

uniWines News November 2012

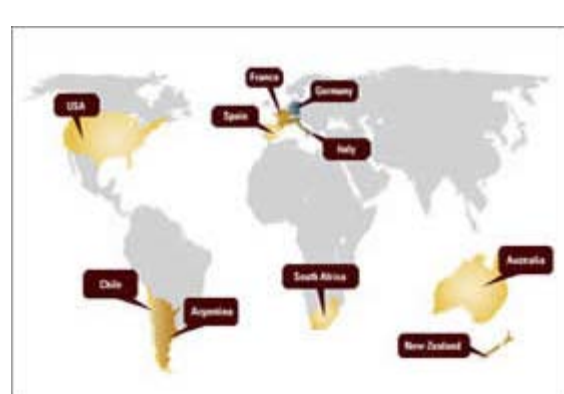


THE VALLEY AND ITS PEOPLE • THE WINES • GET IN TOUCH • FACEBOOK • TWITTER

A new season always heralds the arrival of many fresh breezes too. This newsletter from uniWines is one of them – not that there aren't many other things that keep our team busy, we can assure you! However, communication remains essential for an enterprise with such a diversity of interests. Included are our shareholder wine farmers who supply grapes, local and international customers, business associates, media and the entire wine world out there. It is through this correspondence to all these interest groups that we want to ensure the window to uniWines Vineyards, our people and our world, remains open. Yes, these days there are more communication tools than wine styles in a European supermarket chain. It's Twitter here and websites there; facebook up and Google down. But as it is with wine quality, identity and focus are more important than volume and quantity. By way of this correspondence we therefore want to pierce these overloaded communication channels and share what is happening at uniWines Vineyards. Believe us, there's plenty!

Wine drought

Over the past few weeks, the abovementioned communication channels have buzzed about the worldwide shortage of wine. The most popular figure quoted is 1,3bn bottles that currently exist, mainly as a result of poor crops in Europe caused by inclement weather conditions during the growth season and harvest. As Mark Twain said, there are "lies, damned lies and statistics", so don't bet your last penny on the accuracy of this number. But at this point it remains a fact that the international marketplace is a little anxious about the availability of wine to service their various customers. Many South African wine cellars will be delighted by this situation considering the term "wine surplus" has too often been used in the recent past to describe the current state of affairs. New opportunities are however there to be grasped. What is the opinion of uniWines Vineyards on this matter? Well, the company was established around stability, sustainability and unlocking value. This means loyalty towards current customers, and pricing that is sustainable over the long term and based on good relationships. And also – most importantly – the supply of top quality wine at the best prices in a way that offers value to our shareholder producers as well as the customer. It's a mouthful, but in brief this means that uniWines Vineyards will not sneak into the gap to take advantage of expected shortages. Opportunities will undoubtedly be grasped, but without losing sight of long term growth and sustainability.



In the vineyard

With the vineyards lush in the Bredekloof and an important growth phase having been reached, a busy time lies ahead for uniWines Vineyards viticulturist Gert Engelbrecht. Besides the work in the vineyards there is also the question of the cricket test series between South African and Australia that demands the attention of this cricket-crazy vineyard man. Thanks to a cold, wet winter, the vineyards are in very good condition. "The cold portions during winter – where temperatures regularly approached freezing – caused the vine cycle to be later than the previous year," says Gert. "The early vines began budding about a week later than last year, but despite rain and cold in October, the vineyard flowered at the expected time." According to him, timing matters less than evenness. "So far, bud and flower regimes were exceptionally even, which is very important for a high production area such as ours because it facilitates the management of the vineyard and work schedule, and leads to even ripening," Gert explains. The hard work now lies in the suckering and canopy management, elements that are very important to Gert considering he holds a steadfast belief that the key to good quality wine lies in sufficient exposure to light of the vineyard canopy. In other words, the foliage should not be too dense and dark! "Through suckering we remove the superfluous shoots that do not carry grapes and we retain the right amount of strong shoots that will receive enough sunlight to ripen grapes effectively and quickly," says Gert. "And it now begins to get hot in our valley – when the berries form, it should be under the right conditions so that they can grow accustomed to the heat." As is becoming of a viticulturist, Gert is not easily given to voicing predictions about the coming year's harvest. As he and uniWines Vineyards farmers know, nature doesn't simply let itself be dictated to. "Initially things were late to get underway, but it does appear as if next year's harvest will begin at its usual time at the end of January." However, just like cricket, anything can happen in the vineyard...



Fairtrade

The Fairtrade principle has really taken hold in South Africa over the past two years. While the Fairtrade ethos overseas has grown over quite some time to become a strong brand, it took a while before the name and its familiar seal found favour with the South African consumer. Thanks to the excellent work of Fairtrade SA, not only to get agricultural products in the Fairtrade stable, but also to communicate the values of the brand, the awareness thereof has improved dramatically. This situation is good news for uniWines Vineyards' position as a producer of Fairtrade wines. Firstly, it offers us the opportunity to penetrate the local market with our wines, particularly at a time where the consumer's conscience plays an increasingly larger role in purchase decision-making. More importantly however, is the fact that by embracing the Fairtrade culture, South Africa improves its overall image as an agricultural country with values and a social conscience. South Africa is already the world's biggest supplier of Fairtrade-accredited wines, and as a one of these producers uniWines Vineyards sees how the worldwide demand for Fairtrade grows. As the country gets behind Fairtrade, so can South Africa rise beyond being the largest supplier of Fairtrade wines to being the most well-known and sought-after as well. The advantages this brings to the wine industry – and agriculture in general – are considerable in terms of unlocking value, yes, but also in the supremely important spheres of image and reputation too.

