

### INDUSTRY ARTICLE

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## Regional trumps organic – the Bundesehrenpreis for fruit juices and spirits

Testing what's good: The DLG (German Agricultural Society) tests bakery products, dairy products, meat and sausage products – and, of course, beverages. Together with the BMEL (German Ministry of Food and Agriculture), it presents the annual Bundesehrenpreis awards – bronze, silver and gold – to companies that produce particularly good products in different areas, including wine, beer, fruit juices and spirits. The last category is the most recent Bundesehrenpreis, and has been awarded at BrauBeviale 2019.

### Small manufacturers often have the edge

In various segments of the beverage industry, trends and opportunities can also be seen in the winners of the annual Bundesehrenpreis awards, which are awarded by the German Agricultural Society (DLG). Thomas Burkhardt is the head of the Beverages division at the DLG Test Centre for Foods, and as such he has been closely observing what is happening in each individual segment for years.

Whether it's alcoholic or non-alcohol beverage producers, we basically see the same major trends and topics: organic, regional, the 'craft' concept, sustainability and packaging. It's exciting to see who knows how to make the most of this change: often it's the smaller producers who have the edge – whether they're making apple juice or distilling cherry brandy.

### Mr Burkhardt, to what extent have the award winners and perhaps even the fruit juice and spirits sectors changed since you've been presenting the Bundesehrenpreis?

Burkhardt: Especially in the spirits sector, the 'craft' element has been very strong for a few years now. It is playing an increasingly important role in

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marketing, especially among small- and medium-sized companies. But it has actually also changed the market and the products that are available. In the last five or six years, many German whiskies have been released. And in the last three years, so have gins – in the most diverse range of varieties. It goes without saying that the DLG looks closely at this and differentiates accordingly.

### **In what way?**

Burkhardt: Not every product that is called a gin today is actually a gin. We check whether the product fulfils the basic requirements of what constitutes a genuine gin. Amongst other things, gin is characterised by a distinct juniper note, and this is particularly important. So, when we check the products that have been submitted, we make sure that the juniper is clearly noticeable in the finish.

### **In other words, a gin with a strong orange note masking the juniper, for example, couldn't ever win the Bundesehrenpreis?**

Burkhardt: Right, because according to the relevant EU regulation, gin is a spirit with a recognisable juniper taste. That is why we also check for this as part of the sensory evaluation. All Bundesehrenpreis awards in the beverages sector are determined on the basis of the DLG test, which was very important for the German Ministry of Food and Agriculture when it decided to award these prizes. In the DLG test centre, it's not only sensory evaluations that are made. We don't just look at whether something tastes good – we also carry out analytical testing of the products. This is all about safety and security of declarations. Whether what's written on the label is actually what's inside – and vice versa. This is becoming increasingly important these days.

### **We've heard of craft beer and craft spirits. Are craft winemakers and craft fruit juice producers coming next?**

Burkhardt: Maybe not directly, but in a way, this branch is playing a role everywhere: the wave of craft producers has helped to increase consumer awareness. The enthusiasm for craft production and for regional sourcing, which is often closely linked to the craft movement, has almost overtaken the

trend for buying organic. The unique artisan character of a business, smallish structures and something that I simply refer to as a 'home' can all be conveyed extremely easily and obviously go down very well with consumers. This works especially well for fruit juices.

### **Why is that?**

Burkhardt: For example, you can explain how locally grown fruit is used. Producers can shine a light on their harvest, show their meadows with fruit trees – that's a good story that currently markets very well. It's different from how it was ten years ago. The media environment has changed accordingly.

### **In the last decade, some companies have perhaps undergone a generation shift. Can that also influence these changes?**

Burkhardt: Absolutely. After all, the younger generation also needs to find a way of differentiating itself from its predecessors. And as we're seeing, they also like to take up issues of sustainability, the environment and conservation of resources. That makes sense too, because it's also about their future – and that of their customers.

### **Do long-established, traditional companies have a disadvantage compared to start-ups, which perhaps compete more with spirits and less in the fruit juices sector?**

Burkhardt: Not necessarily. Traditional companies can show how they embody tradition and really live it, whilst still using modern and environmentally friendly production techniques, for example. They can highlight the energy efficiency of their operations. There are a few examples that show that this is well received by customers. Alternatively, they focus on transport and packaging. Specifically, in the fruit juice sector, the question of glass or plastic comes up often. The exciting thing is that smaller companies have an advantage here. Medium-sized companies with direct marketing can implement glass more easily than large companies that go through traders and distributors. In this respect, the market has certainly changed in recent years for all companies.

# BrauBeviale2020

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