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Cheers Wine makers get high with quality

Aussie Expert Roped In To Tell Farmers About Best Methods

Dileep Athavale | TNN

Good wine is made in vineyards, not in wineries. What else can explain the role of good quality grapes in the making of fine wines? Taking a cue from the maxim, the All India Wine Producers Association (AIWPA) has begun a backward integration exercise to educate grape farmers through workshops about the intricacies of growing the wine varieties of grapes to target the best yields and of course a highly remunerative price for their produce.

The AIWPA has involved Australian viticulturist Diana Davidson to hold a series of workshops for the country's grape farmers where she will explain to them the best practices about grapevines, including how to use fertilisers or irrigate the farms and disease control.

Inaugurating the first of such workshops in the city on Wednesday, Rahuri Krishi Vidyapeeth vice-chancellor Rajaram Deshmukh stressed upon the opportunity the Indian wines have at home and worldwide.

"There are about 6,000 Indian restaurants in the world which are more than eager to add Indian wines to their menu," Deshmukh said, adding that the Indian wines can compete more strongly with international brands if concerted efforts are made to improve the grape quality.

He said there is ample scope for wines on the home turf as well because India's wine production is a minuscule 1.4-crore litres per year against 32 billion litres across the globe. On the per capita consumption side too, India ranks very low at 10 ml as compared to 100 litres in Argentina, 70 litres France, 65 litres Italy and 25 litres in the US, he pointed out.

Deshmukh said there is a need to develop nurseries for wine varieties as well as focus on Indian varieties that will help Indian wines meet international standards. The other side of the business is to develop the manpower necessary to manage the different aspects from vineyards to making and marketing wines, he stressed.

The AIWPA president and chairman of Indage Group, Shamrao Chaugule, said the government incentives have helped set up a number of wineries, but there is no proportionate increase in the area under plantation.

The country now has 64 wineries, of which 60 are in Maharashtra, he said, adding that the focus of grape growers has been on increasing production, though not many have bothered about quality. "We may reach a stage of oversupply and price fall. In such a situation, only high quality can rescue the farmers," he said.

According to Chaugule, wine grapes with the right size, colour, sweetness and acidity levels can fetch as much as Rs 100 per kg for the farmer. Even the government policy is favourable to wine makers and ignores the grape farmers, he noted.

MAHARASHTRA AND WINE

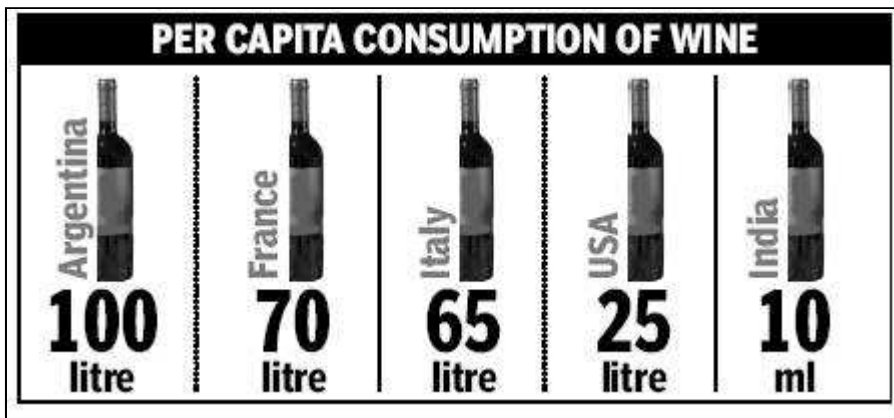
Exports to France, Italy, Germany, US, UK, Singapore and Belgium

Accounts for almost 97 per cent of wine production in India

In 2008, the total wine production of grape wine in India was 2.25 crore litre, out of which state's share was 2.11 crore litre

WINE CONSUMPTION IN INDIA (in per cent)

Mumbai 39 Delhi 23 Bangalore 9 Goa 9 Rest 20



In the last seven years, the grape wine export has increased almost seven-fold from 75,000 litres in 2002 to 525,000 litres in 2007-08. Due to continuous rise in grape wine export, Maharashtra's grape wine production has also increased ten-fold in the last seven years from 2,00,000 litres in 2002 to 2.11 crore litres in 2008.

