



As thousands of winegrowers in the Languedoc convert to organic farming, **James Lawrence** looks to Millésime Bio, the event at the centre of the movement

Languedoc's commitment to organic wine

The transformation of the Languedoc-Roussillon is one of Europe's great revival stories. It has moved on from producing large volumes of indifferent wine to becoming a centre of quality and excellence in the Mediterranean. Its passionate community of wine estates now offers consumers a rich variety of terroirs, small-production labels, indigenous grape varieties and undiscovered styles. But, most importantly of all, the region has spearheaded a revolution in organic winegrowing. Thanks to the dedication of organisations like **Sudvinbio** (Interprofessional Association of Organic Wines of Occitania), the Languedoc is now the largest producer of organic wines in France.

"In recent years, the number of conversions to organic viticulture has increased enormously: more than 4,500 new organic farms over the last five years in France," says Nicolas Richarme, president of **Sudvinbio**. "Our priority is to help winegrowers maintain their commitment to organic farming and its positive impact on the environment. In addition, we must ensure that organic viticulture is financially sustainable for our members; organic farming is more costly, therefore we promote higher prices – and added value – in the export markets."



STRENGTH IN UNITY

One of **Sudvinbio's** greatest achievements was the creation of the Millésime Bio wine fair – now approaching its 30-year anniversary. Uniting a

Millésime Bio wine fair has been running for almost 30 years



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diverse cross-section of winemakers, merchants, and international critics, the event was designed to drive change, encourage the sharing of best practice and challenge the wider industry.

"Thirty years ago, Millésime Bio was created by a group of winegrowers and merchants from the Languedoc-Roussillon who shared an innovative vision for the time: to develop an organic wine

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IN ASSOCIATION WITH:



Nicolas Richarme

PRESIDENT OF SUDVINBIO

The percentage of organically certified vineyards in France has risen dramatically since the first edition of Millésime Bio. Why do you think the organic movement has been so successful in France?

The development of organic wine started from the will of winegrowers to work the vineyard in a cleaner way and to have a more positive impact on their environment and biodiversity. The movement was then followed by consumers who wanted to reduce their impact on the environment and who realised that organic wine is a very high quality product. We then witnessed a real craze for organic wine in France, but also in neighbouring countries, such as Germany, and particularly in the Nordic countries, such as Sweden. The Nordic countries are not themselves producers and therefore consume a lot of French organic wine.

It is generally the case that growers who become organic also move into biodynamic viticulture ?

If the number of organic winemakers increases, then the number of biodynamic winemakers may increase as well, since it is mandatory to be certified organic before being able to go biodynamic. Nevertheless, we do not have a precise percentage of biodynamic production as it is a very specific winegrowing culture. It still remains a little bit on the fringe because it is a way of cultivation that is not accessible to everyone. All the organic winegrowers are not necessarily open to this type of agriculture, so we cannot make a correlation between the increase of organic and biodynamic farming.

We are in the middle of a climate crisis. How can the organic movement help in the fight against climate change?

Agriculture is the second largest source of greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) in France after transportation. However, organic agriculture has a better record on greenhouse gas emissions than conventional agriculture. Indeed, the winegrowers who have converted to organic farming try to have a greater environmental consciousness; they will not use pesticides, will not pollute the water table and will have a less harmful impact on biodiversity. And the more organic winegrowers there are, the more we will succeed in reducing the consequences of agriculture on the environment.

industry,” explains Richarme. “They started from the observation that it was very difficult to bring together the few winegrowers and merchants who existed in organic agriculture. Indeed, organic farming was still on the fringe in the 1990s, especially in the wine sector. It was therefore complicated to sell at the time, despite a real commercial expectation from both sides.

“Thus, Millésime Bio was launched to meet the needs of wine professionals who wanted to promote the added value of organically produced wines, made by wineries that prohibit artificial pesticides.”

Three decades later, Millésime Bio has evolved into the leading global marketplace for stakeholders across the organic wine, cider, beer and spirit industries, attracting thousands of professionals each year. The timing is very opportune: demand for organic wines continues to rise in the UK market. In September, Majestic announced a significant boost in the turnover from organic wines, selling 620,000 bottles of organic wine from August 2021 to July 2022. This amounted to a 27% sales increase year on year.

The organic movement spreading across the Languedoc-Roussillon could soon become the most valuable currency in the global wine market. The revolution is well under way.