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Are the AOC system and the Bourgogne winegrowing region sacrificed by the INAO?

#LeBourgeoisBourgogne

Beaune, 24 January 2020 - There is much anger in Bourgogne directed against the Institut National de l'Origine et de la Qualité (INAO), the French organization charged with regulating French agricultural products. The INAO is proposing to remove 64 communes in the Bourgogne region from the Bourgogne AOC production area, whilst continuing to allow 43 communes in the Beaujolais to produce the Bourgogne AOC. The very notion of Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée and the identity of Bourgogne wines are being called into question.

An incomplete delimitation process that is now causing problems

Unlike other winegrowing regions such as Bordeaux or Champagne, the delimitation work begun in 1937 was never completed for Bourgogne. Although the historical heart of the Bourgogne region has been fully defined, this process has never been applied to those Bourgogne appellations located in the Beaujolais and Chablis.

A call to relaunch the process came in 2000 on the part of producers of the Bourgogne AOC, but the INAO's approach to the issue is now endangering the Bourgogne appellation and its producers. Instead of defining the appellation area in accordance with its founding texts, the INAO is refusing to consider the history of the Bourgogne winegrowing region and its wine producing practices over time.

Bourgogne producers describe the situation as economic endangerment of a sector and a territory

Driven more by fear of seeing its decisions legally challenged rather than by the defense of the concept of appellation of origin, the INAO is now considering the exclusion of entire sectors that have historically been part of the Bourgogne AOC. As such, 64 *communes* representing 7,000 hectares, including 5,500 under vine, would lose their right to produce the Bourgogne AOC. Another consequence of this denial of history is that 43 *communes* in the Beaujolais would continue to be allowed to produce wines under the Bourgogne appellation.

The sectors of Chablis, Dijon - the capital of the Bourgogne region! - and the area north of the Côte-d'Or department (Châtillonnais) would no longer be able to produce the Bourgogne AOC. There are some 20,000 hectares currently within the Bourgogne AOC that have not been planted in an attempt to ensure a stable market. The stakes are very high for all Bourgogne appellations, with considerable economic risks and the threat of production shifting outside the region.

The INAO, out of step with the industry

Failure to listen on the part of the INAO and a refusal to work in consultation with producers has led to an impasse. However, this public body explains in its presentation leaflet that, “The INAO’s strategy focused on quality is based on close collaboration between industry professionals through defense and management organizations (ODG), [...] state services, and the INAO.”

“The commission of inquiry appointed by the INAO is not hearing our proposals and is not listening to us. We do not feel any willingness on their part for consultation and dialog. If we are to preserve the economic model of our *Régionale* AOCs and above all, the image of our Bourgogne wines with our customers, they must listen to us!” said Thiébault Huber, winegrower in Côte de Beaune and President of the CAVB.

A prestigious wine region at the mercy of a dangerous decision

We must avoid conflating two historically distinct wine-growing regions, each with their own characteristics. We must prevent this discreditation of the AOC system. If a Beaujolais becomes a Bourgogne, then why shouldn’t a Crémant de Bourgogne become a Champagne or a Luberon a Côtes du Rhône? The whole notion of geographical indication will be called into question by this decision on the part of the INAO.

An unprecedented response from the Bourgogne winegrowing region

Bourgogne wine producers have therefore decided to fight back against the INAO’s stance and to demand genuine dialog with the body. Many meetings are currently being organized in the region.

“This demonstrates the very major concerns and exasperation of winegrowers in the Bourgogne region. [A petition defending the identities of Beaujolais and Bourgogne](#) has garnered more than 1,600 signatures in just three days. We invite all winegrowers to sign it, but more generally, all lovers of Bourgogne wines and the AOC system,” said Bruno Verret, a winegrower in the Yonne region and President of the Syndicat des Bourgognes wine union.

A gathering of Bourgogne winegrowers is scheduled for 6 February in front of the INAO headquarters in Montreuil, near Paris. On that day, the INAO is set to decide its next move, and Bourgogne producers intend to remind members that they are there to defend the notion of *Appellation d’Origine* and respect for the identities of the two winegrowing regions: Beaujolais wine is produced in the Beaujolais, and Bourgogne wines in the Bourgogne region.

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