

LIFE CYCLE ANALYSIS OF THE PRODUCTION OF NEUTRAL ALCOHOL OBTAINED FROM WINEMAKING BYPRODUCTS FOR USE IN PERFUMERY

Abstract

As is the case in many other industries, major fragrance brands are now incorporating circular-economy in their product-development strategies. This is in response to growing consumer demand for more environmentally friendly products. In light of this objective, perfumery raw materials must be evaluated against environmental and societal criteria. This more critical context, coupled with the fact that alcohol can constitute up to 95% of a fragrance, means greater attention is being given the origin of this fragrance solvent. Industries are now becoming keenly interested in seeking out more environmentally friendly alternatives to alcohols derived from field crops (sugar beet, wheat, corn, sugarcane) so as to use a sustainable alcohol with excellent olfactory performance. To this end, this study entailed evaluating the environmental impact of an extra-neutral grape alcohol produced in France and obtained from winemaking residues. Its olfactory performance has been proven to meet the expectations and industrial needs of perfumers. The environmental impact was assessed by a life cycle analysis (LCA) carried out per the current NF EN ISO 14040 standard. The results show that extra-neutral grape alcohol is positively comparable to sugar beet alcohol, particularly as concerns greenhouse gas emissions. Upcycled grape alcohol is also produced through sustainable management of winemaking waste and does not conflict with land needs for food production. Lastly, unlike field crops, grapevines in the form of vineyards are a perennial crop and therefore serve as major carbon sinks, much the same way forests do.

1 Introduction

The now-palpable effects of global warming, the pollution of the earth's ecosystems, and the decline of biodiversity are manifestations that are pushing modern societies to protect the environment more effectively. The cosmetics and fragrance industries have, in fact, undertaken very extensive transformations to better align their practices with key sustainable-development principles. These industries most often rely on the United Nations' global indicator framework for the Sustainable Development Goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development¹. Such adaptations have an impact on supply chains and the nature of the raw materials used in formulations.

In the perfumery realm, the International Fragrance Association (IFRA) recently established the Green Chemistry Compass, intended to apply the 12 principles of green chemistry to the raw materials used in making fragrances². But the origin of alcohol (ethanol) is now more critically examined, because this fragrance solvent can account for up to 95% of a fragrance's composition. This alcohol is obtained from major field crops such as corn, wheat, sugarcane, and sugar beets. As such crops entail intensive agriculture that consumes vast tracts of arable land, these alcohols negatively impact biodiversity and enter into direct competition with human food production. It is therefore vital to identify sources of alcohol that are more sustainably produced.

To this end, the Coty company recently unveiled an *eau de parfum* made with an alcohol sourced from industrial CO₂ emitted by heavy industries (steel mills, glass manufacturing, thermal power stations, etc.), which consume great quantities of fossil fuels, such as coal and oil. This technology – developed by the LanzaTech biotechnology company – uses genetically modified microorganisms that transform the CO₂ of industrial emissions into ethanol which, once purified, results in a

neutral-quality alcohol³. While this technology is innovative in its capacity to recycle a greenhouse gas, it does not help decarbonize the fragrance industry in the stricter sense, as it relies upon a fossil carbon source.

Other more environmentally responsible approaches are currently being proposed, such as those used by the sugarbeet-alcohol manufacturer Cristalco. These are based on regenerative agriculture, a growing technique that is more environmentally friendly, with the objectives of regenerating soils and preserving water resources and biodiversity as effectively as possible⁴. The sugar beets from these crops are combined with those grown intensively, so as to establish a mass balance in keeping with the established Mass-Balance Approach (MBA).

Lastly, alcohols from legumes, such as peas and fava beans, are available: Regenerative cultivation is practiced here, too, and is said to have even lower impact than that of sugar beets or wheat. Nevertheless, these crops still compete with arable land intended for food production.

