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Spain and France launch grapevine trials to cut farm chemical use by up to 70%

The TRANSFERES project will compare disease-resistant, drought-tolerant vines in border wine regions as climate change strains southern Europe's vineyards

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A new cross-border research project in Spain and France will test grapevine varieties that are more resistant to fungal diseases and better able to cope with drought, as wine producers face mounting pressure from climate change, crop losses and tighter limits

on farm chemical use.

On Thursday, November 19, the Basque research center NEIKER said it is coordinating TRANSFERES, a project designed to study how new and underused grape varieties perform in different wine-growing areas on both sides of the border. The work will focus on vines resistant to diseases such as downy mildew and powdery mildew, and on varieties that can tolerate environmental stress, especially water shortages.

The project comes as vineyards across southern Europe face hotter temperatures, more irregular rainfall and shifting disease patterns. Those changes are altering growing conditions and affecting both yields and vineyard management. NEIKER said the spread of disease, combined with growing pathogen resistance to plant protection products, is increasing pressure on growers to find alternatives that can maintain production with fewer chemical treatments.

That push also aligns with European Union policy. NEIKER said the bloc’s Farm to Fork strategy calls for a 50% reduction in the use and risk of plant protection products by 2030. Resistant grape varieties could help move producers in that direction. According to the research center, these vines contain genetic traits that allow them to withstand fungal diseases and could reduce the need for phytosanitary treatments by as much as 70%.

TRANSFERES will examine both improved and little-used traditional varieties in several producing areas in Spain and France. Researchers plan to measure agronomic performance, plant health, environmental impact, response to stress and the quality of grapes destined for winemaking. The aim is not only to determine whether these vines survive under tougher conditions, but also whether they can produce fruit suitable for commercial wine production.

Ana Diez, a researcher in NEIKER’s Department of Plant Production and Protection and the project’s coordinator, said understanding how these varieties behave under different climate and soil conditions is essential before growers can make decisions about introducing them into production systems. The project is meant to give producers clearer evidence on whether the varieties are viable in real vineyard conditions.

France’s experience is expected to play a central role. NEIKER said French partners already have broader practical use of resistant varieties, and some are being used in commercial wine production. That knowledge will be shared with Spanish participants through the project, while trials in different Spanish climates and soils will give French partners more data on how these varieties adapt outside their current production settings.

The initiative also includes a strong outreach component. Organizers said they will hold demonstration events, cross-border meetings and information sessions aimed at regulators, producers and technical staff. The project will also produce technical documents, publications and communication tools, and it plans to build links with wine appellations, cooperatives, wineries and research bodies so results can continue to be used after the formal project ends.

Another part of the work will study how society views these varieties, a factor that could shape their commercial future. Acceptance by consumers and by the broader wine market may prove as important as vineyard performance if producers are to adopt unfamiliar grapes at scale.

That question carries broader implications for the beverage sector. If resistant and drought-tolerant vines can be introduced without undermining grape quality, they could offer wineries a way to cut production risks, reduce treatment costs and preserve supply under more extreme weather conditions. Over time, that could help support more stable wine output in regions facing stronger climate pressure, though the commercial impact will depend on field results and market acceptance.

TRANSFERES brings together seven research and industry organizations from Spain and France: NEIKER; the Center for Food Research and Technology of Aragon, or CITA Aragon; ARTOMAÑA TXAKOLINA, S.L.; the Catalan Institute of Vine and Wine, or INCAVI; the French Vine and Wine Institute, IFV Pôle Sud-Ouest; the Chamber of Agriculture of Haute-Garonne; and Viñas del Vero S.A.U.

The project has a total budget of 1,008,436.39 euros, including 655,483.65 euros from the European Regional Development Fund. It began on January 1 and is scheduled to run through December 31, 2028. NEIKER said the project is 65% co-financed by the

European Union through the Interreg VI-A Spain-France-Andorra program, known as POCTEFA 2021-2027, which supports stronger economic and social integration across the border region.