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French winegrowers seek €4 billion to shield 70% of vineyards from climate damage

The industry group says prevention would cost less than repeated state compensation for frost, hail, drought losses.

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France’s independent winegrowers are urging the government to back a €4 billion investment plan to protect most of the country’s vineyards from hail, frost and drought, arguing that public money should be used more to prevent climate damage than to compensate for losses after the fact.

The proposal was set out Monday by the Vignerons Indépendants, a national group representing independent wine producers, in comments published by the French trade outlet Réussir Vigne. Jean-Marie Fabre, the group’s president, said the goal would be to

physically protect 70% of the French vineyard over five years, at an estimated cost of €10,000 per hectare.

Fabre said weather-related shocks are no longer occasional events for growers. “Today, a year without climate hazards is the exception,” he said, according to Réussir Vigne. He argued that, as climate disruption intensifies, France needs to move toward protection systems in the field rather than relying mainly on emergency aid once crops have already been damaged.

The growers’ plan would mark a significant change in approach for a wine industry that has faced repeated losses from late frosts, hailstorms and prolonged dry periods. Under the proposal, part of the money would come from the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development, or Feader, which the group said could contribute €2 billion. Regional governments would add another €1 billion, leaving the French state to provide €200 million a year over five years, or €1 billion in total.

Fabre presented the proposal as a cost-saving measure over time, despite the large initial outlay. He said the French state had already paid €2 billion in compensation over the past three years. He also said that a 10% loss in the vineyard translates into a €610 million hit to tax revenue, linking crop damage not only to farm income but also to public finances.

The group’s argument comes at a sensitive time for French viticulture. Producers in several regions have been dealing with weak consumption, market imbalances and pressure on margins, while extreme weather has made harvest outcomes harder to predict. In that setting, the growers are trying to shift the policy debate away from crisis management and toward capital spending on protective equipment and infrastructure.

Réussir Vigne did not detail in the cited report which protection systems would be financed, but the group’s language points to direct vineyard measures against major climate risks, including hail, frost and drought. Such investments in France can include anti-hail nets, frost protection equipment, irrigation-related systems where rules allow, and other tools designed to reduce physical damage in the vineyard.

Fabre compared the requested public effort with support already granted elsewhere in the wine sector. He noted that aid made available in 2025 for vine uprooting and distillation totaled €310 million. His comparison suggested that, in the group’s view, the state is already spending heavily to manage the effects of structural and climatic stress, and could redirect part of that logic toward prevention.

The economic stakes extend beyond grape growers. If more vineyards are protected and harvest volumes become less volatile, that could help stabilize wine supply for producers, merchants and exporters. It could also reduce some pressure on public compensation systems in bad years. For the broader beverages sector, especially wine, a more reliable crop could support continuity in domestic production and help French companies defend market share abroad, although those effects would depend on how widely protections are installed and how severe future weather events become.

Fabre framed the issue in strategic terms. He said stronger vineyard protection would mean the state and national solidarity mechanisms are called on less often for indemnities, while growers would be better able to preserve market share through protected harvests. He also said jobs would be less exposed than they are now when repeated climate shocks cut yields and weaken estates.

His comments put pressure on Paris to decide how far it is willing to go in supporting a sector that remains central to many rural economies and to France’s export image. “The state must choose between supporting viticulture or abandoning the sector,” Fabre said, warning that the industry risks falling behind if policy does not adapt to more frequent climate damage.