

Actualité en France

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Mad about French wines and spirits!

2012 was a vintage year for French wines and spirits internationally. Sales grew and foreigners invested in France's vineyards. French oenologists were also highly sought-after to develop vineyards across the world.

French wines and spirits have always been popular and the 2012 results illustrate this healthy position. According to the FEVS (France's Federation of Exporters of Wines and Spirits), the turnover in exports reached 11.15 billion euros, a growth of over 10% on 2011, which already showed a similar rise. Wine exports registered 7.6 billion euros (+ 8.5%) and spirits 3.5 billion euros (+ 13.5%). France sells two and a half billion bottles per year and the rise in value of products (+ 10%) was higher than that of volumes exported (+ 1.6%). It seems that international buyers have no hesitation in paying high prices for their favourite French fine wines.

Thanks to the 500 and more exporting companies, wines and spirits remained the second trade surplus item in the balance of payments, behind aeronautics and in front of perfumes and cosmetics. Alone they represent 86% of the surplus of French food and agriculture.

The geographical concentration of exports remains strong: the top ten markets represent over 75 % of the total value of our exports. The United States remains the top destination with over 1.9 billion euros (+ 13.1%) and a stronger increase in wines (+ 18%) than in spirits (+ 8%). Then comes the United Kingdom with 1.5 billion euros (+ 5.7%), and China with 1 billion euros (+ 17%). The biggest increases were recorded with Russia (+ 37%), Australia (+ 32%) and Taiwan (+ 25%). Overall, the European Union represents only 41% of exports compared with 50% in 2010. This distribution perfectly illustrates the dynamism of other markets, notably in Asia, in the face of the relative lifelessness of the European market.



For wines, Bordeaux (+ 15% in value) and Champagnes (+ 4.7%) represent 60% of the total amount of exports between them, a long way ahead of Burgundies (6% of exports, + 8.5%). While Champagne is still greatly prized, notably in Asia, Crémant de Bourgogne is especially popular in the United States, Sweden, Belgium and Japan, where sales are growing by 25% per year.

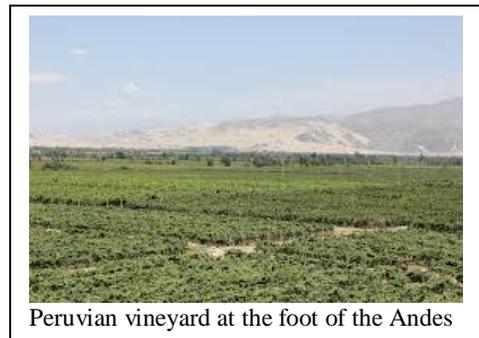
With nearly 2.4 billion euros of exports (+ 17.1%), cognac accounts for over two thirds of sales of spirits worldwide. Its main outlets are the United States (with 924 million euros, up nearly 8%) ahead of Singapore (562 million euros, + 26%) and China (471 million euros, + 26.3%). It is interesting to note that with over 372 million euros of exports (+ 2.6%) vodka is the second biggest selling spirit in the world.

Although sales of wines and spirits are buoyant, foreign investors are also attracted to French vineyards. The most enterprising are the Chinese. In the Bordeaux region, over thirty acquisitions have been made by Chinese investors since 2011 and twice that number are in the process of negotiation. These new buyers are staying away from the classified grands crus and going for intermediate appellations that can be bought for 5 million euros on average, compared to 20 times more for a grand cru. In 2012, the Chinese also established themselves in Burgundy with the purchase of Château de Gevrey Chambertin for 8 million euros.

Other foreign investors preceded them: notably the Japanese, present mainly in the Bordeaux region, the British, the Americans and the Belgians.

Recognised knowhow

While foreign investors in France benefit from the experienced advice of local wine-growers, those who wish to produce in their own countries are also calling upon the knowhow of French professionals. These ambassadors of wine, young graduates or recognised experts, are very numerous and are to be found all over the world. They are working in Argentina, Chile and Peru in the foothills of the Andes; they are making fine wines in the south of Australia, but also in Armenia, Canada and the United States without forgetting Europe (Spain, Portugal, Romania, Italy). French oenologists are beginning to be very much in demand in India and China where the local production of wines is developing exponentially.



Peruvian vineyard at the foot of the Andes

Sylvie Thomas