



PRESS RELEASE

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Stellar stakes its claim on the no-sulphur-added wine market

Only last year Stellar Winery, Namaqualand's tireless innovator, clinched the Woolworths Innovation Award for their No Sulphur-Added Chenin Blanc, made from organically grown grapes. Not content to rest on their laurels, the team has now added two delicious No-Sulphur-Added red wines to their range. These wines are now available at Woolworths stores.

The wines currently available are the No-Sulphur-Added Cabernet Sauvignon 2005 and No-Sulphur-Added Merlot 2005. The Cabernet has a deep, dense hue and oozes ripe blackberry and roasted red pepper flavours. The wine is deliciously dark and juicy with a soft, silky tannin structure. The Merlot boasts an intense bright colour and hints of jasmine and perfume on the nose.

Sulphur Dioxide (SO₂) is a preservative chemical, which can also occur naturally in wine in small amounts, but causes problems for a few unfortunate wine lovers who are sensitive or intolerant to it. "In keeping with our Good Food Strategy, we aim to cater for customers who need healthier wines for specific health or dietary needs. As the leading national retailer in Organic and Good Foods, we have had many requests, almost weekly, over the years for these types of products," said Ivan Oertle, Buying Manager of Woolworths. "Customers are delighted that we stock wines which have health as well as environmental benefits. We have shown these wines at many national wine shows and customers have responded very positively," he said.



"Producing an SO₂ free wine allows us to reinforce the credibility of organic wines and provides us with a competitive advantage. It enables us to exploit a growing niche in the market and offer the customers what they want," comments Stellar winemaker Dudley Wilson.

Producing a no sulphur-added wine presents a major challenge for the winemaker. "Sulphur additions are regarded as standard practice in the winemaking process. Leaving SO₂ out potentially exposes the wine to spoilage from micro-organisms and oxidation. One must be vigilant and attentive to wines made without SO₂. It's rather like leaving one's car parked in a public space with the windows open and the alarm off!" says Wilson.

Notwithstanding the obvious health benefits, wines made in an SO₂-free style are cleaner and more transparent, while in red wines the colour is often more intense. The misconception exists that all SO₂-free wines will have a shorter shelf life than conventional wines. "Not true," says Wilson. "There are many criteria influencing the longevity of a wine." Modern winemaking methods go a long way towards eliminating the problems that made sulphur additions at bottling a necessity. Stellar's No-Sulphur-Added wines show no signs of oxidation or premature ageing. "With no track record to go on it is difficult to be definitive, but current indications point to these wines having a shelf life comparable to conventional wines of the same style and should still be drinking well in two years," comments Wilson.

The labeling of wines as sulphur-free may be confusing for the consumer. Contrary to what is often supposed, the vast majority of wines made from organically-grown grapes do have SO₂ added as a preservative although at much lower levels than conventional wines. Only in America, the home of the organic wine debate, does the term "organic wine" refer to a wine made without any added SO₂ and having levels of naturally-occurring sulphur below 10ppm (parts per million). Levels below 10ppm are regarded as having no effect on sensitive people.

While the winemaker may not add any artificial sulphur to the wine, small amounts of sulphur are produced during the fermentation process. "Natural yeasts can and do make SO₂, but it is very rare for naturally formed SO₂ to be present at bottling above 10ppm. Wines analyzed with levels around 40ppm will have had SO₂ added by the winemaker," explains Wilson.

The huge demand for organic and SO₂ free wines in the American market has prompted Stellar to export their No Sulphur-Added range to the States. As there are currently only a handful of producers making what the Americans call 'sulfite' free wines, this could be a significant market for Stellar. "The Americans appear to be more educated on this subject and have higher demands regarding preservative-free foods," explains Wilson.

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