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Switzerland Drops Plan to Tie Wine Import Rights to Purchases of Domestic Grapes

Winegrower groups say the new federal strategy will not ease the crisis facing Swiss producers.

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Switzerland has dropped plans to tie wine import rights to purchases of domestic grapes, a decision that has drawn a strong response from winegrower groups that say the federal government is not doing enough to address the crisis in the country’s wine

industry.

At a meeting in Bern, Federal Councillor Guy Parmelin presented a new federal strategy for supporting Swiss viticulture. According to the Swiss government, the plan rests on three main steps: adjusting vineyard area to match demand, strengthening promotion and exports, and changing import rules. The measures are meant to support Swiss wine production and improve the market position of Swiss wines at home and abroad.

One of the ideas examined earlier would have linked the allocation of Switzerland's World Trade Organization wine tariff quota of 170 million liters to the purchase and pressing of Swiss grapes. In practice, that would have created a form of domestic preference within the import system. The federal government said the proposal did not win majority support during consultations with stakeholders, and it has now been set aside.

Instead, Bern is proposing to extend payments for voluntary vine removal so that production capacity can be reduced where needed. It also said Swiss wine exports could receive additional support through future trade agreements. A further change would put the WTO wine tariff quota up for auction as part of the 2027 package of ordinances. The Federal Council is expected to open a public consultation on the proposals in January 2027.

The strategy follows discussions launched by Parmelin's Department of Economic Affairs, Education and Research in August 2025 with the Swiss Farmers' Union, the Interprofession of Vine and Swiss Wines, the Swiss Winegrowers' Federation, Swiss Wine Promotion, the Swiss Wine Trade Association and cantonal authorities. Those talks were aimed at finding measures to help a sector under pressure.

Winegrower organizations reacted with disappointment and concern after the government's latest position became public. In a joint statement, the Swiss Winegrowers' Federation, the Interprofession of Vine and Swiss Wines and the Swiss Farmers' Union said they deeply regretted the decision to abandon the domestic preference plan. They argued that Swiss wine producers remain exposed to major challenges and said the three-part strategy presented by the department would not correct the imbalance affecting the sector.

Another group, the Swiss association of independent winegrowers and winemakers, accused Parmelin of misleading producers and said he was putting the interests of the wine trade ahead of vineyard families. The Interprofession of Vine and Wine of Valais, one of the country’s most important wine regions, also criticized the plan. It called the government’s move a decision without courage and said Bern had failed to take responsibility in the face of the current crisis.

The dispute centers on how far the federal government should go in protecting domestic production while staying within a broader market framework. Growers had pushed for stronger measures that would have directly connected imports to support for Swiss production. The government, by contrast, has moved toward a system that focuses on reducing excess capacity, promoting sales and exports, and reshaping the import mechanism rather than limiting market access through a domestic purchasing condition.

The decision matters beyond vineyard policy. By ruling out a requirement that importers buy Swiss grapes in order to secure access to the main wine quota, Switzerland is avoiding a new barrier that could have affected foreign wine suppliers and domestic distributors. At the same time, a shift to auctioned import rights could change costs and competitive conditions for wine importers, traders and other businesses linked to the beverage market, depending on how the final rules are designed.

For Swiss producers, the central issue is whether the new package can stabilize a market that many in the industry say is under severe strain. The government’s answer is to reduce vineyard area where necessary and try to raise the value and reach of Swiss wine. Grower groups say that approach falls far short of the stronger intervention they had sought, setting up what is likely to be a contentious consultation process when the proposal formally goes out for public review early next year.