

AGRICULTURE

Ukraine winemaker toasts golden accolade

By Benjamin Butterworth

A small winemaker located on the edge of Russian-occupied Ukrainian territory has won gold at the prestigious Decanter World Wines awards.

Beykush Winery won gold for its Reserve Chardonnay 2019, marking the second year in a row a Ukrainian producer has scooped gold at the awards.

Svitlana Tsybak, chief executive of Beykush winery and president of the Ukrainian association of craft winemakers, told *The Guardian*: "I can't say we were surprised that we won because our wine is really, really good."

Beykush Winery is in the town of Ochakiv, south of Ukraine's Mykolaiv region. While still under Ukrainian control, Russian forces have a vested interest in the area due in part to its strategic naval base.

The outbreak of war made transporting the wine out of the country a difficult task.

Unable to fly cases of the 2019 bottles to the UK for judging, the firm managed to move six cases over the border, one at a time, and send them on to nearby Hungary. It was thanks to a generous friend of the company that they eventually made it to British shores to secure the prize.

"A Ukrainian who lives in London offered to fly to Hungary with two suitcases," Ms Tsybak said. "He filled them up with 30 bottles and took them to the UK."

Wine production has flourished in Ukraine since Russia invaded in 2014. The value of Ukraine's currency fell by two-thirds, making imported goods expensive and leading to a rise of made-in-Ukraine consumer goods such as clothes, food and furniture.

The victory has prompted a surge in exports for the company, raising much-needed income during the economic turmoil. Ms Tsybak recently secured an importer in the UK, with bottles being sent to western Ukraine and then in a van mak-

ing its way across Europe.

It was not the only Ukrainian company to do well, with 82 per cent of wines from the country entered winning medals (14 in total).



The Beykush Winery's entry had a difficult journey to the UK but scooping gold made it all worthwhile