SPRINT SUCCESS STORIES

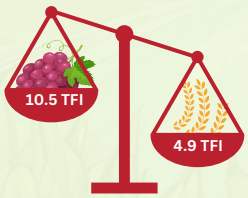
PROMOTING GOOD AGRICULTURAL PRACTICES IN VINEYARDS, ST EMILION, FRANCE

The Saint-Émilion Wine Council protects the appellation of the St Émilion wines and provides advice and services to its members. It has established several initiatives to support a reduction in the use of pesticides, including a compulsory uptake of environmental certification as a membership condition. Other projects on pesticide management include projects on biological pest control (support to bat populations in the vineyards), improved soil management, and technical advice on spraying techniques.

THE CHALLENGE

St Émilion wines are a high value product. As with other Bordeaux wines they are particularly exposed to mildew which develops in damp conditions, leading to yield loss. Like most conventional vineyards, the average pesticides use in vineyards, mostly consisting of fungicides, is significantly higher than the national average for other crops, such as wheat.

Yield losses of 15-20% in St Emilion in 2023 due to wet year.



The average treatment frequency index (TFI) is significantly higher for vineyards compared to wheat*

KEY OBJECTIVES

- To implement an holistic environmental programme for all producers under the St Émilion appellation.
- To raise the identity of St Émilion wines as high end, quality focused product.

BACKGROUND

- Saint-Émilion Wine Council represents around 900 producers and 7,500 ha of productive land.
- They established the initiative in 2015 amid a long history of landscape and environmental action.
- One driver was the cultural significance of its vineyards and chateaux designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.
- Another driver was the growing consumer demand for higher environmental standards in wine production.

REGULATORY SOLUTION

COMPULSORY CERTIFICATION

- All producers in the St Émilion appellation are required to adopt an environmental certification
- Producers are free to choose the certification as long as:
- a) it is a State regulated certification and
- b) it meets the organic certification or at least the level 2 environmental certification (see full list here).
- Key to acceptability was flexibility to choose to match different farming and marketing choices.
- Producers were given five years to adopt an environmental certification
- They were supported by more than 110 meetings to inform and support the select and implementation of the environmental certification.

RECORD KEEPING

- Producers must record their pesticide application practices and calculate their TFI
- Data is captured using DEVOPP digital tool developed as part of the region's VitiData project
- The data will provide benchmarks for the level of pesticide use in the sector.

KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE SOLUTIONS

- An events programme is run to support knowledge exchange and capacity-building e.g.
- Calibration and use of pesticide spraying equipment
- Knowledge exchange events focused on mildew
- Improving soil fertility by supporting soil diagnostics and trials with green covers
- Mapping landscape features to identify gaps for targeted enhancement of ecological corridors

RESEARCH SOLUTIONS

- Supporting research to increase bats in vineyards
- Developing alternative PPPs to tackle mildew, such as products based on algae

*Total average pesticide use (not including biocontrol) in St Emilion in 2021

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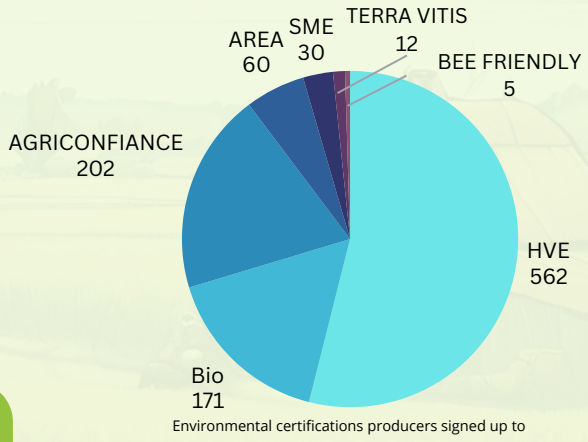
RESULTS AND OUTCOMES

By 2023, 98% of producers in St Emilion had become certified. Although most started with less ambitious standards, higher standards have been adopted over time.



Environmental certifications producers signed up to

LESSONS LEARNED

1. Producer organisations can act as a driver of change by establishing a baseline, supporting information exchange and contracting research and pilots to showcase alternatives
2. Compulsory environmental certification gets the producers foot in the door.
3. A collective approach is required that is flexible enough so that no one is excluded.
4. Focus on concrete solutions to issues and challenges identified by producers.
5. Take an holistic approach, not just pesticides, but focus on multiple topics at the same time.
6. Issue of pesticide use cannot be tackled in isolation from other environmental, social and economic issues.
7. Ensure sufficient time and human resources to inform and support producers.
8. Strong political will by key actors in charge of producer organisations is required.

"We had to choose an approach that brought everyone in and that wouldn't end up causing quarrels and opposition. This meant finding a way forward that was realistic and had political buy-in."

TRANSFERABILITY

The compulsory and voluntary approach adopted could be **replicated by other Wine Producer Organisations across Europe**.

St Emilion Union of Producers adopts two approaches:

COMPULSORY

1. **Environmental certification**
2. **Record keeping of pesticide use**

VOLUNTARY - KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE

1. **Living and fertile soil - e.g., soil cover and green manure**
2. **Towards less pesticides and more biocontrol e.g. use of indicators, adoption of good practice**
3. **Dynamic and diverse landscape e.g. planting of edges**
4. **Water quality e.g. effluent control from wineries, buffer strips**
5. **Climate change e.g. hail and frost damage mitigation**
6. **People e.g. training and skills development, neighbourhood impact mitigation**

LES VINS DE SAINT-EMILION

FURTHER INFORMATION

Read more about St Emilion here: https://vins-saint-emilion.com/en/

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