

Themes from S Africa research visit

February 2025

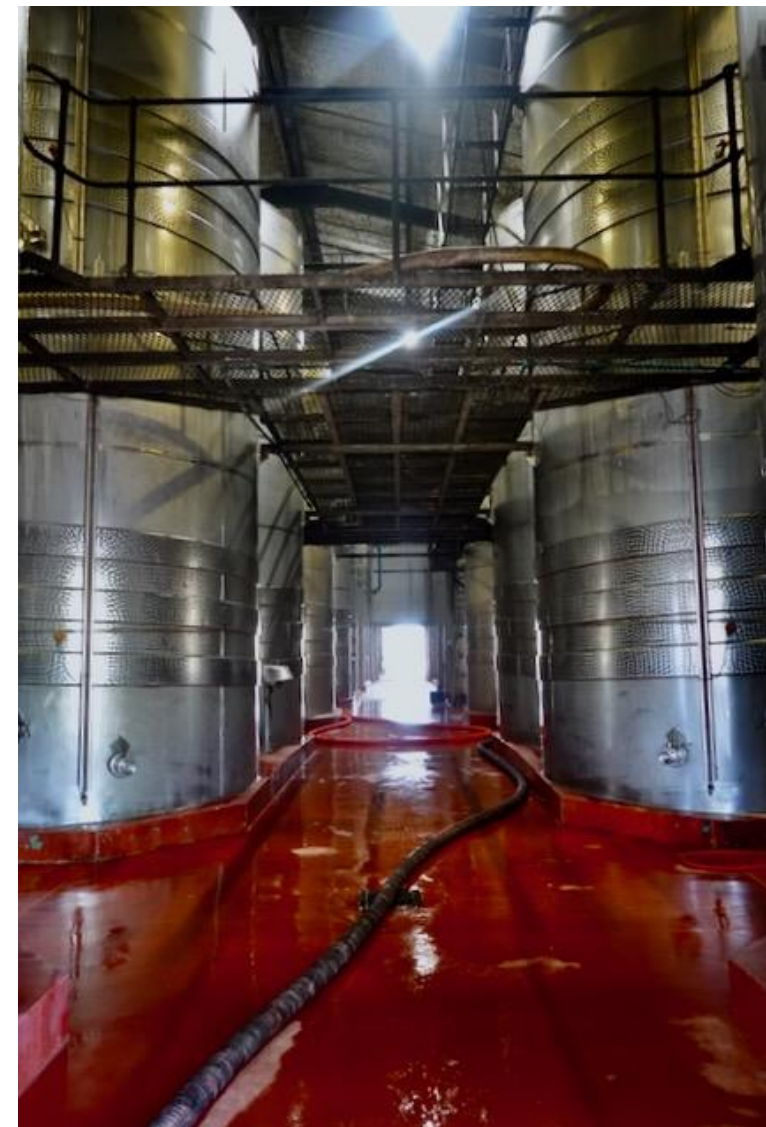


Themes

- Purpose
- Overview of plantings
- Grape growing, especially leafroll
- Old vines and simple winemaking
- Regenerative farming
- Economic and business issues
- Trends and styles
- Questions

