



AS IT IS

Climate, Hard Work Produce Unusual Wines in Chile's Desert

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Extreme temperatures, intense desert sun and the height of the land give grapes grown in Chile's Atacama Desert a thick skin.

Local farmers from the world's driest desert say that gives wine made from the grapes a rich, strong taste.

The grape growing area is 3,600 meters above sea level in between mountains with few plants. The grapes from Caracoles vineyard withstand severe hot and cold weather.

Sixty-seven-year-old Cecilia Cruz has managed the vineyard for the last six years. She is used to the desert's severe conditions.

"For me it is not difficult because I'm raised on the land," Cruz said. "This is the future for my children also for later, when I am not here, for them. I am very proud."

Native Atacama people like Cruz have grown other crops for a long time. They have tried different ways to learn how to make wines on the high land. Cruz is one of 18 producers that form part of the Lickanantay Farmer Cooperative which makes the wine, called Allyu.

The group produces about 12,500 bottles of Allyu each year. The wine has received international awards. The vineyards that produce the wine are close to the town of San Pedro de Atacama which is popular with visitors.

But Cruz said there are still some difficulties with growing grapes. She thinks an expert in wine growing, that is, an **oenologist**, could help by visiting the vineyard. But Allyu's own expert, Fabian Munoz, says other problems, like the intense sun, have really been helpful by making the wine unusual.

Munoz said the strong sun and cold nights make the grapes' skin thicker. The climate also gives the wine an interesting smell.

The taste of the desert

Some wine lovers say they can taste the soil and surroundings in which grapes grew before they were made into wine. Munoz said the Atacama wines hold onto those qualities well.

Munoz said: "One of the identities of our wines is that they express the place (of origin) very well. We don't want to lose the **essence** of that salt taste, that desert taste, that volcanic rock taste, and the grape's **flavors**, which are **distinctive**." He added that he wants the wine drinker to taste the different wines and say, 'Wow, I'm tasting the Atacama Desert.'

The owner of Bosque Viejo Vineyard, Hector Espindola, said it is very hard to make wine in the highlands. He added that it is not the kind of work everyone enjoys.

"The young people don't want to work in agriculture; they want to do something else. We are working in agriculture, and we are going to continue as long as we can, every day with more effort and **dedication**," Espindola said.

I'm Jill Robbins.

Rodrigo Gutierrez reported on this story for Reuters. Jill Robbins adapted it for Learning English.

Words in This Story

oenologist - *n.* a person familiar with the science or study of wines and winemaking

essence - *n.* the basic nature of a thing or its defining quality

flavor - *n.* the taste of something

distinctive - *adj.* having a special quality, style, or attractiveness

dedication – *n.* . complete and wholehearted devotion, or commitment, especially to a career or ideal

What do you think of the Chilean wine growers? We want to hear from you. Write to us in the Comments Section.
