

Information note

Paris, 3rd of March 2016

The regulation, commerce and identity of wine... towards a new world order?

Briefly : Wine will be at the heart of the discussion held amongst the 188 member states of the Codex Alimentarius, beginning at Xi'an in China on the 14th of March. The issue is establishing a list of the additives authorized in wine throughout the world. There are two confronting approaches: the legal limitation of the usage of additives so as to protect the identity of wine, versus the free appreciation of the wine maker regarding the dosage of used additives so as to foster technical flexibility. The defenders of the identity of wine, the European countries, base themselves since 1924 on norms established by the International Organisation of Vine and Wine (OIV) which defines the conditions of use of ingredients in wine. The limits established by OIV experts for certain oenological products aim to minimise the impact on wine whilst ensuring technological efficiency. Countries of the New World are favourable to a norm based on the principle of Good Manufacturing Practices (with no maximal usage dose). The outcome of this discussion will be known on the 18th of March.

Wine becomes subject to/ a subject of the Codex Alimentarius

Some debates are so technical they remain discrete, and yet they concern fundamental issues. Such is the case of the discussion that will take place for wine from the 14th to the 18th of March at Xi'An in China, on the grounds of the Codex Committee on Food Additives. The Codex Alimentarius is an intergovernmental organisation which stems from the FOA and the WTO. Its 188 member states establish global food standards, including a list of the additives authorized for each product consumed in the world, with the goal to ensure the best possible food security. Before being registered in the list of additives authorized by the Codex, each additive is subject to the scientific evaluations of a dedicated body, the Jecfa, so as to study its impact on human health. The Codex Alimentarius also has for mission to foster an international, loyal commerce in a regulatory framework as harmonized as possible. It serves as reference for national regulations when a country wishes to verify the quality and innocuousness of imported food products.

Until 2013, few countries were concerned by the list of additives authorized for wine in the Codex Alimentarius. This list counted only 4 additives (including sulfites) and is unrepresentative of effective



oenological practices. And as the global commerce of wine has experienced an unprecedented dynamism in these last 15 years, with currently 2 bottles out of 5 exported, this deficiency of the Codex Alimentarius constitutes more than ever a potential obstacle to the importation of wine in the numerous 'new consumer' countries which have neither the culture nor the knowledge of wine. Indeed, it is not rare to see cases of wine refused at the customs of diverse countries that do not recognize the oenological treatments the bottles have been through. The recognition of additives used in wine, which are the basis for oenological practices founded on ancient know-how and scientific innovations, is fundamental to ensure commercial trade unhindered by technical obstacles, but also to guarantee the transparency, respect and health of wine consumers throughout all countries.

The nature of ingredients used in wine

Wine comes exclusively from the fermentation of grapes, as defined by the OIV (International Organisation of Vine and Wine) and in the European legislation. Nevertheless, this fermentation implies a biological and chemical transformation which has always required technical means of control and stabilization. The first oenological additive, still used today, is sulfur dioxide. Yet others are also used if necessary such as acidifiers (a warm vintage can lead to an insufficient level of acidity for the equilibrium of wine), tartaric acid, malic acid or citric acid (which are none other than the organic acids of wine), or antioxidants such as ascorbic acid (vitamin C). Stabilizers such as vegetable gums (cellulosic gum, Arabic gum) are also widely used in the bottling of wines destined to long distance expeditions and potentially submitted to temperature favorable to the formation of diverse troubles. The stabilizers allow the guarantee of a limpid wine, sharp and shiny as it is appreciated everywhere in the world.

The list of additives used in wine remains nevertheless relatively limited (less than 20) given the fact that the majority of oenological practices are auxiliary technologies (yeasts, bacteria and oenological enzymes for example) which intervene at a given moment of the elaboration process but are no longer present (or solely in a residue state) in bottled wine. Oenological practices are strictly limited and framed in Europe (Regulation from the European Commission N° 606/2009) and stem for the scientific recommendations of the OIV. The European regulation on wine plans that the European Commission "*ensure that the natural and essential characteristics of wine be preserved and that the composition of concerned products do not go through any substantial modification*" (article 80 of the Parliament and Council regulation N° 1308/2013). It is also the constant concern of some 600 OIV scientific experts on wine which establish the International Code of Oenological Practices. Certain oenological practices are therefore subject to doses of maximal use when they can, at a high ratio, significantly modify the original qualities of grapes and wine. This is the case for acidifiers and certain stabilizers.



Defending an identity of wine

The introduction of oenological practices in the Codex Alimentarius brings up the debate on the identity of wine. Perceptions and cultures oppose and confront themselves. Are the additives used at the discretion of the winemaker (GMP: Good Manufacturing practices), that is to say without legal limit, potentially a risk for the integrity of the wine product? To the extent that the additive represents no danger for the consumer, can it represent a danger for the quality and the longevity of the prestige of wines throughout the world? Is wine a food product like any other? How can we define the identity of wine? It is around these questions that different regulatory approaches and perceptions confront themselves today. An approach encouraging the responsibility of producers in a non restrictive context opposes itself to one that promotes legal limitation of oenological practices for a minimum and controlled impact on the sensorial qualities of treated wine.

The role of the OIV

In this debate, the place of the OIV in the context of a global harmonization of oenological practices is a crucial issue. Initially comprising mostly European countries, the OIV represents in 2016, through its 48 member states, almost 85% of the world trade production. An intergovernmental organisation based in Paris, the OIV has a scientific vocation regarding the elaboration of wine standards. These standards, collected in the International Code of Oenological Practices and the International Oenological Codex, are based on the works of experts in oenology, viticulture, law and food security since more than 50 years. A scientific and technical heritage which has guided the qualitative development of many vineyards throughout the world... and particularly that of European vineyards as the OIV standards are recognized since 2009 in European regulations as a reference for any new oenological practice.

The will to define wine and oenological practices comes from the idea that wine, whilst being a product in constant evolution, carries strong values, cultural and consensual. Wine carries the image and history of a great number of agricultural regions in Europe and in the world. Wine is adulated, celebrated and sometimes... copied. Can additives favour a fraudulent use aiming to elaborate products with a non authentic quality? Since the beginning the standards of the OIV have sought to prevent these excesses. They erect safeguards to promote an oenology respectful of local cuisine and consumers.

To deny the work of the OIV is equivalent to denying the importance of an attentive and scientific consideration of oenological practices with regards to the specificity of wine. This work cannot be accomplished by an organisation such as the Codex Alimentarius, as it is neither its role nor its competence.



To follow, between the 14th and the 18th of March 2016 in Xi'an (China) during the 48th session of the Committee on Additives of the Codex Alimentarius (CACA)

The European Commission, along with all the European countries, the members of the OIV, as well as certain non-member countries attached to a qualitative vision of wine, will support the OIV as a reference for the elaboration of global technical standards on wine.

These international discussions should result in the adoption of a list of recognized and authorized additives... with or without limits: that is the question!

Oenoppia is a non-profit association, bringing together the main designers, producers and distributors of specialist oenological products. Specialist oenological products cover all ingredients, additives and processing aids requiring specific oenological expertise and used in oenology, and that are based on scientific knowledge of grape and wine constituents. Members of Oenoppia are providing to wineries around 85% of the products for winemaking in the world.



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