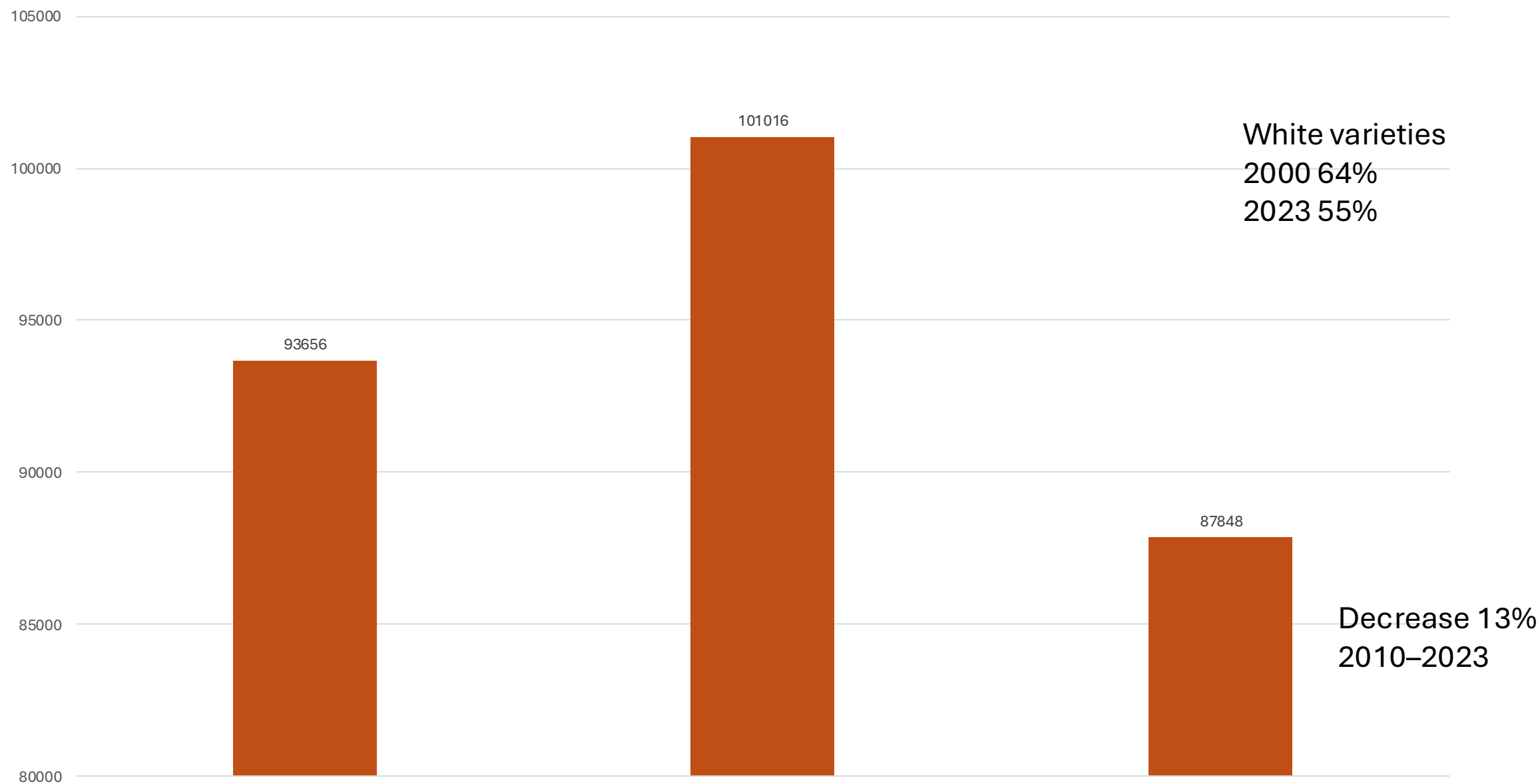
Purpose of the visit

- Update on general visit of 2018 which covered most of the most important GIs
- WOSA agenda: sustainability, old vines, regenerative farming, cool South coast, Cinsault
- Answer L3 questions!

