

# newsfeature

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## FRENCH - ITALIAN WINE WAR

The French-Italian "wine war" is over -- and nary a shot was fired. The "war" flared up when a torrent of cheap Italian table wine flooded the French market early this year. More than 50,000,000 gallons of Italian wine were imported to France in the first two months of 1975, as opposed to 76,000,000 gallons for the whole crop year 1973-74.

Riots and roadblocks greeted the Italian wine. Southern French farmers headed off incoming wine tankers and spilled imported wines into canals and streets. The demonstrators also occupied Montpellier's Saint-Pierre Cathedral to dramatize their fears of sales lost to the cheaper Italian wines.

Finally, France closed its borders to Italian wine imports March 28. Italy threatened to take France to the Community's Court of Justice, charging violation of the Community guarantee of free trade among the nine member states.

The problem was resolved when, on April 15, the Commission ordered France to reopen its borders to Italian wines and agreed to stabilize the Community's wine market by siphoning table wine into a 55-day distillation operation. The Commission estimates that no more than 5,000,000 hectolitres will be distilled.

To prevent a watershed of Italian wine, France has agreed to stockpile 1.5 million hectolitres of Italian table wine--bought by French merchants on contract and which are now being delivered or stored in customs.

The Community is trying to prevent future wine wars. Agricultural ministers meetings over the next two months will talk about reorganizing production and improving the quality of wine. After 1976, there will be stricter controls on wine production in the Community.