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## Vineyard tradition in Valais

Switzerland has nearly 15 000 hectares of vineyards, mainly in the west and in the south, in the cantons of Valais, Vaud, Neuchâtel and Ticino.

According to data from the Swiss Federal Office of Agriculture, the Swiss wine production is about 1 million hectoliters per year, with only slightly more red than white wine. Nearly all the national production is drunk in the country; less than 2% of the wine is exported (mainly to Germany).

The tradition of wine and viticulture in Switzerland is very old, at least from the Roman era. Some archaeological evidence seems to prove that the grapes were planted in Valais even earlier than the Roman era. In an archaeological excavation near Gamsen, some old grape seed was found, and they date to the Iron Age. Also in Ticino some pollen was found in a palynology excavation. But this evidence does not really prove that the grapes were cultivated; they could have grown there in the wild.

The first bottle of wine, made in ceramic, was found near Sembrancher (Valais), in a Celtic tomb of a lady of 2nd century BC. These bottles are named vases a trottola, and they were produced in some Celtic farms in northern Italy. From an inscription on the bottle we know that it contained wine. Around the 150s BC, in the Celtic era, the people in Valais offered wine to the dead, and probably they also drank the same wine. A century later, the Roman amphorae appeared. And wine has been produced and enjoyed in the Valais ever since!

*from the internet*

*It took cats thousands of years to domesticate humans*

## Swiss vines under threat

An insect with the potential to destroy grape harvests is spreading in western and southern Switzerland.

The yellow leafhopper (*Scaphoideus titanus*) was observed in 2008 for the first time



Yellow leafhopper

in the central part of the southern canton of Valais and at the eastern end of Lake Geneva, the Agroscope agricultural research station said.

It was already entrenched in canton Ticino, canton Geneva and along the northern edge of Lake Geneva.

In itself the insect is harmless, but if it feeds on a plant suffering from the "grapevine yellows" disease, it can spread the bacteria in epidemic proportions.

The infection, also known as *flavescence dorée*, can kill young plants and greatly reduce the productivity of older ones. In infected plants the flowers and fruit clusters shrivel up and drop off. Since there is no known way to eradicate the bacteria, efforts are focussed on getting rid of the leafhopper which is its vector.

Ticino is so far the only area where both the disease and the insect have been found. Chemical treatment of all vine nurseries has been made compulsory to halt the further spread of the insect.

*from the internet*

## Economy in Valais - Wallis

Tourism is one of the main industries of the canton. The Matterhorn near Zermatt is one of the biggest tourist attractions in the Swiss mountains. Other parts of the mountains of the canton further west are popular as well, such as the more French-speaking resorts near Verbier and the Evolène and Arolla region. The resorts on the north side of the main Rhône river valley are popular, too. The resorts in the Goms region are slightly less known, yet also receive attention during the summer hiking season and the winter ski season.

Apart from tourism, agriculture is still important, particularly cattle breeding in the mountains - we reported on the famous Eringer cattle in a previous Helvetica - and dairy farming in the plains. The wine industry of the canton is the largest in Switzerland. There are also many orchards in the area, and saffron (see last page) is also gathered here.

Europe's highest gravity dam is the Grande Dixence. Hydroelectric power plants in Valais produce about a quarter of Swiss electricity.

The area between Martigny and the lake of Geneva is the most industrial region of the canton. The most important industries are the subsidiaries of Novartis and Syngenta in Monthey, and an oil refinery in Collombey-Muraz. Near Visp there is a large aluminium processing plant.

The major employer in Visp is the chemical company, LONZA AG, which employs about 2550 people. Visp is an economic regional center and draws workers from many surrounding towns and even from Italy. This leads to a unique situation where there are more jobs in Visp than the total population: 7700 positions for a population of about 6700.

*from the internet*

Solution to puzzle on page 11

