French foils and EU labelling

7 Dec 2009 by Julia Harding MW

20 Feb 2011 - French customs and excise have abandoned the regulation that bottles destined for export must have a different capsule from those used on the domestic market, provided certain paperwork requirements are fulfilled. (See the story in French on Vitisphère.)

Ever wondered about those coloured-coded tops on the foils, or capsules, of French wines bought in France? Known officially as *capsules représentatives des droits* (CRD) or *capsules-congés*, they prove that tax has been paid on the wine and that it may be sold commercially. French wines bought outside the hexagon don't usually have these capsule tops because the duty is not paid within France. (The capsule features Marianne, the historic symbol of France, also used on some French stamps and coins.)

Until now the capsule tops have used the following colours:

- green for appellation d'origin contrôlée (AOC) wines
- blue for vins de pays (VdP) and vins de table (VdT)
- orange for vins doux naturels and vins de liqueur

Changes in the EU common market organisation (CMO) for wine that came into force in August 2009 - mostly to do with labelling and winemaking practices, other changes came into force a year earlier - with a transition period for implementation until the end of 2011, have emphasised the geographical origin of wine produced in the EU by the use of two basic categories: wines with geographical indication and wines without geographical indication. (For background, and more detail, see Will Europe's labels change?)

In France, wines **with geographical indication** include French wines classified as AOC and those classified as VdP; **wines without geographical indication** (what the French call VSIG, ie *vins sans indication géographique*) equate to the vin de table category, which may now show vintage and grape variety on the label.

This association of AOC and VdP as wines with geographic indication (GI) has led to a hot debate in France about the colour used for VdP capsule tops: shouldn't they be green like those on AOC wines rather than blue like those on VdT? No prizes for guessing which producers take which side of the argument. Other solutions so far suggested include: a new colour for *indication géographique protégée* or IGP (come in Pantone), or the same colour for both but a distinguishing symbol for IGP wines.

In the light of the poor and declining sales of French wines in the last 12 months or so (see French wine sales plummet), thoughts of fiddling and Rome burning come readily to mind.

Summary of EU labelling changes
Part of the difficulty in conveying this information succintly lies in the number of languages involved and the proliferation of abbreviations. As I pointed out in Will Europe's labels change?, national classifications, also known in EU-speak as 'traditional terms', such as DO, DOC, IGT may (and surely will) still be shown on labels as long as they are already registered and in use. The use on the label of the terms listed below is optional if a registerd 'traditional term' is shown* but the categories themselves are the underlying framework for the regulations.

Two overarching categories:
wine with geographical indication
wine without geographical indication

Two subcategories of wine with geographical indication:
protected designation of origin (PDO)
protected geographical indication (PGI)

Some equivalent terms for protected designation of origin:
France: appellation d'origine protégée (AOP)
Spain: denominación de origen protegida (DOP)
Italy: denominazione di origine protetta (DOP)
Germany: geschützte Ursprungsbezeichnung (gU)
Portugal: denominações de origem protegidas (DOP)
Hungary: oltalom alatt álló eredetmegjelölések (OEM)

Some equivalent terms for protected geographical indication:
France: indication géographique protégée (IGP)
Spain: indicación geográfica protegida (IGP)
Italy: indicazione geografica protetta (IGP)
Germany: geschützte geographische Angabe (ggA)
Portugal: indicações geográficas protegidas (IGP)
Hungary: oltalom alatt álló földrajzi jelzések (OFJ)

* 'Traditional term' in this context means 'a term traditionally used ... to designate ... that the product has a protected designation of origin or geographical indication under Community or Member State law', eg IGT Lazio or AC Haut-Médoc.

For links to the actual regulations, in all EU languages, see here.