

Nürnberg, Germany 12.– 15.2.2020

BIOFACH2020

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PRESS RELEASE

January 2020

BIOFACH 2020: More than a trend, organic wine is the future!

- **Dynamic growth in the market for organic wine**
- **A strong presence for organic wine at BIOFACH 2020**

When the international organic sector gathers at the World's Leading Trade Fair in Nuremberg from 12 to 15 February, trade visitors from all segments of the industry will once again enjoy a wealth of inspiration for their own wine collections. In addition to the many wine-related discoveries in the international halls, highlights not to be missed are Experience the World of WINE and the international organic wine award MUNDUS VINI BIOFACH in Hall 7! More than a trend, organic wine is the future, as the dynamic growth in the sector abundantly confirms.

The standard response was a disdainful sniff, or a tired smile at most. Organic wines didn't enjoy a good reputation 20 years ago, and that was still the case a decade later. The tide has turned since then. Prominent top-level wineries like Clemens Busch (Mosel), Wittmann (Rheinhessen), Dr. Bürklin-Wolf (Palatinate), Peter Jakob Kühn (Rheingau), Lageder (Alto Adige), Domaine de la Romanée Conti (Burgundy), and Alvaro Palacios (Priorat, Spain) have been applying organic or even biodynamic principles in their vineyards and cellars for some time now, and many others are following their example. Since 2013, organic wine production in the three major wine-producing countries alone (Spain, France, and Italy) has grown by more than 70 percent. The overall proportion of organically certified vineyards within Europe's wine-growing areas has also grown 3.4 times since 2008 to 9.5 percent.

What's behind the growth?

The main driver is the strong and continuing increase in demand for organic wine, and the fact that producers are responding. Peter Riegel, Europe's largest organic trader, began 35 years ago by importing wines from

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three politically active French winemakers, two of which were organic. Today Riegel imports and markets organic wines from 200 winemakers around the world, the majority from Italy, France, Spain, and Germany. In the past few years, growth has been a steady six to nine percent. “It’s clear that the proportion of organic wine offered by food and beverage retailers and discounters is on the rise, at the expense of conventional wine,” Riegel notes. He’s pleased to report that there’s a trend toward a higher quality of wine among end consumers, and this means that wine drinkers are now happy to pay more for a bottle of organic wine.

Another argument for switching to organic winegrowing is that winemakers no longer want to gamble with their health, because applying pesticides does more than just kill off fungal diseases, weeds, and other organisms at the vineyard. For many organic pioneers like Lotte Pfeffer-Müller of the VDP vineyard Brüder Dr. Becker (Rheinhessen), environmental protection has long been an important focus. This was the motivating factor for responsible organic winemakers well before climate change, now a major public concern, became generally acknowledged.

Even so, the key factor causing many winemakers to switch to environmentally friendly winemaking is a greater focus on quality and a desire to produce better wines. This was also the challenge that led Volker Benzinger (Palatinate) to switch to organic in 2016, with certification from the Ecovin association. What motivated him? “We made our business future-proof, and we’d like to continue our journey toward the premium segment. We won’t be around for much longer if we stay on the conventional path.” Even before making the switch, Benzinger adopted an approach that was minimalist and as natural as possible. It was logical, therefore, to avoid using herbicides and other synthetic chemical substances in the vineyard. He can see a clear trend toward natural wines in the Benelux countries and in Scandinavia. More than 30 percent of his revenue from sulphite-free wines comes from this market. Conversely, demand for natural wines of this kind is still in its infancy in Germany. Benzinger considers German buyers very sensitive to price and less willing to pay more for natural wines, although he does see room for development.

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The existence of a trend toward biodynamic wines is beyond dispute, whether or not winemakers relate to Rudolf Steiner's teachings in this field. The result in the bottle is impressive. More and more winemakers are going biodynamic, and they enjoy a high regard among wine drinkers. Just 1,036 vineyards around the world have been certified by Demeter or Biodyvin. That represents growth of 38 percent over the total of 747 in 2016. The largest vineyard operating on biodynamic principles in Europe is Bodega Parra Jimenez, with 500 hectares in La Mancha (Spain).

Climate change boosts demand for adaptable varieties

In an age of climate change, new varieties capable of adaptation, or "fungus-resistant grape varieties," are becoming increasingly important. These are real carbon-savers because they require no more than 20 percent of the protection needed by established varieties. That means fewer tractor runs and therefore lower emissions and less soil compaction.

