

ALL GENRES

Wine regions face dramatic shrink with warming

1:00 am, February 12, 2020

AFP

PARIS (AFP-Jiji) — For anyone planning to drink their way through the impending climate catastrophe, science has some bad news.

According to a new study by U.S.-based experts, global warming of just 2C could see the world's wine-producing regions shrink by more than half.

That's the temperature goal laid out in the 2015 Paris Agreement on climate change.

With 4C of warming, 85 percent of current wine-producing land would be unable to produce good vintages.

"In some ways, wine is like the canary in the coal mine for climate change impacts on agriculture, because these grapes are so climate sensitive," said Benjamin Cook, from Columbia University's Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory and the NASA Goddard Institute for Space Studies.

Writing in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, Cook and his colleagues focused on 11 varieties of wine grape including Cabernet Sauvignon, Chardonnay, Grenache, Merlot and Sauvignon Blanc.

They used archives of each grape variety to model when each would ripen in wine growing regions around the world under three temperature scenarios: 0C, 2C, and 4C warmer than pre-industrial averages.

With 2C of warming and no change in the way wine is processed, 56 percent of established regions were rendered unsuitable for producing wine grapes in the models.

But there may be a ray of hope for despairing connoisseurs: diversity.

If winegrowers switch up their varieties, replacing grapes that thrive in cooler temperatures with warm-weather loving ones, the loss of wine-growing regions at 2C of warming would roughly halve.

Perhaps controversially, the study's authors suggested that wine-growers in France's famed Burgundy region could replace the ubiquitous Pinot Noir with southern interloper Grenache.

They acknowledged that such change could come with a side serving of legal, cultural and financial challenges.

"That's a big hurdle in some regions that have grown the same varieties for hundreds and hundreds of years, and they need consumers who are willing to accept different varieties from their favourite regions," said co-author Elizabeth Wolkovich from the University of British Columbia, Vancouver.