

English sparkling wine leading global innovation

English sparkling wine is fast becoming a leader on the global stage – not just for its exceptional quality and dedicated producers, but also with the industry's thirst to drive innovation.

Backed by £6m of government investment, the industry is embracing innovation that combines methods cultivated for the first vines in Roman times, with the latest technology to protect our countryside and land.

This investment has supported the creation of digital weather stations and systems to recognise and remove potentially harmful debris and micro-organisms from grapes, extending shelf life and reducing waste and lowering CO2 emissions.

Our wine growers are also using traditional methods to boost their harvests. Nyetimber, one of the largest producers of sparkling wine in England, uses Southdown sheep to graze among its vineyards in the South of England when the vines are dormant. The keen four-legged helpers maintain grass on the estate, managing weeds and enriching the soil by supporting the natural and diverse nutrient cycle.

Food Minister Victoria Prentis said:

It's fantastic that English sparkling wine is being increasingly recognised as the premium drink of choice to celebrate Christmas here in the UK.

Growers and producers in England set a high bar internationally, thanks to their thirst for innovation and due to unique methods of managing their estates. It is truly inspiring to see ecologically-friendly and surprising ways to make sure the vineyards are well-maintained and that the soil is as nutrient-rich as possible.

Simon Robinson, Chairman, Wines of Great Britain (WineGB) said:

Our fast growing industry is poised at a truly exciting stage of its development. There are now more than 700 vineyards across England and Wales, more than 200 of which will be open to welcome visitors when Covid restrictions are lifted.

Our highest tier of sparkling wines continue to gain international acclaim for their quality and are competing toe to toe with Champagnes on a world stage. This year we focussed on increasing awareness in this hero style, now referred to as our Classic Method sparkling wines. We can also boast a widely acclaimed industry

sustainability scheme adopted by an ever increasing number of vineyards and wineries.

With support from government and inward investment from individuals and even Champagne houses, we are growing our reputation as one of the world's most exciting emergent wine regions. There has never been a better time to celebrate Christmas with a bottle of English or Welsh sparkling wine.

Since the Roman times vines have been cultivated across England, with the Domesday Book referring to Southern English vineyards as early as the 11th century.

Our climate complements slow-ripening grapes giving them their unique, delicate flavour – one of many reasons this beverage is so distinctive.

Today, sparkling wine makes up to 72% of all wine produced in the UK and is served regularly at high-profile occasions, such as Royal state dinners and the Prime Minister's official receptions. In 2018 and in early 2019, England became one of the fastest expanding wine regions in the world.

Government investment in the wine industry has included support for:

- frost fans or protective storage and production solutions,
 - new wineries and cellars,
 - new testing suites and visit centres,
 - research projects into weather forecasting for vineyards,
 - creating online retail platforms for online sales,
 - building digital weather stations or providing weather forecast services, to help predict and mitigate impacts of adverse weather on vines,
 - helping to expand winery areas, equipment and tourist facilities, further creating jobs and increasing productivity.

Through Innovate UK, Government funding has been provided for projects that continue to create multiple forward-looking industry solutions – such as the new system to recognise and remove potentially harmful debris and micro-organisms from grapes, which results in extended grape shelf life and reduced waste and CO2 emissions.

As we leave the Common Agricultural Policy behind and move towards our new system, we will continue to build on these initiatives, for example through a new Research & Development package for England, to unlock innovation and to encourage agri-food businesses to become more involved in innovative solutions.

The government will also continue to support our wine industry in taking further steps forward, such as helping them with cross-industry collaboration to encourage events and tourism. The wine sector will also be eligible to apply for grants through the Farming Investment Fund.

English sparkling wine is globally acclaimed, winning top awards such as the

prestigious Winemaker of the Year Award at the 2018 International Wine and Spirits Competition awards. The Government-funded Food is GREAT campaign also promotes the unique qualities of English sparkling wine to international audiences – from the US to Japan – through consumer experiences, trade shows and Embassy and Consulate receptions.