

New Steam Cleaning Process Cuts TCA Levels Up to 80 Percent, Cork Producer Says

Following three years of research and development and a multi-million dollar investment, Amorim, the world's largest cork producer, has committed to commercial production of a new cork treatment process known as ROSA.

Amorim owns **Portocork, USA**, which operates independently. Some of the first ROSA-treated corks to reach the US market were sold by Portocork. ROSA is a cleaning process based on controlled steam distillation.

Independent tests on an industrial scale by research laboratories have confirmed that ROSA reduces releasable 2,4,6-trichloroanisole (TCA) levels in cork by up to 80 percent, according to **Dustin Mowe**, sales manager for Portocork America. ROSA is being progressively introduced into Amorim plants and ROSA treated products are now on the market, starting with the granules that form the shanks in Twin Top® and Neutrocork® products.

Three plants in Portugal are using the ROSA process and another will be brought on-line this year. Portocork has been selling corks processed with the new process for more than a year. "It's the first thing in the cork industry that has actually worked and we have the data to prove it," Mowe said. "We're making the claims after we already have the results."

Under the ROSA process, pressurized water and steam are used to force out volatile contaminants from the cork. The key to the effective application of ROSA is the careful control of variables such as water flow and steam temperature.

Amorim commissioned the **Australian Wine Research Institute (AWRI)**, **Campden & Chorleywood Food Research Association (CCFRA)** in the UK and **Geisenheim Research Institute** in Germany to conduct validation tests on ROSA-treated granules. Each laboratory undertook a series of chemical analyses on cork samples before and after treatment with ROSA to determine the reduction in releasable TCA. According to the company, results showed consistent reductions of 69 to 80 percent in the average level of TCA in the cork. Amorim does not claim that ROSA eradicates TCA, but calls it is an element in a package of initiatives to defeat the problem (see "Signs of Success in Battle Against Cork Taint," *WBM* June 2002).

Jocelyn Buchowicz, who buys corks for **Martin Ray Winery**, told *WBM* she has had problems with technical corks in the past but has been using "one plus ones" from Portocork more than a year with good results. "I haven't had a single call regarding the dreaded taint," she said. "We've probably used close to a million of them, and have had success. No one has called and said, this cork is bad and my phone number is on the back of the label."

Eric Aafedt, winemaker at **Bogle Vineyards**, said he is "having pretty good luck" with one-plus-ones treated with ROSA. "I think the whole cork industry has improved," Aafedt added.

Mowe conceded that some winemakers are still skeptical. "We are getting a lot of 'we'll believe it when we see it,'" he said. "But they become believers over time."