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Austrian Sekt Sets Sights on Global Stage

Promising Harvest for Austrian Sekt

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Photo: Austrian Wine

The 2024 harvest is shaping up to be a promising vintage for Austrian sekt, known for its elegance and freshness. According to the Austrian Sekt Committee, this year's conditions—marked by an early start to the growing season and generally high temperatures—have not hindered the development of base wines for sekt but instead have contributed to a balanced and appealing expression. Effective time management

and adaptability to weather changes were crucial for producers, who had to optimize canopy management and soil cultivation to handle the challenges posed by varying conditions.

Michael Malat, a winemaker and head of the Austrian Sekt Committee's marketing team, reported that the analytical values from this year's harvest were nearly ideal. Malat highlighted that these figures indicate a quality harvest suitable for producing high-level sekt, emphasizing the meticulous care taken at every stage of viticulture.

The improvement in Austrian sekt quality has been evident since the introduction of the highest category, Sekt Austria (PDO), in 2015. This category is part of a structured system with three levels: Sekt Austria (PDO), Sekt Austria Reserve (PDO), and Sekt Austria Grosse Reserve (PDO). Revised as recently as February 2022, this framework has allowed ongoing refinement of winemaking practices, enhancing sekt's reputation both domestically and internationally.

The basic Sekt Austria (PDO) category has strict requirements, including the exclusive use of grapes harvested in a single Austrian state and approved for Qualitätswein production. Additionally, there is a minimum aging requirement on the lees: nine months if bottle-fermented and six months if tank-fermented. The Sekt Reserve category is also gaining prominence, with a strong focus on traditional methods, further securing its position in a competitive segment.

This drive toward superior quality is part of a broader effort to position Austrian sekt on the international stage. In 2022, Anika Riegler, who leads the international markets team for the Austrian Wine Marketing Board, emphasized that it was time to promote sekt more vigorously abroad. Riegler acknowledged that past strategies had not sufficiently highlighted sekt, prompting the launch of a campaign to attract global attention.

Despite these efforts, the latest figures from Austria's Wine Statistics Report reveal a 25.7% drop in the total value of sparkling wine exports in 2023 compared to the previous year. This decline in sekt exports is part of an overall 4.3% decrease in Austrian wine exports. The downturn is partly attributed to reduced bulk wine exports, reflecting a strategic shift toward strengthening quality wines.

Meanwhile, the Austrian winemaking community continues to refine sekt production techniques. In recent years, sekt has evolved into a category that balances tradition with modernity. The focus on precise and sustainable practices, along with adaptability to climate change, sustains high expectations for the 2024 harvest, which could further solidify sekt's status as a sparkling wine capable of competing in international markets.