

Climate change offers sparkling prospects to English winemakers

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Although most of England's vineyards are in the southeast, parts of England farther north and in Wales are now suitable for growing grapes thanks to climate change

With climate change pushing up temperatures, English winemakers are rubbing their hands as their sparkling wines start to give top champagnes

a run for their money.

Strolling through the Pinglestone vineyard in Hampshire, southern England, under a pale autumn sun, winemaker James Bowerman is smiling broadly.

"The (Pinot) Meunier really enjoyed itself this year," the vineyard manager says, surveying the vines.

This year's temperatures have taken Vranken-Pommery, the prominent French [champagne](#) house that bought the estate in 2014, by surprise.

"We had to water the vines in June, which is pretty incredible. Given the reputation of the English climate, we were not expecting that," said Clement Pierlot, director of vineyards and champagne cellars at Pommery.

Intrigued by the rapid growth of vineyards in England, Vranken-Pommery jumped into the market after falling in love with the chalk hills of Hampshire.

Fifteen hectares (37 acres) of Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Pinot Meunier, the three primary champagne grape varieties, were planted here last year. A further 25 hectares will be added over the next two years.

While waiting to harvest the first crop of grapes, Vranken-Pommery produced a first sparkling [wine](#) with grapes brought in from elsewhere on this side of the Channel.

Dubbed Louis Pommery England, the test was deemed a success.



English vineyards have found their "niche" with sparkling wines, says Chris Foss, head of the wine department at Plumpton College, Britain's centre for excellence in viniculture

"We can have wines which are fine and expressive but with a nice style and freshness," Pierlot said.

English sparkling wine will "soon bring a level of cheer to British drinkers greater than that provided by French champagne," said Environment Secretary Michael Gove, talking up the "opportunities of a changing climate".

Sparkling wine 'niche'

While English vintners have made [sparkling wines](#) for decades, the number of hectares given over to their production has soared 150 percent in the last 10 years, tripling since 2000.

At some four million bottles, sparkling wine represented 68 percent of wines produced in Britain last year—a share that is set to increase in the coming years.

Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Pinot Meunier account for 71.2 percent of the grape varieties planted.

"We have gone from a small cottage industry to a real, proper, thriving industry," said Cherie Spriggs, head winemaker at Nyetimber, whose first vines were planted in 1988, also in southeast England.

Spriggs was named sparkling winemaker of the year at the 2018 International Wine Challenge in July—the first time the prize has gone to a vintner outside the Champagne region of northeastern France.

She is also the first woman to have won the prestigious award.

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