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Winemakers' Revolt: Tensions Escalate at French-Spanish Border

Protests Highlight Struggles of Local Producers Against International Competition

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Protests by winemakers in southern France escalated this week, with strategic blockades and demonstrations targeting trade policies and international competition. One of the most notable incidents occurred at a toll station near the Spanish border,

where protesters stopped wine tanker trucks and emptied two carrying white wine destined for a négociant operation in Burgundy.

The unrest stems from dissatisfaction among French producers over the lack of support for wines made from locally grown grapes, a situation attributed to France's high production costs compared to more competitive pricing in countries like Spain. "We are uprooting our vines while they sell their wines here," a winemaker told the regional newspaper L'Indépendant during the blockade. Similar events have occurred before; last year, protesters destroyed a truck carrying Freixenet cava and emptied another tanker on the highway.

In addition to the competition from imported wines, winemakers and agricultural workers directed their anger at the Mercosur free trade agreement, which would ease the entry of agricultural products, including bulk wine, from South America. According to the demonstrators, this agreement would increase pressure on local producers already burdened by an oversaturated market and economic challenges.

The Tuesday protests extended beyond the French-Spanish border. In Agen, Agricultural Social Security offices were doused with manure, while in Rodez, protesters dumped manure and tires in front of regional government buildings. These actions reflect broader dissatisfaction within the agricultural sector, which is also grappling with uncertainty surrounding the future of European subsidies and regulations.

Adding to the tensions, the agricultural union Coordination Rurale announced potential food supply blockades. A spokesperson warned of plans to "paralyze and starve Toulouse" as a means of pressuring authorities to address their demands.

These demonstrations underline the vulnerability of the wine industry in southern France, a region historically tied to viticulture but increasingly strained by economic, trade, and climatic challenges. International market pressures and dependence on ever-changing agricultural policies leave producers facing an uncertain future as they seek solutions to ensure the survival of their livelihoods and traditions.