

# Savour the flavour of local vineyards

**F**IVE years ago, the market for Westcountry wines was still struggling to make its name. But today vineyards in the region are unable to produce enough wine to meet the increased demand.

The British wine industry has become a booming market, especially in the Westcountry, which produces 30 per cent of the country's wine, thanks to the warmer climate and people's passion for locally produced food and drink.

With the English Wine Week coming to a close tomorrow producers across the Westcountry are delighted at the change in attitude toward English wines.

Bob Lindo is the owner of the biggest vineyard in the South West – Camel Valley, near Bodmin. He is also chairman of the South West Vineyard association. He said that about four years ago he created English Wine Week because the industry was still struggling to be known.

Now he said that for the second year running Camel Valley has won a gold medal in the International Wine Challenge, where English wines compete side by side with the better known French, Spanish, Australian and South American wines.

Mr Lindo, who set up the five-acre vineyard in 1989, now tends to 20,000 vines on 18 acres and produces on average 40,000 bottles of wine a year. He said: "When we first started we were thought of as being quirky. Now we could sell millions of bottles if we had the capacity. There's a constant demand, if it goes up slightly there's an immediate shortage – we just can't produce enough."

Like many farms in the Westcountry, Camel Valley is considering expanding to keep up with demand.

Simon Boyce, a partner at

When it comes to appreciating fine wine, English varieties have had their doubters. But not any more, as the country's vineyards are at last winning people over. **Helen Collis reports**

Manstree Farm, near Exeter, said that although they are a small and diverse farm they have replanted more than half of their 4.5 acres of vineyards to meet with the demand.

He said: "We have got rid of the chardonnay as it wasn't producing. Our biggest seller is the Mayval, which is a medium dry white wine."

Julia Trustram-Eve, marketing manager for the English Wine Producers, said that the industry is producing nearly two million bottles a year and due to demand that number could even double over the next two years.

The latest official statistics from the

**'Now we could sell millions of bottles if we had the capacity'**

Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs states that there are just under 2,000 acres of vineyards in the country, but Ms Trustram-Eve said that those figures are inaccurate as they do not include the newly planted vineyards that are not yet producing.

New crops will take a few years to mature before they produce suitable grapes. She said that there are nearly another 430 acres of new crops that have not been accounted for.

"We have seen a terrific change in the attitude towards English wines generally," she said. "Firstly the quality has gone up and up. It's much

more consistent and it's much more competitive, particularly with the sparkling wines. Second, there is clearly a growing movement in people wanting to buy locally produced food and drink."

Even wine retailers have noticed a big change in trend in the wine industry. Ian Curzon-Bernard, owner of Vineyards of Bordeaux, a wine retailer in Plymouth, has completely changed his stock over the last couple of years.

He said: "We used to just sell French wines but now we sell 50-50 English and French. If we can support local produce in any way then we will. We even stock locally produced meat, cheese, honey and cider. People should ditch the cheap plonk and go for the quality local produce. And it is of a very high quality."

This week has seen the Westcountry celebrate its success in the wine industry with open days and wine-tasting across the region. People have flocked in their thousands to savour the flavour of locally produced wine.

Down St Mary wine is served in the prestigious Cafe Paradiso restaurant in Exeter and Rick Stein is a strong supporter of Camel Valley wines to accompany his seafood dishes.

Ashford Vineyard near Bovey Tracey, Oakford Vineyard near Tiverton and Sharpham vineyard near Totnes are just some of the many names that are finding their way to the exclusive dinner tables in the Westcountry.