

France worries

20 Nov 2008 by Julia Harding MW

Over the first eight months of 2008, international exports of French wine decreased by 10% in volume, so perhaps it's good news that the French ministry of agriculture is forecasting a drop of around 15% in yields for the 2008 harvest. Well it would be good news if that drop were at the lower end of the quality scale but Nature has a habit of being inclusive.

Even though the value of international exports increased by 7% (14% in the UK – due largely to the high value of the top 2005 Bordeaux wines), reaching €4.2 billion, the French wine trade export organisation, the Fédération des Exportateurs de Vins et Spiritueux (FEVS), is predicting a challenging year for French wine and spirit exports in 2009.

You can see why France is worried when you know that the French wine industry, with an average annual turnover of between €9 and €10 billion, is the second most important sector for France in terms of exports.

The table below shows the regional 2008 harvest forecasts published by the statistics office of the French ministry of agriculture, the Service de la Statistique et de la Prospective (SSP). The reduction of 15% is in relation to both the five-year average and previous estimates. The quantity of grapes harvested will be lower than the 2007 harvest and is likely to reach only 43.7m hl. But it's interesting to see just how much the reductions vary from region to region, with the Loire especially badly affected, and that there is an increase forecast for Champagne, even before the new vineyard land comes on stream.

Out of this total, just over half (22.1m hl) is officially classified as VQPRD (*vin de qualité produit dans une région déterminée*, ie AOC or *appellation d'origine contrôlée* wines that show 'Appellation d'Origine Somewhere Contrôlée' on the label, plus the slowly shrinking VDQS category), 12m hl are vins de pays and 6.8m hl are destined for the production of Cognac and Armagnac.