

Naughty French

21 Aug 2009 by Jancis Robinson

See the [resulting thread](#) in members' forum.

You know how European wine producers and non Europeans have always fought for the moral high ground?

Europeans accuse New World winemakers of confecting their wines by adding acid and water (in the form of irrigation) whereas their own wines are oh- so- natural because they depend solely on God's irrigation (rain) and, until recently when global warming began to make its presence felt, European wine producers were never allowed to add acid.

Well, relatively recently European laws have been changed to allow producers in Europe to add acid, just so long as they don't add both acid and sugar to the same lot of wine, which is easy to fiddle, as one Burgundian vigneron pointed out to me, by simply adding acid to half of a lot of wine and sugar to the other. So much for the moral high ground.

And now that European summers seem to be getting hotter and drier (see [South of France swelters](#), for example), irrigation is becoming more and more common in Europe. In places such as Spain, Austria, even Germany now, at least growers go to the trouble of getting the rules changed to allow it, and generally use very sparing amounts of water via careful drip- irrigation systems.



But in the Languedoc, where the somewhat tenebrous picture above was taken last week, some farmers in the lower, flatter, most ordinary vineyards have always simply turned the tap on when they think they can increase the volume of their crop and therefore bank balance.

In a world that is becoming increasingly short of water, it seems pretty crazy to irrigate by overhead spray to me. It was explained to me when I expressed surprise at how common overhead irrigation is in the [Okanagan Valley](#) in western Canada that this system has the great advantage of helping them stave off frost damage in cold weather. I can understand that. But what possible justification there can be to spray vast amounts of precious water into the air, as above, in temperatures in the 30s C/90s F when much of it must evaporate and be wasted eludes me. Frost is not a problem in the Languedoc!