

ABSTRACT

Production and marketing of the Pinot Blanc

This report examines the strengths and weaknesses of the Pinot Blanc and its positioning on the wine market. For this purpose, a comprehensive survey of more than 700 Pinot Blanc producers in selected regions in Germany, Austria and Italy was conducted. What role does quality play? How well do the producers manage to sell the Pinot Blanc in the premium sector? What are its typical characteristics, which sorts of wine are its competitors? What are the future marketing challenges?

The Pinot Blanc is a typical (Central) European wine sort. Today, Germany is the most important wine-growing region, followed by Italy and Austria. In the last 10 years, however, only Germany was able to increase its cultivation area, while almost all regions in Italy and Austria have lost acreage. Therefore, the Pinot Blanc remains a niche product in the European context. The shares in the total white wine area are comparatively high in South Tyrol (21 percent), Saale Unstrut (18 percent), Baden (17 percent), Styria (15 percent) and Burgenland (9 percent). Indeed, the producers in these regions consider the Pinot Blanc to be a very important image factor for their company and their region. In the other wine-growing regions examined, including Franconia, Moselle and Württemberg, other white wine varieties dominate, such as the Riesling.

The terroir and the degree of maturity of the grapes are the most important factors for the quality of the Pinot Blanc, while the sugar content is no longer important. The Austrian regions focus the most on quality. Especially Styria and Burgenland produce mainly on areas with a yield of less than 70 hectolitres per

hectare and fill almost entirely in 7/10-litre bottles. Austrian producers (except Burgenland) and South Tyrolean producers are selling significantly more Pinot Blanc in the premium sector (i.e. at retail prices ex farm incl. VAT over 10 euros) than producers in Germany do. Only for a few regions, such as Burgenland, Styria and South Tyrol, specialist trading is of great importance, otherwise food retailing or sales ex farm predominate.

South Tyrol is best at selling its Pinot Blanc on foreign markets, followed by Burgenland and Lower Austria. According to the producers in all regions, the quality of the production is given, but it is often not (yet) possible to achieve a reasonable price. Consequently, the Pinot Blanc producers consider the stronger positioning in the premium sector to be the greatest challenge for the future, while the use of new cultivation and cellar techniques is less urgent.

The "most typical" characteristic of the Pinot Blanc is – according to the assessment of producers in all regions examined – its taste, especially its freshness, finesse and juiciness. Also its structure, i.e. its fullness and strength, is strongly emphasized by the producers. After all, its smell is considered to be very typical by winegrowers in South Tyrol and the German wine-growing regions. Above all, the aromas of fruits such as nuts, apples and pineapples are mentioned. On the other hand, the Austrian regions appreciate its long shelf life. The producers interviewed classify Chardonnay and Ruländer (Pinot Grigio) as the largest competitors of Pinot Blanc in all regions.

How can the Pinot Blanc better manage to exploit its (market) potential in the future? There are good prospects for that, as the Pinot Blanc follows an international trend that favours less opulent and less "cheeky" wines.

The greatest challenge for the future is the increase of the premium sector. This is particularly important for those regions that claim the Pinot Blanc as their leading wine. Styria has managed best to achieve top prices and can therefore serve as a model for other regions such as South Tyrol and Baden. A first step on the way to becoming a premium brand is to fill production even more strongly in 7/10-litre bottles.

In terms of marketing, it is more important to highlight the typical characteristics of the Pinot Blanc, its finesse and juiciness as well as its particular fruity notes, in order to distinguish it better from its competitors such as Chardonnay or Pinot Grigio.