Another alternative is to use an alcohol made from French winemaking byproducts. Grape marc from the crushing and pressing of grapes and wine lees from the sedimentation during fermentation are the principal residues of winemaking. They are currently recycled per the biorefinery principle into different byproducts: alcohol, tartaric acid, grape seed oil, natural dyes, biocomposts, etc. (Figure 1)⁵. Grape alcohol is extracted from the marc through continuous hot-water extraction. The resulting water-alcohol mixture is then concentrated by distillation. Distillation also makes it possible to concentrate the lees alcohols. The concentrated alcohols from the marc and lees are ultimately rectified to produce an extra-neutral alcohol with an alcoholic strength greater than 96%. Grape alcohol is therefore an “upcycled” alcohol, because it comes only from wine biowaste in accordance with circular-economy precepts. This alcohol from the major French wine terroirs (Burgundy, Rhône Valley, Provence, Bordeaux, etc.) does not present any land-use conflicts regarding food production and can even come from certified-organic crops.

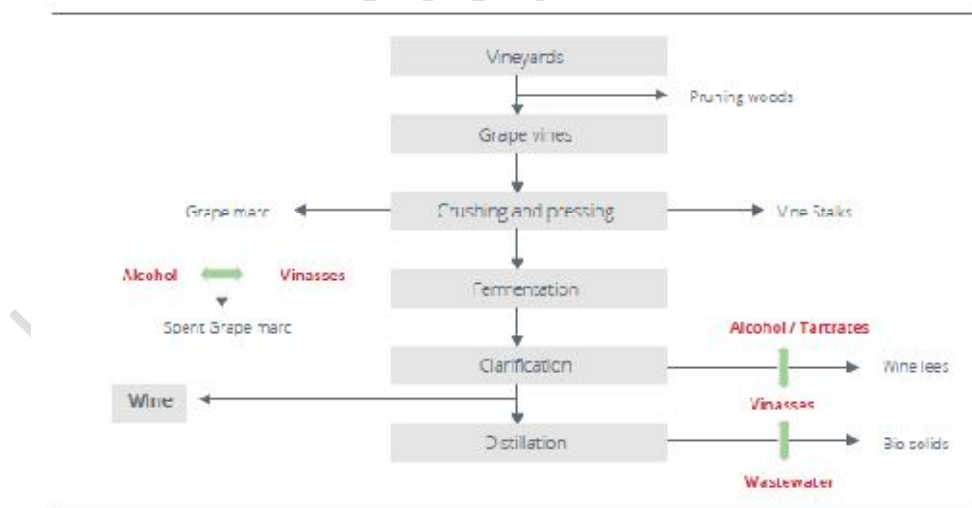


Figure 1: Biorefinery of wine-making byproducts (adapted from Jin & Kelly⁶)

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In 2024, French production of neutral grape alcohol will total more than 50,000 hectoliters. Grape alcohol is therefore relatively available for use in perfumery. To qualify for such use, however, it must satisfy two essential criteria:

- 1) present a positive environmental footprint compared to French alcohol made from sugar beets or other major field crops;
- 2) possess the olfactory properties that perfumers expect and be free of any sensory defects.

To assess the olfactory properties of the extra-neutral grape alcohol developed by the Union des Distilleries de la Méditerranée (UDMGroup) and marketed under the Uveol® brand, a comparative sensory study with sugar beet and wheat alcohols was conducted, the results demonstrating the following key points (publication in progress) :

- A RATA (rate-all-that-apply) analysis, which made it possible to describe and discriminate between the three alcohols studied, showed significantly that grape alcohol is comparatively fruitier than sugar beet and wheat alcohols and tends to have aquatic and yeasty notes.
- Triangle tests carried out on 10 perfumery raw materials diluted in the three alcohols separately showed that there is no significant difference in the 10 materials when tested in grape alcohol and sugar beet alcohol, and that the grape alcohol typicity does not alter the odor of the materials tested.
- An olfactory time-intensity analysis showed that extra-neutral grape alcohol does not significantly alter the diffusion of the three notes tested (top, heart, and base notes).

Given the positive nature of the olfactory study of extra-neutral grape alcohol, we believed it was vital to evaluate its environmental impact with a life cycle analysis (LCA). Such a study was performed on the extra-neutral grape alcohol Uveol® developed for perfumery by the Union des Distilleries de la Méditerranée (UDM Group).

