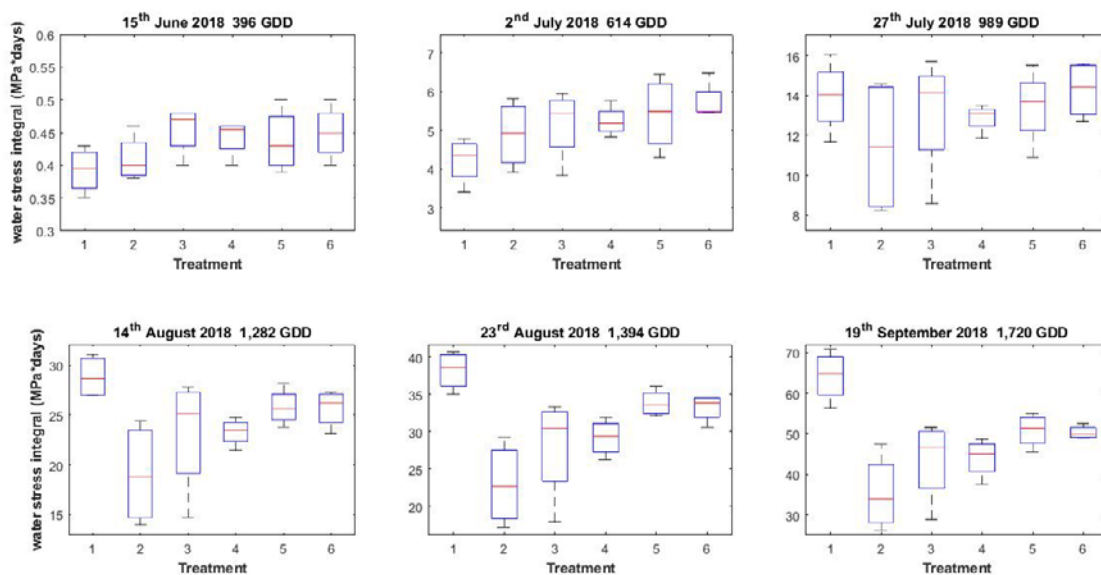
\*: statistics of generated simple linear regression models using multispectral VIs as predictors are not shown because all analyzed models including multispectral VIs as predictor reached R<sup>2</sup> values of <0.5. Therefore, multispectral VIs offered weak results in 2018 and 2019.



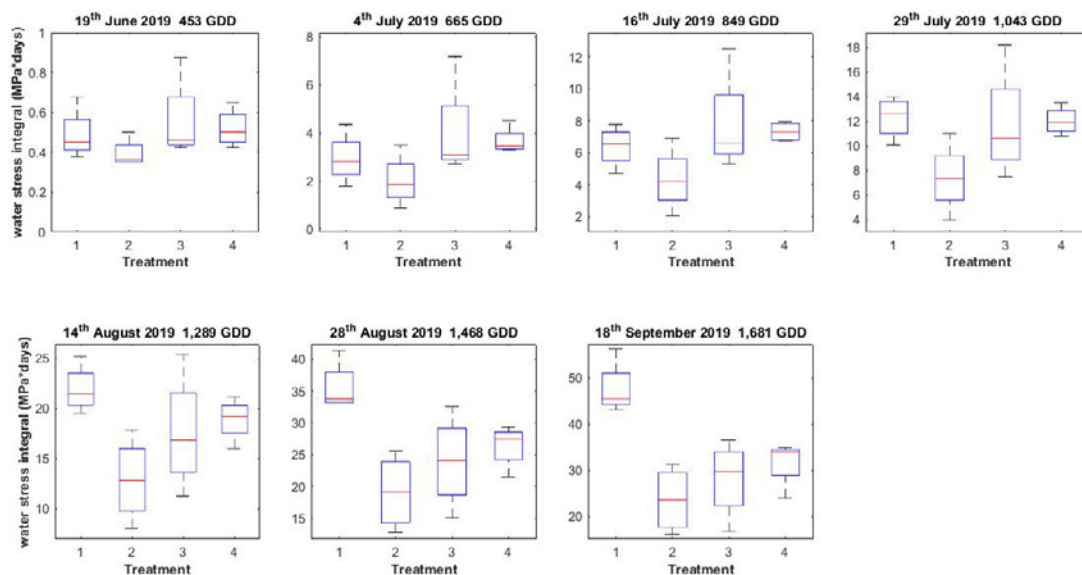
**Figure 1** Location of the commercial vineyard cv. Monastrell in southeastern Spain, and replicate plot field distribution where the study was performed during 2018 and 2019 seasons. Each coloured dot corresponds to a grapevine plant.



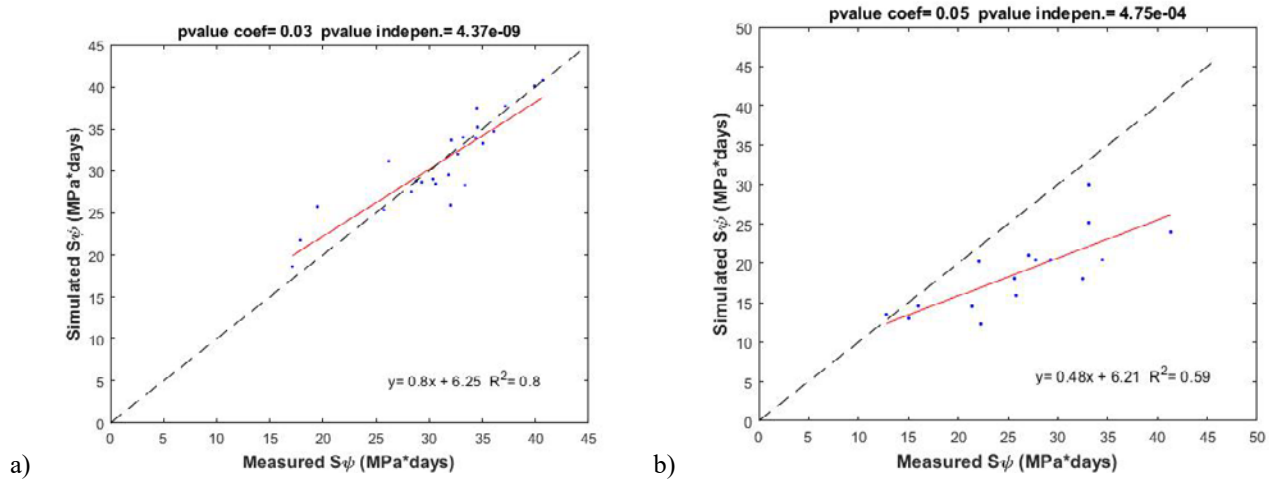
**Figure 2** Three resulting images from well-illuminated vegetation segmentation with MS-GEO-LAIC, used for segmenting multispectral images: (A) the selected portion of the image; (B) the values of the pixels corresponding with the selected clusters; and (C) the values of the pixels corresponding to the unselected clusters.



**Figure 3** Water stress integral (MPa\*days) of studied vineyard for different treatments of experimental design at different sampling dates in 2018 season.



**Figure 4** Water stress integral (MPa\*days) of studied vineyard for different treatments of experimental design at different sampling dates in 2019 season.



**Figure 5** Regression line of: (A) measured  $S\psi$  and simulated  $S\psi$  with the calibrated model that used as predictor GLI data for 23rd August 2018 with 1,394 GDD, and (B) the validation process using the equation of the calibrated model with GLI data of 28th August 2019 with 1,468 GDD, similar to the calibrated model (1,394 GDD).