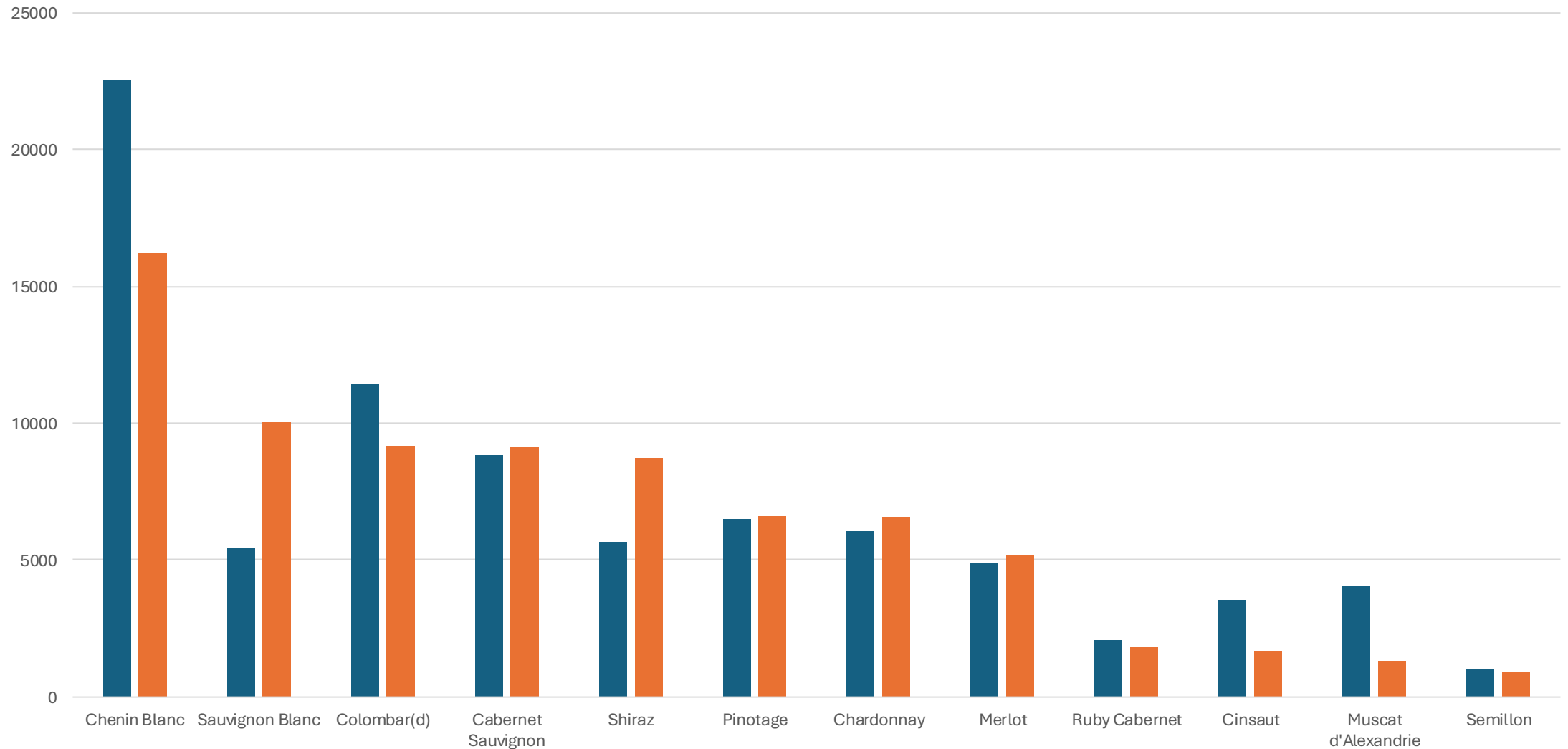


Chardonnay at Storm Wines
& Perdeberg Wines

Total vineyard, hectares, 2000, 2010, 2023, SAWIS data



Vineyard area by variety, hectares: 2000 and 2023



Grape growing

- big range of training systems on the well-funded private estates: bush vines, standard trellising, eschallas
- experimentation with row direction to deal with/channel the wind

