

Research suggests parts of UK could be too hot for wine-making by 2080

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Increasing summer temperatures could mean some parts of southern England are too hot to grow vines for making wine by 2080, according to a new book launched today (26 May 2008).

The author, Emeritus Professor Richard Selley from Imperial College London, claims that if average summer temperatures in the UK continue to rise as predicted, the Thames Valley, parts of Hampshire and the Severn valley, which currently contain many vineyards, will be too hot to support wine production within the next 75 years.

Instead, Professor Selley says, this land could be suitable for growing raisins, currents and sultanas, currently only cultivated in hot climates such as North Africa and the Middle East.

In addition, he adds that if the climate changes in line with predictions by the Met Office's Hadley Centre, by 2080 vast areas of the UK including Yorkshire and Lancashire will be able to grow vines for wines like Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon which are currently only cultivated in warmer climates like the south of France and Chile.

Different grape varieties flourish in different temperatures, and are grouped into cool, intermediate, warm and hot grape groups. For the last 100 years 'cool' Germanic grape varieties have been planted in British vineyards to produce wines like Reisling. In the last 20 years some 'intermediate' French grape varieties have been successfully planted in southeast England, producing internationally prize-winning sparkling

white wines made from Pinot Noir, Pinot Meunier and Chardonnay.

Combining temperature predictions from the IPCC and the Met Office's Hadley Centre with his own research on UK vineyards throughout history, Professor Selley predicts that these cool and intermediate grape varieties will be confined to the far north of England, Scotland and Wales by 2080, with 'warm' and 'hot' varieties seen throughout the midlands and south of England.

Explaining the significance of his new study, Emeritus Professor Selley from Imperial's Department of Earth Science and Engineering, said: "My previous research has shown how the northernmost limit of UK wine-production has advanced and retreated up and down the country in direct relation to climatic changes since Roman times.

"Now, with models suggesting the average annual summer temperature in the south of England could increase by up to five degrees centigrade by 2080, I have been able to map how British viticulture could change beyond recognition in the coming years. Grapes that currently thrive in the south east of England could become limited to the cooler slopes of Snowdonia and the Peak District."

Professor Sir Brian Hoskins, Director of the Grantham Institute for Climate Change at Imperial College London, said: "This research shows how the environment in the UK could be affected by climate change in a relatively short period of time. Increases in temperature over the course of this century could have a dramatic effect on what can be grown here, including vines."

Source: Imperial College London

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