

Wine tasting to kick off fair trade week

Socially-conscious tipplers rejoice. Fair trade wine is coming to Canada.

Through his company, Direct Terroir, David Schmid is importing fair trade organic wines from South Africa and Argentina. He's also looking at importing some Chilean wines in the future as well.

Fair Trade is a system of trading based on treating workers and producers with fairness and respect. By purchasing fair trade goods, one ensures farmers are paid a decent wage for their labour and are able to receive education, health care and keep their children in school.

There is a press conference and a wine tasting scheduled for May 1, which is the launch of National Fair Trade Weeks 2007, which runs from May 1 to 15. The tasting is being held from noon to 1 pm at the Transfair Canada office at 328 Somerset West in Ottawa.

Schmid says there are a number of social issues that threaten South Africa such as racism, poverty, HIV/AIDS and a lack of access to education and health-care systems.

"The fair trade system can bring a lot of improvements to that condition," Schmid says. "For example, the kids are more educated and they're more informed about the AIDS problem."

According to a TransFair Canada publication, one South African vineyard and winery has used its fair trade premium to provide free housing and electricity for its workers, a trained health-care committee and a community watch program to fight crime.

“Since we have joined the fair trade system, we receive on a periodical basis part of the profit of the farm,” Maria Malan, farm manager at Stellar Winery in South Africa, told the TransFair Canada publication.

“My life and those of my fellow workers has changed,” Malan said.

The wine is not only unique in the Canadian marketplace because it is fair trade certified - it is also produced with organically grown grapes.

Schmid says people today are sensitive to environmental issues so importing organic wine, made with grapes grown in biologically active soil without the use of pesticides, herbicides or other harsh chemicals, makes sense.

For more information, visit www.transfair.ca or www.african-terroir.com.