



PRACTICE ABSTRACT NR. 64

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Enhancing ecological infrastructures in the vineyards of upper Douro valley in Portugal

The upper Douro valley is a region whose landscape has been intensely shaped by vine growing and wine making activities for the last 300 years. The vineyards are grown in steep hillsides where in the past handmade schist walls were erected to support the vines. Despite the landscape reshaping over time it kept its singular character and in 2001 it was awarded the World Heritage label assigned by UNESCO. The landscape's singularity is enriched by a dynamic winegrowing activity, producing worldwide known DOC (Designated Controlled Origin) wines. More recently, in the late 1990s, pioneer grapevine growers implemented strategies to enhance the vineyards' eco-functionality. These strategies consist of a set of agro-ecological farm practices combining vineyards green cover, including the growing of grassy vegetation in the slopes of land terraces, with the recovering and enhancing of live hedgerows, schist walls, and Mediterranean bushes. Enhancing ecological infrastructures (EIs) is a way of obtaining an array of ecosystems services with both private and collective benefits. Grapevine growers benefit from biologic pest control and soil protection services, by strengthening the resilience of their vineyards, threatened by climate change and insidious pests and diseases. The EIs reinforce the region winemaking competitiveness through the capture of marketing benefits related to the aesthetical quality of the landscape and the grapevine grower's contribution to safeguarding the world cultural heritage. In addition, there has been increasing evidence of a liaison between agroecological practices in the vineyards and the wines' oenological quality.

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

‘Enhancing ecological infrastructures (EIs)’ is done in a unique path by each vine-grower. EIs requires vine-growers’ in-depth knowledge of each inch of vine: What are the main threats? Soil erosion? Soil dryness? Pervasive pests? Labour scarcity to cultivate the vine? On the other hand, which EIs can /must be enhanced? Live hedgerows? Dry-stone walls? Spots with autochthonous bushes? Forest patches? Hence, it is up to each vine-grower to choose how to implement EIs. In addition, the chosen path need to be constantly fine-tuned to the vines and soil condition, along with climate variability. In some areas, climate change and its increasing dryness effect is another factor to be taken into account. All of this entails costs. What are the benefits of EIs? It contributes to vines’ long term resilience and eco-sustainability. But there are also marketing advantages. EIs enhances wines uniqueness, amplifies its sensorial differentiation favouring winegrowers competitiveness in globalised markets, where wine aficionados, who are major influencers, increasingly assign value to the agro-ecological growing of the vines and resulting in ‘natural wines’, also known as ‘raw wines’.

Learn more:

http://www.advid.pt/imagens/noticias/technical%20guide_ADVID_EN.pdf



ABOUT AGRILINK

AgriLink is a multi-actor project funded by the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme. It brings together 16 partners from 13 countries, including universities, applied research institutes, advisors and consultants from public organisations, private SMEs, a farmer-based organisation and specialists in communication and distance learning.

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