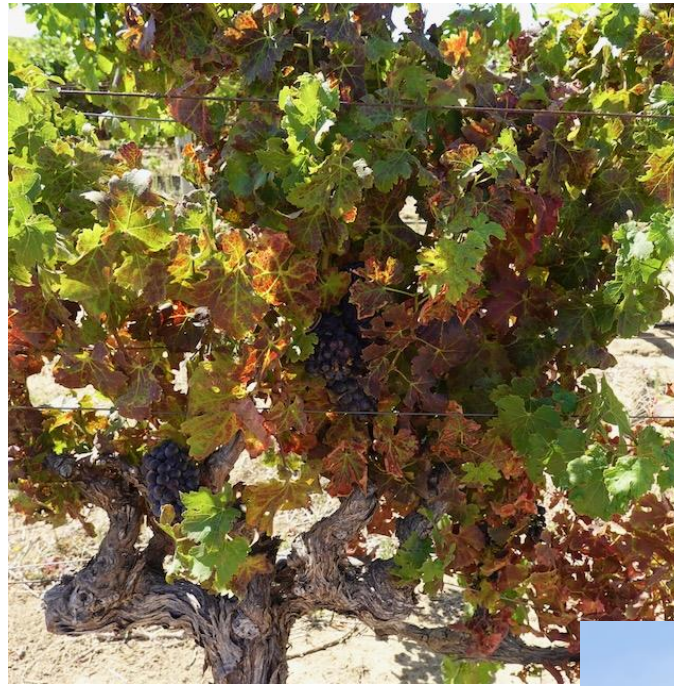


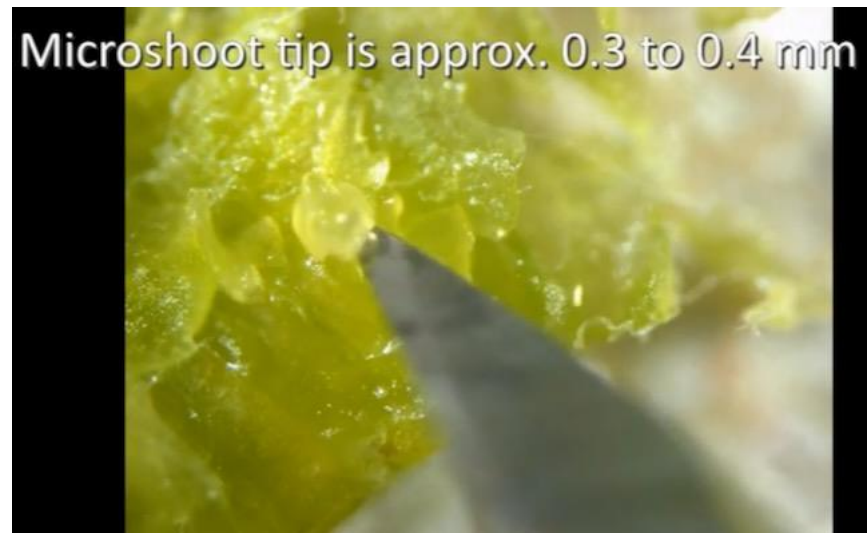
Eschallas training
& young bush vine



Tackling leafroll

- Thought to be in c. 70% of S African vineyards
- getting the message across about removing virused vines immediately and only replanting with virus-free stock
- plant propagation and treatment based on meristem excision; then test repeatedly at every stage for virus





Propagating virus-free vines by meristem tissue propagation and heat treatment



Old vines and simple winemaking

- 20 years ago, Rosa Kruger persuaded Eben Sadie to rent a vineyard of old vines even though it was four hours drive away
- MW tasting in 2012 led to setting up 'I am old' website (suggestion of Jancis Robinson), the precursor of the Old Vine Project
- Surviving old vines all have leafroll but don't show it; they still can produce 5-6 tons/ha.
- Aims: to keep farmers on the land by raising the price of old vine fruit and cherish S Africa's old vines.



Nadia Hefer (OVP)
& Rosa Kruger



- Winemaking: just destemming, one pump over a day, basket press, and then just left in the [old] *tonneau*, ambient yeast
- Research results:
 - Old vine juice had lower sugar levels and lower pH/higher acidity.
 - Consumers are willing to pay a higher price as the wine is seen as exclusive.
- Most old vines owned by co-operative growers: co-ops can raise the price of old vine wines from R6,000/ton to R20,000/ton



Regenerative farming

- organic is challenging and attracts no real price premium
- small but very impressive trend to prioritise soil health and plant resilience
- cover crops to cover the soil (lower soil temperature, reduce evaporation, prevent erosion, adds in hummus and nitrogen);
- native species and promoting biodiversity: fynbos, lakes, removal of 'alien' trees and shrubs; wildlife corridors
- make own compost and have a worm farm, foliar spray with 'compost tea'

Continues...



- no till; carbon sequestration
- high-density controlled grazing with cattle or pigs;
- ducks to eat the snails and geese to protect the ducks from lynx (caracal)
- certification or verified improvement of soil microbiological life
- Claimed to be cost neutral: no chemicals to buy, saves tractor hours and fuel, keeps yields reasonable due to improved soil fertility)
- But you need land: Reyneke, 120 ha (80 vineyard, 20 pasture, 20 rewilding)



Scientific research

- Impressive collaboration with the University of Stellenbosch and others
- VinPro: close to the growers
- New organisation:



- <https://sawine.co.za/>
- knowledge transfer: technical handbook, yearbook, monthly magazine (accidental learning), pamphlets, 'newspaper', web



SOUTH AFRICA WINE RESEARCH LIBRARY



Start search here...



Search the South Africa Wine Research Library for past and current industry-funded projects. The search operates like a Google search. It can be conducted by entering a topic, e.g. Shiraz, smoke taint or ring nematodes, or by researcher name, project number, or project title.

LATEST PROJECTS

EVALUATION OF SOIL HEALTH INDICATORS IN THE STELLENBOSCH WINE GRAPE REGION

by Admin | February 18, 2025 | Viticulture | 0 Comments

Project title: Evaluation of soil health indicators in the Stellenbosch wine grape region

