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British wine industry booms: plantings soar by 74% in five years amid rising demand

English and welsh wines garner increasing interest, boosting viticulture across Great Britain

Tuesday, June 27, 2023



The British wine industry is experiencing a period of unprecedented growth, as indicated by a whopping 74% increase in plantings over the past five years, a recent WineGB report reveals. The increase is driven by the soaring demand for English and Welsh wines, inspiring producers to expand their vineyards, thereby enhancing the UK's

reputation as a significant player in the global wine market.

Currently, Great Britain is home to 943 vineyards, with a total of 3,928 hectares under vine. England leads with a staggering 3,855 hectares under vine, followed by Wales with 70.3 hectares and Scotland with a modest 1.9 hectares dedicated to viticulture. This significant expansion mirrors the robust growth and vitality within the UK's wine sector.

The production volume also experienced a robust increase, as the industry produced 12.2 million bottles in 2022, a stark 130% increase from the 5.3 million bottles produced five years earlier. Notably, sparkling wine continues to dominate, accounting for 68% of the total production, maintaining a consistent figure over the last five years.

Official government figures now label viticulture as the fastest-growing agricultural sector in the UK. This booming industry employs 2,300 individuals on a full-time basis, with an additional 8,300 people engaged in part-time or seasonal work, offering an important source of income for thousands of Britons.

Looking ahead, WineGB surveyed its members, representing over 90% of the country's wine production, about the industry's trajectory over the next decade. Predictions from the respondents suggest an upward trend, with the total area under vine in Great Britain expected to increase to 7,600 hectares by 2032. Similarly, the annual production volume is projected to reach between 25 million and 29 million bottles.

"This truly is an exciting time for English and Welsh wine," remarked Sam Linter, Chair of WineGB. "We have become an internationally acclaimed wine-growing region of the highest quality."

Kent emerged as a hotspot for wine production, accounting for 1,033 hectares under vine – a significant 26% of the country's total plantings. West Sussex, East Sussex, Hampshire, and Essex followed with their respective vineyard areas. In terms of grape varieties, Chardonnay leads, accounting for 31% of total plantings, followed by Pinot Noir (29%), Pinot Meunier (9%), Bacchus (8%), and Seyval (3%).

During the pandemic, direct-to-consumer sales surged to represent 57% of all sales of English and sparkling wines. However, this figure has now decreased to 30%, with the retail trade – supermarkets and independent stores – becoming the largest channel, accounting for 41% of sales.

WineGB predicts growth across all categories. "Consumers are demanding more locally produced, environmentally friendly products, something that English and Welsh wines are in a unique position to deliver," said interim CEO Ned Awty.

Tourism, another vital revenue stream for the industry, experienced a significant post-pandemic boost. Visitor numbers at Great British wineries increased by 17% year-on-year in 2022, contributing to 24% of the industry's revenue.

In conclusion, the burgeoning British wine industry paints a promising picture, driven by increasing demand and commitment to quality. It offers a testament to the UK's capabilities in crafting internationally acclaimed wines and boosting the local economy through job creation and tourism. As we look ahead, it's clear that the sector is ripe for further growth and exploration.