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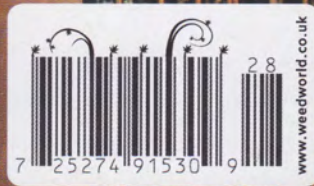
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AOC

APPELLATION D'ORIGINE CONTRÔLÉE (Controlled Designation of Origin)

By Frenchy Cannoli

“An AOC area is born of an alliance between the natural environment and human ingenuity. From that alliance comes an AOC product with unique, inimitable characteristics. A product so different that it complements rather than competes with other products, possessing a particular identity that adds further value.”¹

For the French wine industry, it all came together in 1855, when the Bordeaux Chamber of Commerce and the region's Vintners Association established a method of evaluation that emphasized quality over quantity after 13,000 years of mass production. The cornerstone of the transformation was the creation of a hierarchic classification of quality² that listed the best red wines of the region based on three attributes:

1. A long-standing reputation for quality in the producing region
2. Consistent characteristics that defined the wine from the specific domains in the region
3. A public recognition of the wine's ability to maintain this identity over time



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This system has seen only two official changes in over 160 years; it has been replicated in every wine producing country in the world, and is the foundation of today's multi-billion-dollar wine industry.

This marketing approach, centered on origin, quality, heritage and tradition, literally transformed the viticulture industry. The cultural approach to wine changed from one where consumption was a mandatory hygienic necessity in a society where water sanitation was an issue, to pure appreciation under the clever promotion of the wine industry.

The Cannabis industry in the Emerald Triangle and other regions of the U.S. West Coast meet all the same prerequisites:

- A long-standing reputation for quality known the world over.
- 60+ years of defined genetic characteristics from specific farmers within the regions.
- Long-term public recognition of the superiority of the cannabis grown in the area.

The obvious success of this system in the wine industry and the positive, far-reaching repercussions it had on the world's economy would strongly suggest that we endorse it as the most logical approach to Cannabis evaluation in the U.S. In doing so the U.S. West Coast would become to the Cannabis industry what France is to the international wine trade.

This positioning would protect and empower the small farmers that have suffered through the U.S. Government backed War On Drugs over multiple generations. It would take full advantage of an existing economy based on the production of small farmers. But above all, it would exploit fully the "terroir" of the West Coast, the "source of all quality and uniqueness", the basis of the AOC, and the most prized agricultural product branding available.

The word "terroir" is so French that it cannot really be translated; it represents respect and love for the land's uniqueness and diversity. It is embodied in today's food and wine culture. The word expresses the uniqueness of every region and its products; but more importantly it expresses the delicate symbiosis between the environment, the plant kingdom, and the humans who nurture and enhance the characteristics

of the land, the perfect eco-system.

Hugh Johnson in his foreword to James Wilson's book "Terroir" summarize well the depth of this synergy (the book's introduction is dedicated to wine but applies to all agricultural products):

"Terroir, is the whole ecology of a vineyard: every aspect of its surroundings from bedrock to late frosts and autumn mists, not excluding the way a vineyard is tended, not even the soul of the vigneron³."

The closest translation is most certainly "a taste of place" which expresses the relation existing between the region, the taste and agriculture⁴.

The terroirs of the West Coast are apparent in the wine produced; wines that are recognized worldwide for their quality and diversity due to the variety of distinct microclimates and to the land's geological and topographic characteristics. The uniqueness of these wines is directly related to the region, the varieties⁵, and the growing and winemaking methodology.

These various terroirs have also worked their magic on a variety of cannabis genetics brought to the region in the late 60s and the 70s from all over the planet. These landraces have become cannabis heirlooms and they are the expression of their adoptive land's uniqueness and the manifestation of generations of farmers/growers skills, tradition, dedication and love for the plant and their land; the source of the Emerald Triangle's deserved reputation for quality, to name the most known cannabis growing region in California.

"The AOC designation links a product with its geographical origin and makes it subject to rules of production and manufacturing. It expresses the close relation between a product and its terroir, coupled with the decisive and enduring impact of human savoir-faire.

AOC regulations go far beyond the question of geographical delimitation itself. They encompass all aspects of the production process relating to terroir in the largest sense. These regulations embrace all of the features that characterize an AOC product – geography, pedology (the science of the soil), climate, technique and human in-put."⁶

How to claim a Cannabis AOC designation?

The AOC applies mostly to wines, but also to dairy produces like cheese, to fruits and vegetables, even to poultry so logically we would simply have to follow a traceable if not simple procedure in order to obtain this ultimate agricultural recognition.

Let's briefly review how this process is managed in France to better understand the controls set in place to assure the quality standards associated with AOC designation.

"The INAO (Institut National de l'Origine et de la Qualité) is the French organization charged with regulating French agricultural products with Protected Designations of Origin (PDO). Controlled by the French government, it forms part of the Ministry of Agriculture.

Every Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée (AOC) is produced according to rules codified by the INAO. Because its primary purpose is to regulate the use of noteworthy names, one of its primary tasks is to delimit the geographic area entitled to produce a product"⁷.

In the first step in the process of requesting AOC designation "the farmer must form a "Syndicat de Defense" (Union of Defense) to manage the appellation process, and prepare a report that:

- Gives reasons that justify their request.
- Bring the proof of the name's use and the product's reputation, giving historical data.
- Establishes the link between the "terroir" and the product, showing the natural, technical and human factors that confer the unique characteristics to the products.
- Includes an economic analysis (market, prices...)"⁸

The report is then sent to the INAO, whose decision depends on the product status in the market and the rules of production that will guarantee that the product can be consistently reproduced in its uniqueness.

This system aims to protect the farming region against urbanization while developing rural areas economically, socially and environmentally by preserving traditions and the core values of sustainable agriculture and small farming.

It would be technically possible for Cannabis farmers to follow the rules given by the INAO, however the U.S. wine appellation system doesn't follow the European model of controlled appellations that sets many restrictions around product origin and production in order to protect the identity of a product and its terroir.

We need to justify the existence of the local West Coast terroirs and document the relation between the terroir and the Cannabis plant's expression of uniqueness like all other Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée products have had to do. Due to almost 100 years of cannabis prohibition in the U.S., we do not have hard evidence of Cannabis terroir in historical or scientific sources to reference like the wine industry uses to justify AVA (American Viticulture Area). The West Coast outdoor Cannabis farmer/grower is going to need to gather solid scientific evaluations of the soil, climate and methodology to support their quest for an Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée.

While we do not yet have a specific governmental entity to work with like in France, we can most certainly create an "Union of Defense" style groups to work alongside wine industry experts and science labs to "establish the link between the terroir and the product, showing the natural, technical and human factors that confer the unique characteristics to the products"⁹.

The Department of Food and Agriculture, the Fish and Wildlife Department and the State Water Resources Control Board are agencies that control our industry; they are also by definition natural allies of sustainable agriculture and small farming and could help greatly in our pursuit for Cannabis terroir recognition.

We want the not-yet-legalized and most controversial agricultural product on the planet to receive the ultimate quality validation that is the AOC, the recognition of quality and uniqueness that the West Coast terroir warrants, which is vital to the protection of our small farmers and to the future of Cannabis.

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