

THE



TIMES

No. 68442 ■ MONDAY JULY 18 2005 ■ www.timesonline.co.uk ■ 55p

Chirac will eat his words and drink British wine

From Nicci Smith
in Brussels

BRITAIN is to wreak revenge on President Chirac for disparaging British cuisine by serving the French leader national dishes and English and Welsh wine each time he comes to Brussels.

M Chirac will be offered toasts not of French champagne, but of Camel Valley Brut from Cornwall. He will have to wash his meals down not with Bordeaux, but with Chapel Down pinot noir as Britain uses its six-month EU presidency to showcase its best regional food and drink at all ministerial meetings and summits.

A total of 2,148 bottles of Eng-

lish and Welsh wine have been ordered at a cost of £11,800 to the EU budget. Ten vineyards will have the chance to show off some 15 of their finest wines as ambassadors, ministers and heads of state visit Brussels.

M Chirac caused a rumpus this month by telling Gerhard Schröder and President Putin that Britain had the worst food after Finland. He added that Britain's only contribution to European agriculture was mad cow disease.

The French President, who survived British cuisine at the G8 summit in Gleneagles, is due to sample British fare twice during the UK presidency, at summits in October and De-

cember. But French ministers will be subject to it on an almost daily basis at routine meetings. Tonight, for example, EU agriculture ministers will consume Scottish smoked salmon and Welsh lamb, washed down by Sharpham barrel-fermented dry 2003.

The British wines, from Cornwall, the South East, the Midlands and Wales, have been chosen through a rigorous tendering process, which included tastings by Embassy and EU officials. The winners included Sharpham Beenleigh red 2003, Denbies Coopers Brook 2003 and Glyndwr medium white 2002.

This year marks the 50th an-

niversary of the first commercially produced British wines. About 450 vineyards now produce nearly two million bottles a year, and while this is still a relatively small sector compared with its European neighbours, its prospects are bright.

French vineyard owners are meanwhile facing something of a crisis. Competition from new world wines has hit sales and now hundreds of millions of bottles are to be turned into industrial ethanol for use as factory fuel to get rid of the surplus.



How sensible of our men in Brussels to force President Chirac to eat his Anglophobic words by serving him the best of British Fayre.

Frankly, I think the likes of the fine Cornish Camel Vinyard Brut fizz and Chapel Down's elegant plummy Pinot Noir are much too good for his bigoted Gallic palate (Jane McQuitty writes).

Having said that, what Chirac may be recalling is that while the Bulldog spirit of the English and Welsh vineyards cannot be doubted, cold, wet Britain will always be a margin-

al northern grape growing climate — even with global warming.

Of course winemaking and grape-growing standards in our green and pleasant land, which now has around 450 producers tending around 2,500 acres of vines, have improved greatly.

This is a relief of those of us, like Chirac, who remember the thin, oxidised, sulphur-tainted, cloying Teutonic-aping English and Welsh wines of old. What has now emerged is a true dry, delicate, aromatic, zesty English hedge-row-scented wine style. Perhaps even Chirac might develop a taste for it.