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Spring Frost Threatens Champagne Vineyards as Early Warmth Accelerates Vine Growth

Winegrowers report vines developing up to ten days ahead of schedule, raising concerns about potential crop damage and reserve shortages.

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Champagne vineyards are facing an early threat from spring frost, as unseasonably warm weather has pushed vine development ahead of schedule. In Montgueux, Aube, winegrower Denis Velut reported that vines were running two weeks ahead of the usual pace, though a recent drop in temperatures has slowed growth to about ten days

ahead. The Comité Champagne, which oversees the region’s wine production, confirmed these observations. Sébastien Debuisson, director of the technical department at Comité Champagne, said on March 12 that this is an unusually early start for the earliest-ripening vineyard blocks, particularly for Chardonnay and Pinot Noir in areas like Sézannais, Côte de Montgueux, and the Seine valley. However, he noted that average budburst had not yet been observed and that there are significant differences between regions.

Last Sunday, temperatures dipped below freezing in several parts of Champagne. Velut said that no damage was reported so far. He explained that this part of Champagne has faced difficult years recently due to frost and heavy rainfall, which have affected yields. Dry weather is expected to return soon, which growers see as a positive sign. Still, Velut expressed concern about the coming weeks, saying that the risk is not over until the end of April.

Winegrowers are also worried about their ability to replenish individual reserves. These reserves are important for financial stability and for maintaining the quality of their blends. John Hardy, a consultant with Viti-Concept who works across Champagne, said that vines are currently eight to ten days ahead of normal growth rates depending on location and pruning schedules.

Although it is too early to predict harvest dates with certainty, Hardy indicated there is a strong chance that harvesting could begin in August again this year. He cautioned that it is still too soon to make definitive statements about the timing. The situation remains uncertain as growers watch the weather closely in hopes of avoiding further frost damage before the end of April.