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French Wine Test Finds Pesticides in Each of 92 Bottles Analyzed

By Rudy Ruitenberg - Sep 25, 2013

Laboratory testing of 92 French wines from across the country found pesticide traces in every bottle, including those made from organically-grown grapes, consumer organization [UFC-Que Choisir](#) reported.

All findings were “well below” toxicity thresholds defined by European Union maximum-residue limits, the group wrote in a report for the October issue of its magazine. Que Choisir tested wines ranging from a 1.63-euro (\$2.20) bottle of generic red to a 15-euro Chateauneuf-du-Pape.

The toxicity limits used are based on those for wine grapes before fermentation, as “bizarrely” no such EU limits are in place for bottled wine, Que Choisir wrote. Wine producers in France account for 3.7 percent of farmland and 20 percent of the country’s pesticide use, the group said.

“By drinking a glass of wine, you have every chance of unknowingly swallowing a few micrograms of these pesticide residues,” Que Choisir wrote. “No wine today escapes the pollution by plant-protection products applied to the vines.”

The findings included an insecticide and a fungicide not allowed in the EU, the group said. Wines produced from grapes from “conventional” agriculture on average contained four pesticides, mainly fungicides, while for wine from organic grapes residues mostly consisted of one to two pesticides, wrote Que Choisir.

Health-risk assessments for pesticides are generally based on toxicology studies for a single product, without taking into account cumulative effects, Que Choisir said.

The biggest pesticide count was found in a bottle of Bordeaux from 2010 priced at 10.44 euros, with 14 chemicals detected, followed by a 3.75-euro 2012 Bordeaux with traces of 13 products, according to the report.

Vine Diseases

“Weather conditions, particularly rainfall, have a direct impact on diseases of vines and attacks by

parasites,” Que Choisir wrote. “The warm and dry weather of Provence and the Rhone valley partly explains why the wines from these regions are significantly less loaded with pesticides than their cousins from Champagne and particularly Bordeaux.”

The wines were tested using gas and liquid mass spectrometry that allowed detection of “very low” quantities of molecules of 1 to 10 micrograms, Que Choisir said. Cheaper wines didn’t necessarily contain more pesticide traces than more expensive wines, the test showed.

The highest level of residues tested were 1,682 micrograms in a 2011 white from Graves in the Bordeaux region, followed by 582 micrograms for a 2012 Bordeaux and 569 micrograms for a 2011 Bordeaux. Those three wines and a Bordeaux rose exceeded Swiss thresholds for phthalimide, a non-toxic substance formed by the fungicide folpet, the report showed

The group also found wines with residues close to zero in Bordeaux, as well as in the Rhone Valley, Loire Valley, Provence and Languedoc-Roussillon regions.

For wine made using organic grapes, pesticide traces may have originated in the environment, for example from spraying by neighboring wine makers, according to Que Choisir. Of 10 wines from organic grapes tested, six had residues close to zero, the group said.

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