



Press release

CHAMPAGNE WINEGROWERS AND HOUSES PROPOSE TANGIBLE SOLUTIONS FOR IMPROVING CONDITIONS FOR HARVEST WORKERS

Epernay, France, October 16, 2023 - Following its Executive Board meeting on October 16, the Comité Champagne* announced its first concrete proposals to tackle the challenges facing grape harvesting in Champagne. The proposals aim to ensure that the tragic events of this year never recur by taking all necessary preventive measures.

Every year, 120,000 seasonal workers participate in the Champagne grape harvest, providing support to the industry's 17,000 employers. During this year's harvest, four unsanitary accommodations were closed, investigations on these cases are ongoing. These unspeakable practices are in total opposition with the commitment and investment that is standard for the appellation and they seriously damage its reputation. Furthermore, unrelated but equally devastating, the Champagne region also mourns the loss of five grape-pickers during the 2023 season. Together, these incidents highlight the critical need to mobilize all in Champagne to provide better oversight during this crucial period.

As a result, this week the Comité Champagne announced the creation of a professional group, representing the region's winegrowers and houses, to develop recommendations for improving conditions for workers in the wake of a challenging 2023 harvest. The new interprofessional group will provide guidance to the industry and the government to ensure well managed and safe conditions during the vitally important annual harvest period.

The group will focus on the four following priority areas:

Accommodations

Many winegrowers, co-operatives and wineries provide accommodation for their seasonal employees during the harvest period. However, given the size of the temporary workforce, direct housing capacities remain insufficient. To address the immediate priority of accommodation, together with state services, the Comité Champagne will launch "Assises de l'hébergement des vendangeurs en Champagne" with the goal of mobilizing all stakeholders to explore solutions for increasing housing capacity and ensure optimal conditions for all grape harvesters. In the short term, to better equip professionals, the Comité Champagne will provide them with a guide to accommodating grape-pickers.

Health & Safety Measures

Harvests in Champagne are carried out entirely by hand, which can be physically demanding and intense particularly during periods of high temperatures. The industry will create more rigorous safety measures and develop methods for disseminating information to all stakeholders to ensure full understanding of the expectations for keeping working conditions as safe as possible.

Service providers

Given the complexity of direct recruitment, the limited availability of local labor, and the need to react quickly to upon determination of the harvesting schedule, subcontractors are indispensable during harvest time. In order to create standards for these organizations, the Comité Champagne aims to establish a "Charter of Service Provider in Champagne", to provide Champagne growers and houses with a directory of committed service providers. This charter will be drawn up in partnership with the national social organisations.

Recruitment

The network of producers that need to find an adequate temporary workforce is vast. The new interprofessional group will develop new tools to better facilitate recruitment. Additionally, the group is calling for Champagne viticulture to be recognized as a job in short supply, with significant recruitment needs.

These initial proposals will be outlined in a roadmap that will be shared with all stakeholders, including government bodies and the industry's trade unions. The Executive Board of the Comité Champagne will allocate substantial resources to fully develop these recommendations and to ensure the implementation of these new measures as of the 2024 harvest.

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*Comité Champagne is a trade association which represents the winegrowers and houses of Champagne, France.