

Weinakademiker Thesis

Dry Science: Exploring the Evolution of Dosage in Champagne and its Influence on Technical Mastery and Market Strategy

Abstract

Motivation

The role of dosage in Champagne has undergone a significant transformation since the beginning of its existence. Traditionally added to hide imperfections in wine, to shape style and to add balance, dosage has become a marker of oenological precision and brand identity. In recent decades, the Brut Nature category of champagnes, including Zero Dosage Cuvées, have grown in popularity, reflecting a shift in both production philosophy and consumer demand. In parallel, changing climatic conditions in Champagne have moved winegrowers to reduce the quantity of “liqueur de dosage” due to naturally riper grapes and less acidic wine profile. These trends raise critical questions about the future of dosage in Champagne and its implications for technical winemaking and commercial positioning.

Objective

This study investigates the key factors influencing the choice of the dosage, namely climate change, personal vision of winemakers and evolution of consumption patterns. The aim is to assess its evolution and usage in the contemporary winemaking, as a simple technical adjustment or as a marketing “trick”. It is also important to understand the reasons behind the increased interest in Zero Dosage styles by both large Houses and small producers nowadays, and the path that this technical mastery will take in the nearest future.

Methodology

Diverse sources have been used for this research: historical and technical literature, scientific articles, professional press and books, interviews with 6 cellar masters from “grandes maisons” as well as 1 independent oenologist. To complete the study, an online consumer survey was conducted with 132 responses from 25 countries.

Content

The study helps to understand the role of dosage in Champagne from a corrective necessity to a deliberate stylistic choice. From the 19th and early 20th centuries, when

dosage levels often exceeded 150 g/L, through advances in viticulture and winemaking who led to lower sugar levels, the introduction of the Brut category in the 1920s and the formal recognition of Brut Nature in 1985.

A detailed examination of current production practices reveals how climate change has facilitated the rise of Zero Dosage category of champagnes. Warmer growing seasons result in grapes with higher ripeness and lower acidity. Producers adapt by modifying harvest times, managing malolactic fermentation, employing reserve wines, and using oak to provide structure and balance. The research highlights two approaches in the use of liqueur d'expédition: established champagne houses wish to retain the ancestral style and smaller producers who have modern vision and defend their terroirs and intrinsic philosophy.

Despite the growth in recognition and consumption of Brut Nature category, new generation of consumers remain unfamiliar with this product and price positioning. Even if these champagnes are synonym of purity, health appeal, and gastronomic potential, turning awareness into regular consumption remains a challenge. Positioned as premium offerings, these cuvées appeal to health-conscious, sustainability-driven, and younger consumers seeking authenticity and food versatility. To secure long-term success, producers must invest in education, accessible pricing, and targeted marketing strategies—particularly through tastings, chef partnerships, and digital storytelling—to modernize Champagne's image and grow the Zero Dosage audience.

Conclusion

The study concludes that the increase of Zero Dosage champagne is a result of climate change, market shift, the philosophy and style of a champagne house, and new cultural and generational preferences. These parameters can be opportunities to engage younger, health-conscious and yet price sensitive consumers. The long-term success of Brut Nature category depends on bridging the gap between interest and regular consumption. The study highlights the need for balanced pricing, technical adaptation, and storytelling that emphasizes values such as authenticity and sustainability, suggesting that the future of Champagne lies not in dosage levels, but in how producers creatively respond to evolving cultural and environmental conditions.