

## Marlborough urged to up its game

10 Mar 2009 by Jancis Robinson

In Marlborough, New Zealand, they are celebrating 30 years of producing Sauvignon Blanc at the country's leading wine producer Montana (called Brancott Estate in the US) but in a way the timing could not be worse. As I pointed out in [Marlborough at the crossroads](#), the industry is currently faced with an embarrassing surplus of wine, some of it of decidedly questionable quality.

According to the local paper, *The Marlborough Express*, Montana's founding managing director Frank Yukich spoke from the hip at the celebrations. He told the assembled crowd that it was not enough to maintain the current quality of Sauvignon Blanc and 'believe sales will continue for ever. Many of our wines do not age well. After 24 months there can be an excessively pungent canned pea character, not at all attractive', he said. 'Economic downturns are temporary but the damage to the industry's reputation by having poor quality wines on the shelves in our overseas markets will be permanent.'

Responding to his comments, Fabian Partigiani, managing director of the Pernod Ricard subsidiary that now owns Montana, claimed that Montana's distribution networks will save it from dumping wine, despite what the *Express* describes as 'calls from some industry leaders for wineries to do just that to prevent a wine glut. Last year some Marlborough industry leaders called for any leftover wine in tanks to be tipped rather than sold cheaply to preserve Marlborough's premium image.'

Mr Partigiani said Montana held no surplus wine although he did add, 'it depends on how you define it. As an industry you could say that we don't [dump wine], because we've exported bulk wine, so technically the answer is no. I think our long-term future is really good. It would be a naive statement to say everything's rosy within the industry ... we've got to make sure the balance between supply and demand are right and I think we'll always have pressure on us with weather conditions etc, but at the moment we have what looks like two bountiful vintages, which means we're slightly out of sync with supply and demand.'

So important is the wine industry to New Zealand that the celebrations were attended by my friend the new Prime Minister John Key, whose views on Sauvignon Blanc may be familiar to purple pagers from this [Wine and politics](#) video I filmed last month.