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Climate Crisis Devastates Jura's 2024 Wine Harvest

Jura Winemakers Face Existential Threat Amidst Record Losses

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Winemakers in France's Jura region are grappling with what may be one of the most challenging harvests in recent memory. The 2024 vintage is anticipated to yield dramatically lower quantities, with losses estimated between 60% and 70% across many vineyards. Though the quality of the wine is expected to remain high, the significant reduction in volume is raising alarms about the long-term viability of the region's winemaking operations. This sharp downturn in production has been attributed

to a combination of adverse climatic conditions, particularly a devastating frost event in April, which hit the vines at a crucial stage of growth.

Benoît Sermier, a winemaker in the region, emphasized the detrimental timing of the frost. In late April, young shoots had barely developed a few leaves when the frost struck, scorching much of the vegetation and significantly reducing the number of clusters per vine. This early cold snap has had a dramatic impact on the vineyard's productivity, with 2024 shaping up to be one of the most difficult years in recent history.

The 2024 harvest was delayed until September due to these climatic setbacks, compared to the 2023 harvest which took place in late August. The frost wasn't the only issue slowing down this year's cycle—overall cooler temperatures in the spring delayed the flowering process, which in turn pushed back the harvest timeline. Sermier notes that while this is not the first time Jura winemakers have faced harsh frosts—2017, 2019, and 2021 also saw significant losses—the damage this year appears to be more severe. For younger winemakers, who are still working to establish their vineyards, these repeated setbacks present an even greater challenge, as they lack the stockpiles of older wine to help buffer against the lean years.

The challenges of the 2024 vintage are not confined to frost alone. An unusually wet climate since last fall has compounded the difficulties for winemakers. Patrick Rolet, a winemaker and cattle farmer in the region, explained that persistent rainfall has forced growers to treat their vines far more frequently than usual. This is particularly taxing for those practicing organic farming, where treatment options are more limited. Moreover, the wet conditions have promoted the spread of downy mildew, a fungal disease that affects vines and could pose an even greater threat in the future, potentially impacting the 2025 vintage as well.

Olivier Badoureaux, director of the Interprofessional Committee of Jura Wines (CIVJ), underscores the unprecedented nature of this year's losses. Historically, the region's average production hovers around 80,000 hectoliters per year. However, for 2024, they expect to produce just 25,000 to 30,000 hectoliters—a staggering drop. Badoureaux notes that this level of decline is unmatched in the past 25 years, and the region will

struggle to meet demand in the marketplace. Despite this, some winemakers are holding onto optimism, hoping that the quality of the 2024 wines, while limited in quantity, will be strong enough to sustain market interest.

Yet this optimism is tempered by a stark reality: the increasing volatility of the climate is making viticulture in the Jura ever more precarious. Winemaking in the region has always been a delicate balancing act, with the region's unique climate contributing to its distinctive wines. However, with frost becoming more frequent and severe, combined with wetter growing seasons, winemakers are facing an increasingly uphill battle.

The loss of yield is especially devastating in a region like Jura, which, while small in size compared to more renowned French wine regions like Bordeaux or Burgundy, has built a strong reputation for its unique varietals, such as Savagnin and Poulsard. The region's wines are cherished for their authenticity and connection to traditional winemaking methods, but the climatic instability threatens to erode the continuity that these winemakers rely upon. In particular, younger vintners are feeling the strain, as the financial hit from multiple difficult years leaves them struggling to maintain their businesses and invest in the future.

Sermier, Rolet, and many of their peers are coming to grips with a hard truth: climate change is reshaping the landscape of viticulture. Beyond frost and mildew, the overall predictability of the growing season is eroding, making it difficult to plan and adapt. For biodynamic and organic producers in particular, whose methods rely on natural processes, the impact is even more profound. Treatments that might mitigate frost damage are often not feasible within their farming frameworks, and they are left exposed to the full force of the elements.

While the 2024 harvest will undoubtedly produce high-quality wines, the economic and emotional toll on Jura's winemakers is immense. The hope for some is that the exceptional nature of these wines will bring enough attention and revenue to carry them through to a more stable season. However, as climatic patterns become increasingly unpredictable, the broader question looms: how sustainable is winemaking in the Jura in the face of climate change?

For now, producers will focus on salvaging what they can from this year's reduced crop, but the long-term solutions remain elusive. Investments in frost protection, such as wind machines or heating systems, might offer some relief, but these are costly measures that not all winemakers can afford. As the region faces what could be a new normal of erratic weather patterns, Jura's wine industry stands at a crossroads, forced to rethink its strategies in an increasingly uncertain world.

For wine lovers, the 2024 vintage from Jura will likely be a rare and sought-after find. The scarcity of bottles combined with the dedication and resilience of the winemakers will make it a memorable year in terms of quality. However, this vintage also serves as a stark reminder of the fragility of the winemaking tradition in regions like Jura, where nature's whims play an outsized role in shaping both the wines and the livelihoods of those who produce them.