

ILLEGAL FLAVOURANTS NOT TOLERATED IN THE WINE INDUSTRY, SAYS SOUTH AFRICAN WINE INDUSTRY BODY

Wine producers who enhance their wines by adding flavouring supplements are acting illegally and can be criminally prosecuted, says Dr Jakob Deist, chairperson of the management committee of the SA Wine & Spirit Board.

“South Africa’s wine regulations are quite clear on this matter: no additional substances are permitted to enhance wine flavours. Those contravening the law will be punished and could be prevented from having their wines certified, which in effect means they cannot be sold.”

Dr Deist was responding to recent allegations in the local and international media that some South African wines were being illegally enhanced with natural food flavours, particularly those made from Sauvignon Blanc grapes. “While no suspected winery has been identified, we view the allegations very seriously. “

“The local wine industry has been aware for some time of the global practice of adding flavourants to wine. Although they pose no physical harm to consumers, their use is patently unethical. In an effort to eradicate any potential local use of such illegal substances, the SA Wine & Spirit Board together with industry research arm Winetech has for the past two years been working to develop a reliable system that can unequivocally detect the use of these natural food additives. The ongoing research, which has in fact been profiling Sauvignon Blanc, has included collaboration with other wine producing countries. Moreover, Winetech has been sharing its findings with member countries of the European Union,” says Dr Deist.

“The development of a detection programme of this nature is an extremely sophisticated process. And after two years’ of intensive data collection, Winetech is confident it has reached the point of finalising a system to identify such illegal practices.”

He says that from the 2004 harvest, which begins in January, any winery suspected of tampering with their wines to enhance flavours, will be subjected to a stringent scientific and forensic audit.

“A producer whose wine shows evidence of the addition of flavourants, will be severely dealt with,” he said. “This could result in criminal prosecution with attendant public censure.

“The allegations taint the industry, its integrity and its reputation which is why we shall do everything possible to identify wrongdoers and bring them before the law.”

Dr Deist says the SA Wine & Spirit Board and Winetech are currently working in close concert with South African Wine Industry Information and Systems, as well as Wines of South Africa and the National Department of Agriculture to identify culprits.

He urged anyone with concrete evidence to come forward.

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