Project number: SU SS AH 25-01

Project leader: Prof A.G. Hardie-Pieters

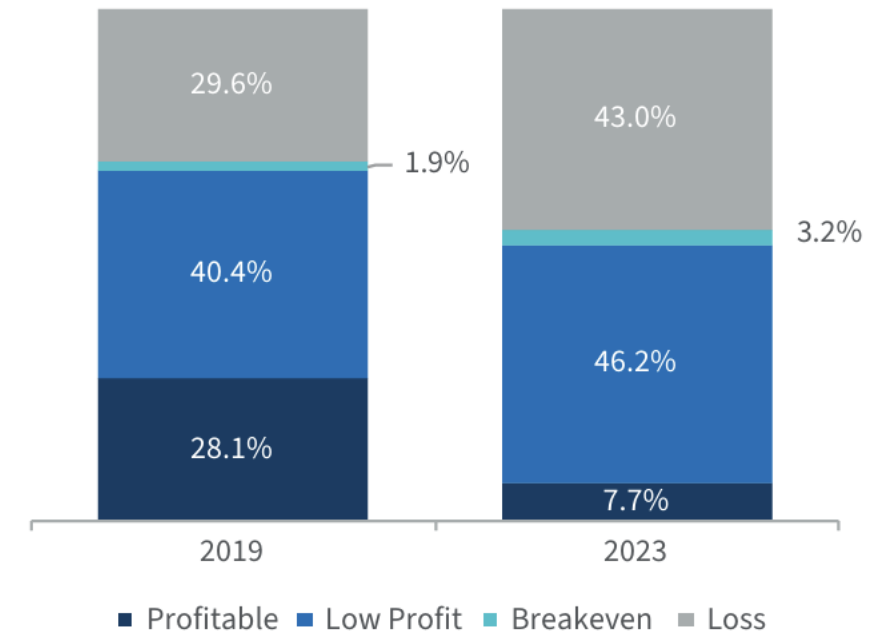
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Economic and business issues

- Continuing issue of 40% of wineries trading at a loss (low yields, competition, low prices).
- Even affects top companies:
 - Kaapzicht's entry level Chenin sells for R60 (£0.43) per bottle at 5.2 tons/ha. You need R100 per bottle at 10 tons/ha to break even.
 - It would make sense to pull out his basic Chenin and buy grapes for that wine.
 - They have pulled 80 ha and replanted 20.
- Cooperatives becoming registered private businesses. For example, Perdeberg is now owned by eight directors (ex-growers) and gets most of their fruit from them, plus 28 small growers: more strategic and business direction
- 'cellars within cellars' to produce premium wines in ex-cooperatives

Figure 6: Profitability based on NFI, 2019 vs. 2023



Source: Vinpro (2024)

Wealth of the top wineries:

- Anthonij Rupert owns Richemont luxury goods brands, including Cartier, 10 luxury watch brands, Montblanc, Net-a-Porter and many more, €10bn sales in 2024
- Oldenburg: Adrian Vanderspuy, family history in mining, now in the finance sector): 17 workers on a short sorting table...



Opportunities

- **Ntsiki Biyela at Aslina Wines**
 - got university scholarship for winemaking, not knowing what it was and didn't speak Afrikaans;
 - wines pre-sold to customers, then buys the grapes; makes her wine at her former employer, Delheim;
 - 'Talk to people, be honest, build up trust'. From nothing to 100,000 bottles, 85% exported.
- Another example: **Natte Vallej**, a high-quality brand, small batches, all bought in fruit from good vineyards, many of which the owner discovered on his cycle riding
- Black empowerment: **Compagniesdrift**, Meerlust spun off its store/pack/labelling/dispatch business, now community-owned and led. 60 clients, stores 3m bottles.



Trends and styles

1. Cap Classique

- Informal (currently) Nectar category, demi-sec but that doesn't mean anything here, 32-50 g/L RS,
- Krone's Nectar is the biggest seller of all, 1.5-2m bottles a year, hugely popular in Africa (R170, £7)

2. Excitement on the South coast: cool climate

- more than Hermanus and Elgin
- New Wave South Coasters and Agulhas Triangle
- Some vineyards too cool to ripen CabS fully



3. Cinsault

- trend for lighter reds
- more of a niche trend than volume, e.g. Craven
- very resilient grape, very hardy, little disease, very drought tolerant
- with a good canopy, it can handle the sun
- can get high yields if you want it
- there is a bit of leafroll virus, but it doesn't kick in until after harvest.



4. Wine tourism

- Creation Wines in Hemel-en-Aarde has 60,000 visitors a year, restaurant, weddings, multi-sensorial wine and food pairing experiences
- Groote Post:
 - former dairy farm in Darling
 - now devotes highest third of farm to vines, then other crops and livestock, lowest part is an antelope and giraffe park for tourists
 - two income streams: driving tourist through the park, selling them wine which they will remember.



Questions?

