

Champagne bottle gets green makeover

September 14 2010, By Katherine Butler

Go to Google looking for "green wine," and you'll be greeted with a flood of information on how the global wine industry is taking steps to green its grapes, bottles, processes and more. Many wineries are eschewing pesticides and embracing biodynamic practices. Most vineyards are quick to crow about their eco-friendly practices -- that is, most vineyards outside of France's Champagne region.

The makers of champagne are legendary in their discretion about their winemaking practices. As the New York Times reports, the fact that champagne makers have quietly adopted a more eco-friendly design for their [bottles](#) surprises no one. Producers in the region have reshaped their bottles into a sleeker, more efficient design -- all to reduce the carbon footprint of their process. This "bottle shock" is a big step in the greening of the industry.

Thierry Gasco is the master vintner for Pommery. As he told the New York Times, "This is how we're remaking the future of champagne. We're slimming the shoulders to make the bottle lighter, so our carbon footprint will be reduced to help keep champagne here for future generations." To the untrained eye, the dark bottles don't look very different from traditional containers. The difference is just 2.3 ounces less material below the neck of the bottle. But experts say this difference will remove 200,000 metric tons of carbon dioxide that the industry emits each year transporting its goods around the world.

The champagne industry is traditionally at the whim of the economy, primarily because it takes an average of three years to produce

champagne from raw grapes. This makes it more sensitive to times of economic uncertainty, which is certainly true with the current recession. Tyler Colman is an author of environmental studies on the wine industry. As he told the NY Times, "for champagne producers to reduce the weight of their packaging is definitely a step in the right direction, because there's less mass to transport around the world." Others point out that reducing the [carbon footprint](#) of the industry is a way to stay competitive with the rest of the market.

But the champagne industry remains typically discreet about how much money producers will save or how much eco-standards will improve with these new bottles. The task of redesigning them had to consider the famous shape while containing the extreme pressure on the beverage. The new bottles are not much cheaper than the original ones, but they could become an industry standard -- and therefore further reduce the cost of production.

In the meantime, vintners continue to balance the carefully cultivated traditions of Champagne with progress and efficiency.

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