Experts assume that wines made from these sustainable grape varieties will grow in importance in the future. Unfortunately, according to Riegel, this is not yet reflected in revenues because end consumers don't yet relate to varieties like Solaris, Johanniter, Cabernet Blanc, or Pinotin. At best, these will sell in cuvées with attractive labels and fancy names, or in specialist shops offering professional advice. If sellers make the effort to explain the advantages of the new varieties to customers and offer them an unbiased tasting opportunity, then wines other than the usual Merlot and Riesling will have a chance.

Christian Wolf, head of tasting for MUNDUS VINI BIOFACH, takes a positive view of the development of fungus-resistant grape varieties, and he's generally impressed by the quality of the organic wines submitted from a total of 13 countries this year. The jurors include 45 tasters from 15 countries. The ceremony for the major international organic wine award MUNDUS VINI BIOFACH will be held from 13:00 to 15:00 on 13 February 2020.

For more details on the program for BIOFACH, including everything related to wine, see: www.biofach.de/programme



Background: What is organic wine?

Craft winemakers all agree that a good wine is made in the vineyard, not in the cellar. Healthy, concentrated grapes are preferred for quality wines, and high returns are no longer the deciding factor in a saturated market. Healthy harvests require sturdy vines that aren't susceptible to disease. This is where organic viticulture comes in: Organic winemakers can bolster the ecosystem in their vineyards by avoiding the use of synthetic chemical fertilizers or herbicides like glyphosate. Instead, they plant legumes in open areas to loosen up the soil and add nitrogen via a natural process. Flowering plants also provide food for insects and help the vines survive. This approach encourages biodiversity in the vineyards, which would otherwise become a vulnerable monoculture. Unfortunately, it's not yet possible to quantify the value of biodiversity in vineyards or convert it into a carbon saving figure.

Organic viticulture involves strengthening the vines – not by freeing them from supposedly harmful weeds but by deliberately sowing other plant species close by that will, in turn, attract useful creatures – while also strengthening the soil and keeping it full of life. To protect against powdery and downy mildew, the typical fungal diseases in vineyards, organic winegrowers are still able to spray copper and sulphur. Even so, the permitted quantities are much lower than in conventional winegrowing. In biodynamic viticulture the winegrowers work with preparations like cow horn manure or cow horn silica that promote plant health. They help the leaves take up light, assist the grape ripening process, and help maintain life in the soil. Herbal preparations made of horsetail and stinging nettle help the vines defend against fungal infections. The sequence of activities performed by organic winemakers is determined by the rhythm of nature. The economic risk they face is much higher than that of conventional operations, which are able to turn to synthetic chemical sprays in response to a fungal outbreak.

Organic viticulture is far more difficult in cool to temperate climates like Germany compared with dry areas with little precipitation. This is due to the fungal diseases that occur at a particular atmospheric humidity and temperature and that don't like dryness and heat. To control other pests like



grape berry moths, organic winemakers use methods like mating disruption. Pheromones are released in the vineyard to confuse male moths to the point where they can no longer locate females and are therefore unable to reproduce.

In the cellar – in the vinification, fermentation, and maturing processes, in other words – less intervention is allowed in organic wine production than in conventional vinification. Genetically modified yeasts are generally not permitted. The Demeter association accepts the least possible manipulation in the vinification process. This means that the quality of the grapes is all the more important in determining the wine's quality. The objective of most organic winemakers is to produce honest wines from the best grapes: wines full of character that reflect the soil, climate, grape variety, and the signature of the winemaker.

Background: Germany is the world's largest market for organic wine and it's still growing

More than 120 million liters of organic wine were sold in Germany in 2017 (*Source: WEIN+MARKT March 2019*), or more than 23 percent of global sales. Germany still remains the largest market for organic wine, with France and the UK in the second and third positions. Looking ahead to 2022, the IWSR study *Drinks International* forecasts that Germany will continue to be the largest organic wine market. Organic is also a topic of growing interest in viticulture. Data from the *FIBL Survey 2020* shows that the total area of organic vines worldwide has more than tripled since 2008, from 127,000 to 422,000 hectares in 2018. Organic vines currently account for slightly more than six percent of the total winegrowing area worldwide. In Germany and in Europe as a whole, the figure is ten percent. The global total in 2000 was still just 1.3 percent. Spain has the largest area of organic vines, with 113,419 hectares (12.1 percent of the total), while Italy has the highest proportion of organic vines compared with the total area devoted to wine-growing, at 15.9 percent (106,447 hectares). France (organic: 12.6 percent), Spain, and Italy still produce the largest amounts of wine, and they're also the largest organic wine-producing countries. Together these three countries account for 74 percent of the total area of organic vines worldwide.

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