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‘Devastating’ frost strikes Bordeaux vineyards next

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Bordeaux vineyards have been hit by what many fear is the worst frost in a quarter of a century, with farming unions warning that some producers now face crisis and that the 2017 vintage could be affected. *With extra reporting by Chris Mercer.*



Fires are lit in the vineyards around St-Emilion to help prevent frost. Credit: Jean-Bernard Nadeau / Cephas

Bordeaux, and especially the Right Bank, has become the latest victim of severe frosts across Western Europe in the past fortnight.

Temperatures of -3 ° C swept the vineyards of Bordeaux overnight on 26 and 27 April, causing considerable damage to vines already well into the growing season thanks to an early spring.

Farming union FDSEA said the frost made for a ‘devastating’ spring for its members, although it cautioned that full assessments were still underway.

Early estimates suggested that thousands of hectares of vines and agricultural crops in general in the area had been damaged, said the union.

While some of the larger estates may have been able to afford advanced frost protection, such as helicopters, sprinklers and heaters, Bordeaux has around 6,000 winemakers and many are small-scale producers.

Already facing financial difficulties, 'this frost has reduced winemakers' hopes to nothing', said the local branch of FDSEA, calling for a crisis meeting.

In some areas of the Right Bank, 'losses of between 50% to 100% are envisaged,' Thomas Duclos, associate oenologist at Oenoteam, told **Decanter.com**.

He said that it was difficult to properly estimate the damage and impact on the 2017 harvest at this early stage, because 'we do not know how the vine will react'.

Several winegrowers drew parallels with the notoriously bad frosts of 1991.

Only the plateau of Pomerol seems to have been mostly spared on the Right Bank. Those in the valley were particularly affected.

Some of the classified grands crus used helicopters to try to prevent frost forming, while many producers in Bordeaux and across Europe have this week deployed heaters and lit hundreds of controlled fires to keep the vines warm.

In Bordeaux, Pauline Vauthier said that fires had kept her family's vineyards at Château Ausone safe this week. But she reported fears of significant damage at the Fonbel and Simard estates.

In Pessac-Léognan, closer to the city, the damage was worst in cool places, close to forests, although it was too early to give a proper assessment.

In the Entre-deux-Mers, Nicolas Lesaint, of Château Reignac, in St-Loubes, said that he had never seen frost so severe.

Frost has also caused problems in across many other vineyards in Europe, including in northern Italy, Switzerland, Germany, several areas of France and the UK.

Read more at <http://www.decanter.com/wine-news/devastating-frost-hits-bordeaux-vineyards-367741/#qoV7kcPGmBLxSiWt.99>