Evolution of Japanese Wine Market and Wine Law

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Abstract

Japan is a wine consuming as well as producing country. Japanese wine production still only has a brief history, starting about 140 years ago with the establishment of the first domestic Japanese wine company in the 1870s. Today, wine is produced all over Japan and there are about 300 wineries in Japan, with the major production areas being Yamanashi, Hokkaido and Nagano.

Recently, total wine consumption in Japan has exceeded 3 million hl, although consumption per capita remains relatively low at 3.5 liters per year, compared to the majority of member states of the EU.

In this study, we analyze recent development of wine production and legislation, in the context of recent appearance of « Japanese wine » produced in Japan from the domestically-grown grapes, which is distinguished from « wine fermented in Japan » made from imported grape juice or must.

The National Tax Agency introduced new rules in 2015 in order to distinguish these types of domestically produced wine. The new rules and standard become effective in October 2018, also regulating wine labeling such as the name of vine variety, vintage and geographical designation.

As a member state of the WTO, Japan has the national system of geographical indication (GI) and currently only one wine geographical indication « Yamanashi » which was registered by the national tax agency in July 2013. In order to use the geographical designation that has become legally protected, the respective producers have been obliged to comply with the product specification rules. This legal system is considered to contribute to an improvement of the quality of Japanese wine by protecting the interests of wine makers and consumers.

Keywords: Wine Market, Wine Law, Japanese Wine, Geographical Indication