



The European Commission has proposed lifting the ban on direct producer wines in the Common Market Organisation (CMO) Regulation (1308/2013). The direct producers are American grape varieties that were imported into Europe in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. The CMO does not allow Member States to classify these varieties for wine production. Six of these varieties are explicitly prohibited by name: **Noah, Othello, Isabelle, Jacquez, Clinton and Herbemont**. Nevertheless, in many regions of Europe a strong local tradition of producing these wines persists – such as Uhudler in Burgenland, Austria and wines from the Clinton variety in the region around Venice – despite legal persecution.

Many myths have and continue to be told about the direct producers by their opponents. **Let's take a closer look...**

### **The direct producers don't taste like wine from European varieties!**

So what?! The direct producers are known for a berry-like taste, referred to as "fox tone". **But taste is subjective and is not a reasonable basis for prohibiting a product** from the market. There are many consumers who enjoy these wines, as seen by the success of Uhudler in Burgenland, Austria. They should be seen as complement to, not a replacement of, classic wines on the market.

### **The direct producers brought phylloxera to Europe!**

It is time to let go of the past! Phylloxera (also known as the vine pest) had devastating consequences for the wine sector and hundreds of thousands of wine producers across Europe at the end of the nineteenth century. International trade has brought in different kinds of diseases in all agricultural sectors, without triggering a direct prohibition as wide and far reaching as the story of direct producers.

Instead of resentment, we should recognise that these wine grape varieties **can help us to meet the challenges of the future as they have greater natural resistances to pests and diseases**, such as downy and powdery mildew, than the European varieties. These qualities are an important tool for research and breeding. The direct producers can be used to **develop new varieties and/or to help make classic European varieties fit for future challenges such as climate change, but also to reduce pesticide use in viticulture**. Pesticides are generally much more intensively used in viticulture than in other agricultural sectors.

### **Legalising the direct producers will have a negative impact on "traditional" wine growers in Europe!**

The market for direct producer wines is small, with sales generally tied to the specific region of cultivation. Direct producers are **certainly not a commercial threat to wines based on better-known, more prestigious varieties**, such as cabernet sauvignon. Thanks to their natural resistances, the direct producers should instead be seen as a valuable tool for research and climate change adaption in viticulture more widely and boosting organic wine production.

### **The direct producers spread diseases and pose a risk to plant health!**

Today, it is frequently argued that the direct producers pose a risk to plant health as they show disease symptoms at a later stage than European varieties or don't show symptoms at all. A recent example of this argument is in relation to the bacterial disease *flavescence dorée*, whose occurrence in Europe is increasing owing to climate change.

**This myth also doesn't stand up to closer scrutiny.** Pests and diseases are a reality of agricultural production – direct producers or no direct producers. Farmers and authorities need to put in place effective strategies to combat their spread. In all other parts of agriculture there are numerous varieties that are either resistant or more susceptible to diseases than others, but **this variation doesn't lead to outright prohibitions.** Outbreaks will be dealt with through the existing strict plant health regime, which addresses quarantine and non-regulated quarantine pests with extensive preventive but also defensive measures. Why should viticulture be any different?

### Direct producer wines aren't of the same quality as wine from European varieties!

There is nothing inherent to these grape varieties that means the wines are of poorer quality. The root of this myth can be found in the history of the direct producers. In the 1920s, before their prohibition, these wines served the mass market, as they were cheaper to produce, because the vines can be (a) planted directly, compared to the European varieties which are grafted onto different root stocks, and (b) successfully grown without the use of pesticides, thanks to their natural resistances, saving on material and human resources.

Today, the legal persecution of direct producers means they often do not meet the same standard as commercial wines, as they are confined to cultivation in gardens and production for private consumption or secret sale. The example of Uhudler in Austria demonstrates that **these wines can be produced at the highest quality** when they enjoy some legal protection.

### Direct producer wines make you crazy!

This myth was particularly popular in the 1960s and was often linked to claims that direct producer wines had a high methanol content. Various studies conducted in Austria and Canada have since demonstrated that the methanol content of the direct producer wines is well **within the safety guidelines of the International Organization for Vine and Wine.** These studies also indicate that methanol content is heavily influenced by production methods.

#### Further information

In 2018 ARCHE NOAH published a study *Forbidden Fruits: The fabulous destiny of Noah, Othello, Isabelle, Jacques, Clinton and Herbemont* looking at the history of the prohibition of the direct producers in Europe and collecting scientific evidence refuting the above myths. The study can be found on our homepage: <https://www.arche-noah.at/english/policy/wine-grape-biodiversity>

Contact: [goncalo.macedo@arche-noah.at](mailto:goncalo.macedo@arche-noah.at)