

Canada's wine industry

Outsourcing terroir

Sep 10th 2009 | OTTAWA

From The Economist print edition

Blended deceit from the nanny state

THE idea of Canadian wine invites disbelief in those who think of the country as being a frozen wilderness. In fact, British Columbia's Okanagan Valley, blessed with a Mediterranean microclimate, is home to some respectable vintages and southern Ontario, on the same latitude as France's Languedoc, produces passable plonk. Partly thanks to government subsidies, the wineries have raised the quantity and quality of their output, won a few international awards and notched up modest export sales.

Some wine producers fear that their new status risks being undermined by loose labelling allowed by Ontario, Canada's most populous province. It lets wines made with up to 70% imported grapes be sold as Canadian. The small print declares, ambiguously, that these impostors were "cellared in Canada", but they are otherwise indistinguishable from the real thing. British Columbia follows a similar practice.

This laxity dates from when Canadian wine makers struggled to get enough local grapes. It is backed by Canada's two biggest wine companies, Vincor Canada (a subsidiary of Constellation Brands, an American wine giant) and Andrew Peller. They argue that they cannot compete with cheaper imports from Chile and Australia unless they use bulk wines from those same countries.

Smaller wineries in both British Columbia and Ontario, which produce better-quality wines, say the labelling is devaluing their image. They want the rule changed. They accuse the Liquor Control Board, an arm of Ontario's government that holds a monopoly on off-sales in the province, of siding with the heavyweights. The board displays their blended wines on the shelves dedicated to promoting local products at the front of every store. It is bad enough for consumers to have to buy wine from the government. Why the government thinks consumers should be hoodwinked in the cause of trying to compete with Chile and Australia in wine production is even more baffling.

Alamy



Bottled here, not just cellared