



PRESS DOSSIER

Introduction

The Rías Baixas appellation (La Denominación de Origen Rías Baixas) is a small wine-growing area in north-west Spain, in the region of Galicia. While Rías Baixas has long had a strong wine-growing tradition, passed down from generation to generation, it was only in 1988, with the setting up of the Rías Baixas Wine Regulating Council, that the wine-growing sector began to play a fundamental part in the development of the region's economy. One of the key factors in its success has been the decision to continue growing the region's indigenous grape varieties, in particular Albariño, which cope so well with the challenging local climate and impart genuine quality and a sense of place to wines that have a distinctly Atlantic character.

Grape varieties and wines

The wine-growing sector has played a fundamental part in the region's economy, especially in Pontevedra but also in La Coruña, the two provinces in which the appellation is situated and divided into five sub-zones: Valle del Salnés, Ribera del Ulla, Soutomaior, Condado del Tea and Rosal. One of the key factors in its success has been the decision to continue growing the region's indigenous grape varieties, in particular Albariño, which represents over 96.5% of the production. These native varieties cope well with the challenging local climate and impart genuine quality and a sense of place to these wines with their distinctly Atlantic character. The preferred varieties authorised by the Rías Baixas appellation are Albariño, Loureira Blanca (or Marqués), Treixadura and Caíño Blanco (for whites); and Caíño Tinto, Espadeiro, Loureira Tinta and Sousón (for reds). Other varieties are authorised by the appellation, and these are Torrontés and Godello (for whites) and Mencía, Brancellao and Pedral (for reds).

Largely made up of a patchwork of micro-plots of vines, typical of Galicia, the appellation currently covers a surface area of 4.047 hectares (9,996 acres), divided up into over 21,825 plots of vines. With the benefit of the manual skills and expertise of the area's 5,500 and more vine growers, traditional Galician vine-growing has been maintained, so that vines are still trained on pergolas, a growing system which we can take pleasure in observing when visiting Rías Baixas.

The Rías Baixas Regulating Council currently includes 184 wineries on its register, most of them small and medium-sized, and which last year produced the third largest crop in its history, amounting to 33,404,961 kilos of grapes harvested.

The production of white varieties in the Rías Baixas appellation represents 99.21%, in which Albariño is the king variety with 96.5% of the total. It is followed by Caíño Blanco, Treixadura and Loureira. While red varieties only make up 0.79% of the production, in the present campaign 262.679 kilos of red grapes were harvested. Most of them were the Sousón variety produced in the Condado do Tea sub-zone.

Some 22,606,310 litres of wine were certified under the appellation to supply markets in Galicia, the rest of Spain and abroad. Currently, exports of Rías Baixas, make up 31% of sales in volume, while the remaining 69% goes to Galicia and the rest of the domestic market.

Types of wines

Rías Baixas wines display a straw-yellow colour and have floral and fruity aromas. They are powerfully aromatic, fresh and smooth and have balanced acidity and a full range of flavours that are influenced by the Atlantic climate of the Galician Rías Baixas. In addition to the well-known Rías Baixas Albariño wines, vinified only with Albariño grapes, the appellation also allows other wines to be produced under their label. “Rías Baixas Condado do Tea” is made with grapes from that particular sub-zone, using at least 70% Albariño and Treixadura; then “Rías Baixas Rosal”, which must be made up of 70% Albariño and Loureira from that particular geographical area. “Rías Baixas Val do Salnés” must contain 70% of the officially preferred varieties grown in that area, and this is the same for “Rías Baixas Ribeira do Ulla” wines. If only the name “Rías Baixas” is indicated on the label, this means that the wine contains authorised or preferred varieties of the appellation, and that it may have been produced, vinified, bottled and labelled in any of the five sub-zones of the appellation. In the case of “Rías Baixas Barrica” wines, these must have spent time in oak barrels of a capacity of more than 600 litres. “Rías Baixas Tinto” is a red wine, the total production of which is very small, and these are wines that are vinified with red grape varieties from any of the appellation’s production area. Finally, “Rías Baixas Espumoso”, which was the last category to be included in this appellation, is a sparkling wine made from any of the mentioned varieties in any of the sub-zones, and the production of which must at the same time comply with the Spanish and EU requirements for the production of high quality sparkling wines.

Rías Baixas wines have great versatility and can be enjoyed with or without food. They should be served at a temperature of between 10° and 12°C and can be paired with a wide range of dishes. These wines are currently widely distributed in the domestic market and exported to around sixty countries, among which are the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, Puerto Rico, Ireland, Sweden, Mexico, Japan and China.

Evolution

During its 29 years’ history, the Rías Baixas Wine Regulating Council has multiplied by almost twenty the surface area of vines under its control, which has now reached over 4,000 hectares (9,880 acres). It has incorporated over 6,700 vine growers, the heirs to the 492 pioneers who founded this appellation. It has increased the number of wineries from the initial 14 to 200 (which during the crisis dropped to 177), and has today succeeded in certifying 20 million litres of wine, almost ten times more than the two million certified in the first vintages.

Employment

The Rías Baixas wine-growing sector generates in the area a total of 7,600 full-time jobs as well as 5,200 temporary posts during busy times of the year. Thus, the Rías Baixas appellation provides 7% of the area’s employment, a percentage which rises to 12% during the harvesting period. Its impact is especially significant in the Salnés valley sub-zone, where over 60% of the annual Rías Baixas grape production is concentrated and almost 70% of the wineries are located. In the area of Salnés, the Rías Baixas appellation accounts for over 13% of fixed jobs, a percentage which rises to 20% when temporary jobs are counted.