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Study Predicts Extreme Weather for English Wine Country

Soggy Forecast Threatens England's Wine Boom

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Imagine rolling vineyards bathed in the soft light of a summer's evening, the air filled with the earthy scent of ripening grapes. Now picture those same vineyards under relentless downpours, battered by hailstorms, and even the occasional mini tornado. This might sound like the stuff of dystopian novels, but according to a recent climate study by the World Weather Attrition group, this could very well be the future of English wine country.

The study paints a rather soggy picture for the next decade, with Britain facing monsoon-like rains, more frequent hailstorms, and the occasional "mini tornado." It's a forecast that's bound to make English wine producers a bit jittery about their future. The climate experts from a well-known London university are particularly concerned about the increased likelihood of massive supercell storms throughout the year, which bring with them the threat of flash flooding. The southern and central regions of England, already warmer, are expected to bear the brunt of these weather changes.

This scenario poses significant challenges for England's burgeoning wine industry, which is at a pivotal point in its growth. Come 2024, the English wine market is set to reach a new level of maturity. However, flood-prone vineyards could face severe outbreaks of downy mildew, akin to the recent devastating bout in Bordeaux. While climate change has thus far been a double-edged sword for English viticulture—bringing warmer temperatures and higher yields—it's also throwing up hurdles that could hinder this progress.

One of the key strategies experts are considering is reforesting barren hills to help soak up excess rainwater during torrential downpours. Others are focusing on improving drainage systems to mitigate flood risks. These measures could significantly influence land prices, making vineyard investors much more meticulous in their due diligence. Vineyard managers will need to pay close attention to a site's flood risk, its proximity to bodies of water, elevation, and soil type. Grapevines are notoriously intolerant of waterlogged conditions, making such factors crucial.

With climate change, more land might become suitable for grape cultivation, but it's essential not to take unnecessary risks. Experts predict a growing polarization in vineyard values, with prime land fetching increasingly higher prices compared to less desirable plots. In the southeast, even if rainfall events become more frequent, the price for top-quality land is expected to rise. The market for vineyard land will become highly localized, with plots just a few miles apart having vastly different values.

Establishing a vineyard is a capital-intensive endeavor, and buying land with unacceptable risks doesn't make financial sense. Flood-prone vineyards could become unsellable, posing a significant risk to investors. Currently, established vineyards in

England can command prices of up to £50,000 per acre, especially if the vines are well-maintained and under 10 years old. Bare land suitable for viticulture is selling for over £14,000 per acre, a figure that could easily rise to £20,000 or £25,000 under the right conditions.

WineGB, the national body representing the English wine industry, is committed to supporting its members in navigating the challenges of grape growing in a marginal climate. They recently joined forces with the Horticultural Crop Protection group, giving them access to shared knowledge, new plant protection products, and emergency authorizations when necessary. This partnership will enable growers to better respond to disease pressures and ensure they have the necessary information to safeguard their crops.

As we look to the future, it's clear that English wine producers will need to adapt to a changing climate, employing innovative strategies and making informed decisions to weather the storms ahead. The resilience and ingenuity of this industry will be key to maintaining and growing England's reputation as an emerging wine powerhouse, rain or shine.