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Bordeaux winegrowers rise in protest

Bordeaux winegrowers join national farmers' demonstrations

Wednesday, January 31, 2024



In an unprecedented move, winegrowers from Bordeaux, traditionally seen as the bastions of French viniculture, have taken to the streets to join a nationwide farmers' demonstration, voicing their distress over escalating costs and excessive regulatory demands. This collective action has seen major disruptions, including road blockades around the bustling city of Bordeaux and more symbolic protests like dumping manure and igniting bonfires in front of the Gironde regional government headquarters.

The core of the unrest lies in the French government's decision to eliminate a tax concession on agricultural diesel fuel, a critical component in the operational costs of farming and viticulture. Winegrowers, alongside other farmers, argue that the removal of this tax break, coupled with rising electricity costs and an array of government fees, has placed an unsustainable financial burden on them. Additionally, they express frustration over being overwhelmed by regulatory paperwork, which they claim hampers their operational efficiency and profitability.

Jean-Samuel Eynard, a prominent figure in the Gironde agricultural sector and president of the FNSEA in Gironde, has publicly expressed the severity of the situation, stating that the level of desperation among winegrowers is unparalleled. Echoing his concerns, Vincent Bougès, president of the Young Farmers of Gironde, highlighted the unsustainable nature of certain costs and expressed a desire for wine products to be appropriately valued and sold at fair prices.

In response to these challenges, the protestors have made specific demands, including the establishment of a minimum price for bulk wine by the Bordeaux wine trade and a reduction in the fees smaller growers are required to pay to the Bordeaux Wine Council. These demands reflect a broader call for economic sustainability and recognition of the value of their produce in the face of market pressures and regulatory constraints.

The demonstrations have not only included road blockades but have also targeted bottling facilities in the south of France, with reports of bonfires being lit outside the gates of major plants, including those owned by Castel in Capiscol and Grands Chais de France in Baume. These actions signify the protestors' determination to make their grievances heard and to push for meaningful changes that would alleviate the financial and regulatory pressures they face.

As the situation unfolds, the winegrowers have announced plans to escalate their protests by blocking the motorway near the renowned wine-producing regions of Sauternes and Graves in the coming week. This move underscores the critical nature of their demands and signals a deepening crisis that could have significant implications for the Bordeaux wine industry and French agriculture more broadly.

The Bordeaux winegrowers' decision to join the farmers' demonstrations represents a pivotal moment in the ongoing dialogue between the agricultural sector and the French government. It highlights the urgent need for policy adjustments and support mechanisms that recognize the unique challenges faced by those who are at the heart of producing some of France's most celebrated wines. As negotiations continue, the hope remains that a resolution can be found that addresses the winegrowers' concerns while ensuring the long-term sustainability and success of the French viticultural heritage.