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A Lifeline for French Vineyards

From Bordeaux to the Rhône Valley, winegrowers receive a crucial financial boost

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Marc Fesneau, Agriculture Minister

In a significant development aimed at bolstering the French viticulture industry amidst an agricultural crisis, Agriculture Minister Marc Fesneau announced a substantial increase in emergency funding for winegrowers. The announcement, made on a recent broadcast on Sud Radio, detailed the expansion of the "emergency fund" from 20 million euros to an impressive 80 million euros. This financial boost is designated for

vineyards in crisis-stricken regions, ranging from Bordeaux to the southern areas of the Rhône Valley.

The decision to quadruple the emergency fund comes in response to the severe challenges faced by the wine sector, particularly in areas hit hard by diseases such as mildew, which had a significant impact on Bordeaux's production in 2023. The increased financial support aims to address the hardships of winegrowers by covering various adversities encountered across the crisis-afflicted viticultural regions. The minister highlighted the government's commitment to absorbing the interest on loans for the year 2024 to alleviate the financial strain on struggling vineyards.

This enhanced emergency fund is part of a broader strategy to support the agricultural sector, which also includes a proposed campaign for vine pulling to address overproduction issues. The campaign, pending approval from the European Commission, could see funding up to 150 million euros, potentially affecting up to 100,000 hectares of vineyards. This initiative offers two options for winegrowers: temporary uprooting for replanting with climate-resistant or market-demanded grape varieties, or permanent removal as part of a shift towards agricultural diversification.

The announcement follows Prime Minister Gabriel Attal's assurance that the promised emergency funding would be released "before the end of the week," as stated in his policy speech at the National Assembly. The rapid deployment of the fund, with application processes starting in prefectures on February 5, 2024, and initial payments expected before the Paris International Agricultural Show on February 24, underscores the government's urgency in addressing the sector's challenges.

Moreover, the readiness to finance a vine pulling campaign last autumn, aimed at mitigating overproduction, signifies a strategic approach to revitalizing the French viticulture landscape. The European Commission has already green-lit a co-financed vine pulling plan in Bordeaux, France's premier AOC vineyard, with more than 1,200 applications for approximately 8,000 hectares of vine removal.

This comprehensive support package illustrates the French government's proactive stance in safeguarding its viticulture heritage and ensuring the sustainability of its wine industry amidst evolving climate challenges and market demands. As these measures

are rolled out, the viticulture sector anticipates a period of significant transformation, aimed at enhancing resilience and securing the future of French wine.