

SA TESTS FOR POSSIBLE ILLEGAL FLAVOURANTS IN SAUVIGNON BLANC THROUGHOUT THE CAPE

With the 2004 harvest just beginning, the South African wine industry has started an extensive testing programme covering all the Cape's wine growing districts to monitor for the possible use of added flavourants in Sauvignon blanc, confirmed SA Wine & Spirit Board management committee chairman Jakob Deist.

Although flavourants do not in any way pose a health risk to consumers, it is illegal to use them to enhance the character of wines.

Teams of inspectors from the Wine & Spirit Board are arriving unannounced at wineries across the Cape, drawing samples of grape juice, which will be compared with the finished wines, to check for any inconsistencies in the level of certain methoxypyrazines responsible for the typical green pepper (capsicum)/herbaceous flavours in Sauvignon blanc.

Deist said the levels of 2-Methoxy-3-isobutyl pyrazine (iBMP) found in the finished wines should match those in the grape juice. This procedure for testing had been established on the basis of the findings of a two-year research study, implemented when certain Sauvignon blancs had shown what appeared to be atypical flavour characteristics in relation to their place of origin.

Cooler growing climates are generally associated with higher iBMP levels and grassy, green flavours, whereas warmer wine-growing regions are associated with lower iBMP levels and tropical flavours.

The research, begun in 2001, two years before any public allegations of wrongdoing, had set out to detail the flavour profiles found in specific wine-growing conditions to provide a measure against which inconsistencies could be examined.

Deist said the current testing involved wineries across the spectrum, from the major corporates and cellars to mid-sized, as well as boutique and *garagiste* producers. “It is essential we monitor all levels of producers in all regions to send out a message to any potentially errant producers that no illegal winemaking practices will be tolerated.

“We view the allegations that some wineries could be guilty of using added flavourants in an extremely serious light and we have gone to great lengths to develop the parameters in which wineries can be tested.”

He said any irregularities discovered would be followed by forensic audits at wineries involved, where not only the suspected wines would be examined but the entire Sauvignon blanc production.

If found guilty of using additives, producers could be criminally prosecuted under South African law and prevented from having their wines certified. Certification is required before any wine can be labelled for variety, vintage year or origin.

The findings of the research project, led by a team from ARC Infruitec-Nietvoorbij under Dr Johann Marais on behalf of Winetech, the research arm of the SA Wine & Brandy Company (SAWB), had just been published (February), said Deist, and were readily available.

These findings have also been made available to wine-producing EU member countries to assist their own eradication of the use of flavourants.

SAWB CE Dr Johan Van Rooyen said his organisation was fully behind the testing. “We welcome all moves that reaffirm the integrity of the South African wine industry.”

DATE	FEBRUARY 11, 2004
ISSUED BY	SA WINE & SPIRIT BOARD
QUERIES	DR JAKOB DEIST, CHAIRMAN, MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE
	TEL + 27 (028) 840 2312