

Record exports of SA wines in 2012

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While farm workers in the Western Cape wine lands intensify their strike, SA's wine industry on Monday (14 January) reported that exports for last year had reached 417m litres - a new record for the sector.

There are fears that the farm worker strike could cause irreparable damage to the agricultural sector and lead to the long-term loss of export markets.

Earlier this month, the Congress of South African Trade Unions said it would call on the international community to boycott SA's agricultural products because they were produced in "slave labour conditions". Farm workers want their daily wages to be doubled to R150, among other demands. They are also calling on farmers to improve working conditions.

Wines of SA chief executive Su Birch said on Tuesday (15 January) that exports for last year, at 417m litres, showed an increase in exports of 10m litres. The previous record, achieved in 2008 was 407m litres. Exports last year showed a 17% increase on volumes exported in 2011.

"The record sales are the result of a more favourable currency, as well as the global shortage of wines stemming from a significant drop in the recent harvests of competitor wine-producing nations in Europe, Latin America, Australia and New Zealand," Birch said.

"At this stage, all indications are that this year's local crop could be the third-biggest in recorded history assuming that good weather conditions continue, that there is a speedy and peaceful resolution to the strikes, and harvests come in on time," she added.

While the industry regretted the labour unrest in the Western Cape, huge strides were being made to ensure decent working conditions on all wine-producing farms, she said.

"The Fairtrade office has confirmed that SA now has the highest number of Fairtrade-accredited wineries worldwide, with 65% of Fairtrade wines sold globally coming from SA."

South African Table Grape Industry chairman Johan van Niekerk warned at the weekend that the strike would result not only in massive losses to farmers but also in the loss of employment and loss of export markets.

"As part of the fruit industry and the direct recipients of the current unrest, we commit ourselves to partner with government and labour to develop a fruit industry development plan, to address the challenges of the socio-economic environment in the

Western Cape," Van Niekerk said.

Source: *Business Day* via I-Net Bridge

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