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Fungal Foe Threatens Bordeaux

Early Mildew Outbreak Sparks Concern

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As Bordeaux celebrated the en primeur tastings of its 2023 vintages, an unwelcome guest has also made its presence known—mildew. The early outbreak has been described as both "early and very virulent," marking a challenging season for one of the world's most revered wine regions. This situation, compounded by the recent wet and warm conditions, has sparked significant concern among local winegrowers and experts.

Alexandre Davy from the French Institute of Vine and Wine (IFV) highlighted during a CIVB webinar that mildew is rampant "almost everywhere" in the Libourne area and occurs "frequently or even very frequently." The situation is somewhat similar in Graves, albeit more sporadic, and scattered instances have also been reported in the Médoc region.

Bordeaux's weather from September 2023 to April this year has been notably severe for vineyards, with Saint-Émilion receiving 950mm of rain compared to the average 544mm. Moreover, the region has experienced temperatures about 1.3 degrees Celsius above the norm, creating ideal conditions for mildew to thrive.

The early onset of this fungal menace means that winegrowers are forced to increase their vine treatment schedules and bolster plant protection efforts. Despite proactive measures, including early spraying, the rapid leaf growth post-treatment may leave new foliage vulnerable to infection. This necessitates a continuous and vigilant approach to vineyard management this season.

The looming threat of warmer weather following recent colder days could exacerbate the situation, potentially leading to further outbreaks across Bordeaux's vast vineyards.

Recognizing the psychological and economic toll on winegrowers, MSA Gironde established a helpline last year to support those affected by the recurrent mildew challenges. This initiative reflects the broader community's effort to rally behind its vine cultivators during such critical times.

Marie Loustalan Prévost from Château Grand Corbin-Despagne voiced concerns earlier this February about the persistent struggles with mildew, particularly under Bordeaux's oceanic climate which tends to be more humid. This humidity further complicates the management of fungal diseases, making them tougher to control.

As Bordeaux winegrowers navigate this challenging period, the industry watches closely, knowing the impact this could have on the quality and quantity of the forthcoming vintages. The resilience of Bordeaux's vineyards is being tested once again, highlighting the ever-present influence of climate on viticulture and the indomitable spirit of those who cultivate one of the world's most cherished wine regions.