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Grape harvest ushers in Federweißer season in Franconia as Bavarian winemakers prepare for autumn traditions

Partially fermented wine returns to shops and bistros, with production expected to reach 200,000 liters despite higher prices

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In the Franconia region of Bavaria, grape harvests for Federweißer have begun, marking the start of a seasonal tradition in German wine culture. Federweißer, a partially fermented grape must, is known for its sweet and refreshing taste. It is often enjoyed with savory onion tart or hearty snacks during late summer and early fall. The drink is also called Rauscher, Süßer, or Bitzler in different parts of Germany.

The production process for Federweißer starts immediately after the grapes are pressed. Yeast begins to convert the sugar in the grape juice into alcohol and carbon dioxide. Unlike fully fermented wines, Federweißer is bottled before fermentation is complete. This means the drink continues to ferment in the bottle, which requires special closures that allow gas to escape but prevent air from entering. This avoids dangerous pressure build-up while maintaining freshness.

One of the largest producers of Federweißer in the region is the Winzergemeinschaft Franken (GWF), based in Kitzingen. In late August, GWF employees began harvesting mainly Müller-Thurgau grapes near Volkach, using mechanical harvesters for efficiency. Martin Deutsch, chairman of GWF, expects about 200,000 liters of Federweißer this year. The product will be sold in wine shops, bistros, and retail stores across Bavaria. Deutsch noted that prices are likely to be slightly higher than last year but did not provide specific figures.

Federweißer gets its name from the yeast particles that are stirred up by carbon dioxide during fermentation, creating a feather-like appearance in the glass. Legally, it is classified as "partially fermented grape must" rather than wine. Its alcohol content ranges from four to eleven percent, depending on how long it has been fermenting. Early batches are sweeter and lower in alcohol; as fermentation continues, sugar decreases and alcohol increases.

Alongside Federweißer, another seasonal specialty called Federrotling is also popular in Franconia. This drink is made by blending white and red grape varieties before fermentation.

According to a spokesperson from the Franconian Winegrowers' Association, the quality of Federweißer does not indicate the overall quality of the vintage. The main grape harvest in Franconia is scheduled to officially begin on September 10 in Würzburg.

Bavarian Agriculture Minister Michaela Kaniber plans to attend the event as local winemakers start picking Silvaner, Riesling, and Bacchus grapes for wines intended for aging.

Franconia remains Bavaria’s most important wine-growing region, accounting for 98 percent of the state’s approximately 6,300 hectares of vineyards. Around 2,900 winemaking families are organized into three regional cooperatives, with an additional 600 wineries selling directly to consumers. Each year, Franconia produces about 400,000 hectoliters of wine.

The start of Federweißer season signals a busy period for local winemakers and offers residents and visitors alike a chance to enjoy one of Bavaria’s unique culinary traditions as summer turns to fall.