

**Interview with Gilles Louvet, President and founder of the Languedoc organic wine merchant CVLD:  
"The organic wine market is booming" (Dec 28, 2009)**

For the last three years, sales of the trade company CLVD Aude (Languedoc Cellars Wine Distribution) have recorded an annual growth of 40%. This year, despite the crisis, growth could be even higher. Its niche: the making and trading of organic wines. With a production of 40 000 hl and 3.5 million bottles sold annually, CLVD has become the first operator of organic wines in France. For Gilles Louvet, founder and president of the company, the demand for organic wines will boom in the coming years. Large foreign retailers as well as French mass distribution are in the process of creating or expanding their offer of organic wines and the lack of supply could actually limit the growth of this emerging market.

■ How do you explain your amazing results (sales up 40 % each year for the last three years) in spite of the crisis?

We are positioned on a very specialized niche - organic wines - with a very precise monitoring of the product we are working upstream in the cooperatives : we select specific parcelles and vinify the wines we then sell. This allows us to produce exactly the profiles of wines that our customers call for, starting when the grape is still on the vine. For customers coming up in-between vintages, we play with blendings to create the wines that will best suit their tastes. Our tailor-made organic wines, coupled with very high expectations from the market for that kind of product is the key to our success.

■ Do you think there is still room for growth in this niche?

The market is just emerging and still expects strong growth in the coming years. In France and export, the mass distribution key-players set up or expand the room on their shelves for organic wines. While so far, we worked mainly in France with specialized stores, this year we were listed by three major national brands of the distribution for more than 1 million bottles. And this trend is global. We just opened an office in Atlanta in partnership with the Paul Sapin for the development of our sales in the U.S.. Throughout the world, the trend is upward for organic wines. What we fear now is that the lack of supply.

■ But the government has planned to triple the area devoted to organic farming, bringing the surface of the organic vines in Languedoc-Roussillon, first organic wine-producing region, to 20 000 ha by 2012, according to its "Organic Agriculture: Horizon 2012" strategic plan. Shouldn't you rather fear a congestion of the market?

No, I think the market can absorb three times the volume of production of organic wines of Languedoc. I am not saying that some producers, who won't have adapted their wines to the demand or haven't developed the marketing and distribution channels will not be landed with unsold wines. But given our progression rate, I feel that these volumes will easily find their market. Especially as the demand is also very strong grape juice "organic." If there was saturation of the wine market "organic" producers will be able to sell their grape in juice.

■ Weather conditions in 2008 were particularly problematic for the protection of the vineyard in Languedoc Roussillon. Some organic growers have lost much of their harvest to mildew. Is it not likely to tune down some of their enthusiasm?

What we have observed among our suppliers is that growers who go organic for several years have had no concern. Those who came more recently were most affected: were the vines less resistant or did these new organic wine growers lack of experience ? I do not have the answer, but I think going organic is taking a step in a course that is run on the long term and that the pricing and valuation of organic wines, compared to traditional wines, will encourage conversions. The small crop in 2008 has led to a sharp increase in prices: we bought our vins de pays for 25% more euros than last year. We were unable to pass on a mere half of this increase on our prices. Despite this increase, we sold all our 2008 and are already working on the 2009 campaign.

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