

French coopers lobby government

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French coopers are lobbying the French government's forestry commission for greater transparency, and price protection, in an industry worth €300m a year.



Barrel-making: a €300m industry

Les Tonneliers de France, the group representing the coopers, has secured twice-yearly meetings with the **Office National des Forêts (ONF)**.

This is vital, they say, for ensuring their survival.

Barrel makers are the biggest value purchasers of oak in France, spending €106m in 2011 for 265,000 cubic metres of oak. Prices vary from €350 to €600 per cubic metre.

Although over 70% of this oak is sourced through the ONF (the other 30% coming from private forests), the first direct meetings between the government agency and the coopers happened only this year.

Jean-Luc Sylvain, president of the French barrel makers association, told **Decanter.com** that as international competition gets fiercer, both for barrels and for alternative products such as chips and shavings, having visibility over pricing and market conditions is now essential.

'French oak for barrels are seen as the best in the world, but we have been suffering from a forestry commission which has not been taking us seriously. Without a long term vision of the market, and with no clarity over the quantity or quality of wood released onto the market, our future is threatened.'

There are 42 coopers in France, employing between 1,500 and 2,000 people, with an annual turnover of around €300m. In total, they produce around 500,000 barrels per year, with around 300,000 barrels coming from ONF oak.

Following a meeting in March 2011 between **Sylvain** coopers and Pascal Viné, the new president of the ONF, twice-yearly update meetings are now in place – one in June, before the main season for purchasing oak begins, and one in November, after the key auctions of October.

'This is a government agency, and all its workings should be transparent.'

'We are not looking for protection, but we want the prices to be more stable and to be decided by the market, not by the ONF.'