

## France sees red after Spanish rose wine found in domestic bottles

July 9 2018, by Nicolas Gubert And Joseph Schmid

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French investigators found that millions of bottles of rose actually contained Spanish wine

Summer is the ideal time for breaking out a bottle of rose, but fans of French wine might think twice after millions of bottles were found to

contain less costly Spanish tippie instead.

France's consumer fraud agency confirmed Monday that 70,000 hectolitres—the equivalent of 10 million bottles—of Spanish rose were falsely labelled as French vintages by hundreds of producers in 2016 and 2017.

According to French daily Le Parisien, which first reported the findings, Spanish rose sold in bulk at the time for just 34 euro cents (\$0.40) a litre compared with 75 to 90 cents for French rose.

"We were alerted to the 'Frenchification' of Spanish [wine](#) at the end of 2015," the consumer agency's Alexandre Chevallier told the paper.

"So we launched an inquiry at all levels, from producers to importers to restaurants and distributors," he said.

Twenty-two percent of the businesses subjected to controls in 2016 and 15 percent in 2017—a total of 743 establishments—were cited for trying to present the foreign wine as French, he explained.

Some blatantly passed it off as French, as was the case for bottles showing drawings of French-sounding but fictitious castles, or wines sold by the glass in some restaurants.

Others were more subtle, putting "Produced in France" on the front label but "European Community wine" on the back, or embellishing bottles with national symbols like the heraldic lily or a ribbon in the blue, white and red of the French flag.

Misleading wine drinkers is no small matter in France: producers could face fraud lawsuits that carry penalties of up to two years in prison and 300,000 euros in fines.



French winemakers emptying wine from a Spanish truck during a protest Le Boulon, ten kilometres from the French-Spanish border, in April 2016

### 'Question of price'

Tensions have long simmered between winegrowers on either side of the Pyrenees, with French producers often accusing their Spanish rivals of unfair competition.

In recent years French protests have blocked Spanish trucks from bringing their wine into the country, with demonstrators emptying their loads onto highways.

Production surpluses in Spain have pushed down prices there, making the country's wines a better deal for consumers—and a tempting substitute for some French distributors.

"It's a question of price," Jerome Despey, a winegrower in the southern Hérault region and member of the FNSEA agricultural union, told AFP.

The two countries' agriculture ministers met in Paris last summer to try to end the conflict, leading to a series of measures aimed at limiting price volatility, Despey said.

Price increases across Europe following weather-related grape harvest shortfalls last year have also helped ease tensions.

"We need to keep up the pressure with these inspections so this kind of thing can't happen again," Despey said, urging the government to impose stricter labelling rules.

Delphine Geny-Stephann, France's junior economy minister, said she had asked the fraud agency "to continue carrying out regular inspections in the sector."

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Citation: France sees red after Spanish rose wine found in domestic bottles (2018, July 9)  
retrieved 5 July 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2018-07-france-red-spanish-rose-wine.html>

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