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Catalonia examines more than 100 grape contracts for possible below-cost purchases

Officials widened enforcement of Spain’s food chain law after growers said some wineries offered less than €0.30 per kilogram

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Catalonia’s regional government has expanded its scrutiny of the wine sector and is now examining more than 100 grape purchase contracts for possible buying below production cost, according to a report published by ARA on Saturday, Nov. 21.

The cases center on possible breaches of Spain’s food chain law 16/2021, which bars buyers from paying less than the cost of producing an agricultural product. ARA said the Catalan Department of Agriculture, Livestock, Fisheries and Food has stepped up its work since October, when the newspaper reported that about 50 contracts were already under review. The latest figure suggests the number of investigations has more than doubled as officials widened their checks.

Much of that increase has come from inspections opened on the department’s own initiative, according to the report. Some cases also stem from complaints filed by farmers, farm groups and other industry participants, but ARA said many of the new inquiries were launched directly by technicians at CadeCAT, the unit that oversees commercial relations in Catalonia’s agri-food chain. The stepped-up enforcement reflects what sector sources described to the newspaper as a highly tense moment for winegrowers and wineries.

All of the cases are still at an early stage. ARA reported that officials are currently collecting and reviewing documents from the parties involved to determine whether any file should move into a formal sanctioning phase. Opening a formal case would not mean an immediate penalty, but it would start a process that could end in fines if authorities conclude that the contracts violated the law.

Under the legal framework cited by ARA, fines can range from €250 to €3,000 for minor violations, from €3,000 to €100,000 for serious violations, and from €100,000 to €1 million for very serious violations. Any sanctions would remain subject to objections and appeals. The names of producers or buyers penalized would only become public after any court process had been exhausted, the report said.

Department sources cited by ARA expect the review of the files to move forward in the coming days and to be well advanced by late December. Even so, the procedures are expected to continue into 2027 because the parties under investigation are likely to challenge any formal findings.

The stronger enforcement follows a harvest season in which grape prices became one of the main disputes in the sector. In August, seven farm organizations said several wine producers had presented offers for grapes at prices “well below” production costs.

According to ARA, those groups said some wineries were offering less than €0.30 per kilogram, far below the reference production cost published this year by the Catalan Institute of Vine and Wine, or Incavi, at €0.53 to €0.56 per kilogram.

ARA noted, however, that Incavi's figures are only a benchmark and do not automatically determine whether a contract is illegal. CadeCAT technicians are assessing each contract individually, with the key question being whether the agreed price was below the real cost of producing the grapes covered by that specific deal.

The broadening investigation matters beyond the immediate dispute between growers and buyers because it could tighten oversight of contracts across the wine supply chain and raise the potential sanction risk for wineries and other operators that purchase grapes. For the beverage industry, that means closer scrutiny of how raw materials are priced and documented, with possible effects on sourcing practices and negotiations between growers and producers.

The contract reviews are unfolding as wine production in Catalonia shows signs of recovery after several difficult years marked by drought and weak yields. Data presented in early November by the Agro-food, Rural and Environmental Observatory showed that the region produced 356,506 metric tons of grapes in this year's harvest, up 3.9% from the 2025 campaign. Incavi said the figures pointed to a sector recovering from very low levels, although it also said that a lack of spring rain and high summer temperatures had reduced what were initially expected to be stronger gains.

Weather conditions shaped both the size and timing of the harvest. According to the figures cited by ARA, summer heat hit earlier-ripening varieties such as chardonnay and macabeu especially hard, while rain at the end of August helped later-ripening varieties including xarel·lo and parellada. The campaign was also marked by an earlier harvest calendar across the region as warm conditions sped up ripening.