

ILLEGAL FLAVOURANTS NOT TOLERATED IN THE WINE INDUSTRY, SAYS SOUTH AFRICAN WINE & BRANDY COMPANY

Wine producers found guilty of enhancing their wine flavours by adding flavouring supplements can be criminally punished in accordance with the laws prohibiting the use of such substances, says Dr Johan van Rooyen, CEO of the SA Wine & Brandy Company (SAWB). “South Africa’s wine regulations are quite clear on this matter: no additional substances to enhance the natural wine flavours found in specific grape cultivars are permitted. Guilty parties will be punished in terms of the law and could be stripped of their wine of origin status.”

The SAWB represents the total South African wine industry through four chambers – wine producers, cellars, labour and trade.

Dr Van Rooyen was responding to recent allegations in the local and international media that certain South African wines were illegally flavoured, especially those made from Sauvignon Blanc grapes. “Although those making the allegations did not reveal any suspected winery, unfounded allegations of this nature could have a potentially devastating affect on the local and international wine markets and jeopardise the total image of the South African wine industry.”

Although the SAWB was not aware of any wineries partaking in the practise of adding flavourants to enhance the taste of a specific wine, its research arm – Winetech in collaboration with the SA Wine & Spirits Board - has for the past two years been developing a system to trace illegal flavourants. “All recognised wine countries are currently working on similar systems, and I know that Winetech has been sharing its information with member countries of the European Union,” said Dr Van Rooyen.

“The development of a detection programme of this nature is extremely sophisticated, but Winetech is in the final phases of this system that will allow the industry to test wines as to whether their flavours have been tampered with. As of next year’s harvest, which begins in January, wineries will be subjected to tests. Any winery suspected of producing wines with an unnatural flavour profile, will be subjected to a stringent scientific and forensic audit to determine whether the flavours obtained were natural.

“A producer whose wine shows evidence of tampering, will be severely punished,” he said. “This could not only entail criminal punishment in terms of the law, but also through the damage of respective winery’s reputation. It is a sad state of affairs that we have to resort to such measures, but our industry cannot afford to be seen to be acting in an ethical way. Although flavourants pose no physical harm to consumers, it is dishonest and can severely taint the integrity of our industry.”

Dr Van Rooyen said that the matter was jointly being attended to by the South African Wine Industry Information and Systems, the Wine and Spirits Board, Winetech, Wines of South Africa and the National Department of Agriculture.

“It is a pity that the allegations that were made on this matter were unsubstantiated,” said Dr Van Rooyen. “The SAWB welcomes anybody who has concrete evidence to come forward so that the matter can be dealt with.”