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Alsace wine producers confront sales slump as crémant emerges as only bright spot

Industry faces historic low harvests, financial strain, and calls for restructuring to secure future of the region

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The Alsace wine industry is facing a growing sales crisis, prompting urgent calls for change among producers. On July 24 in Colmar, Gilles Ehrhart, president of the Association des viticulteurs d’Alsace (AVA), addressed delegates at a pre-harvest assembly, urging them to focus production on Crémant d’Alsace. This sparkling wine remains the only segment in the region showing resilience amid declining market demand.

In 2024, Alsace vineyards sold 900,240 hectoliters of wine, with Crémant d’Alsace accounting for 306,339 hectoliters. While sales of still wines have dropped by 2.2% in the first half of 2025, crémant has maintained its pace. Ehrhart emphasized the need to direct more volume toward crémant to avoid further losses and to ensure enough supply for future commercialization, especially looking ahead to 2027.

The urgency is heightened by forecasts for the 2025 harvest, which is expected to yield just 768,114 hectoliters—a historically low figure for a region accustomed to producing around 900,000 hectoliters annually. Despite crémant's relative strength, overall annual sales have fallen by 20,000 hectoliters since the start of the year, now totaling 891,475 hectoliters. Ehrhart warned that producers may soon have to adapt to living with just 850,000 hectoliters per year.

This situation will require difficult decisions about vineyard restructuring and could have significant human, economic, and heritage impacts. Ehrhart encouraged struggling growers to seek support from the MSA's aid unit. The industry is also beginning a period of self-examination. At a seminar on July 7, Jérôme Bauer from the AVA board noted that the region lacks a clear strategic vision. Starting July 28, new commissions will address all issues without taboos—including profitability strategies, relaxing single-varietal rules in favor of blends (up to 85/15%), reconsidering packaging options like bag-in-box (BIB), establishing a hierarchy for crémants, strengthening quality control, succession planning, and even vineyard removal.

Ehrhart questioned whether maintaining all current vineyard hectares is sustainable in coming years and suggested that reducing vineyard area might be necessary.

Financial strain is already evident among producers. The Jean Geiler cooperative in Ingersheim—recently merged with Orschwiller and Hunawihr cooperatives to form an 880-hectare entity—told its 315 suppliers on July 23 that they would receive only half payment for their 2024 harvest. In Bas-Rhin, the Charles Wantz négociant in Barr is also facing serious difficulties.

Despite these challenges, some major players are investing in crémant production. Arthur Metz in Marlenheim has included a new aging hall as part of an €18 million investment over three years. In Colmar, Wolfberger cooperative is spending €2 million to modernize its production lines and increase capacity from 9,000 to 15,000 bottles per hour. The Grand Est region has supported Wolfberger with a €1.25 million interest-free loan over seven years due to the project's water and energy savings. Arthur Metz and Wolfberger each produce about eight million bottles of crémant annually.

As Alsace faces one of its most challenging periods in recent memory, producers are being pushed to adapt quickly or risk further decline in one of France’s most historic wine regions.