The objective of this LCA is to assess the environmental impacts of the production of 96% neutral alcohol from the distillery at the Vauvert site (Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur region). The calculation methods and database are those of the Product Environmental Footprint (PEF) and version v3.9.1 of ecoinvent^{®7}, respectively. The boundary applied will be gate-to-gate at the UDM Group. The results will be evaluated in light of the LCI⁸ data on the climate change indicator for sugar beet alcohol available in the ecoinvent[®] database.

Wine distilleries, in collaboration with the wine industry, have been established in France for more than a century and have historically focused on avoiding the overpressing of grapes and excessive filtration of wine lees⁹. The distillation of wine byproducts makes it possible to control the quantity and quality of wines, address customs regulations, and combat fraud.

Distillation of these byproducts also eliminates the potential impacts of soil and water pollution that could result from poor management of grape marc and wine lees. Such impacts are primarily due to Chemical Oxygen Demand (COD) and Volatile Organic Compound (VOC) emissions¹⁰.

While performance can be influenced by weather variations and unforeseeable climatic factors, several studies have confirmed the role of wine estates in carbon storage. Like forests, perennial crops such as grapevine vineyards can potentially store substantial quantities of carbon: Depending on the soil typology, studies suggest these quantities can range from 134 g C/m² to 900g C/m² per year.¹¹¹² In comparison, the annual storage of sugar beet cultivation ranges from 100 to 150 g C/m².¹³¹⁴

Winemaking byproducts (marc, lees, and finer residues known as *bourbes*) must therefore be disposed of. Up until 2014, the only authorized recovery method was distillation¹⁵.

In 2022, sources for French bioethanol production were mainly grains (63%) and sugar beets (33%). Marc and lees constituted only 4% of this production, half of which was imported¹⁶. The main uses of bioethanol remain incorporation into fuels, food (i.e., potable alcohol), and industrial uses (i.e., hygiene, pharmacy, chemistry).

The UDM Group distillery collects winemaking byproducts – grape marc and wine lees – from wine cooperatives and wine cellars/merchants located within a 40-kilometer radius around the Vauvert site. The data gathered and calculated by the UDM Group for the 2022-2023 campaign indicates collection of approximately 55,600 tons of grape marc and wine lees, for an ultimate production of pure raw alcohol amounting to approximately 25,000 hectoliters¹⁷.

The Functional Unit (FU) defines the focus of any LCA study. All calculations, analyses, and comments depend on this parameter, bearing in mind that all inputs and outputs of the LCI are tied to the functional unit in accordance with the current applicable standard (cf. NF EN ISO 14040).

The FU for this LCA is as follows: **“Production of one hectoliter of 96% pure neutral alcohol for use in perfumery.”** Unlike an ethanol used for energy, this alcohol is purified after undergoing rectification so as to satisfy the quality criteria of the fragrance industry.

2 Methodology

The LCA was carried out per the methodology of the ISO 14040:2006 and 14044:2006 series as established by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO).

2.1 Status of grape marc and wine lees

The first methodological decision to be made for an LCA in the agricultural sector is whether it is appropriate to take upstream agricultural factors into account in the life cycle, in this case the winegrowing and winemaking stages responsible for the production of grape marc and wine lees.

In this study, grape marc and wine lees are considered waste and, as such, the upstream winegrowing and winemaking/marketing channels are well outside the study's scope.

This decision is based chiefly on two factors, summarized as follows:

- **With respect to regulations:**

French decree 2014-903 of August 18, 2014¹⁸ establishes producers' obligation to: “[...] meet their obligation to eliminate all residues from winemaking or any grape processing operation in compliance with regulations relating to environmental protection and marketing of fertilizing materials and growing media.”

- **With respect to standards:**

In standard EN 18027:2023¹⁹ (SB6)²⁰, it is clearly set forth that “if a residue does not have economic value, it should be considered as a process waste stream and not affect the upstream process load.” The non-economic value of winemaking residues is established by the Fédération Nationale des Distilleries Coopératives Viticoles (FNDCV)²¹.

2.2 Status of winemaking byproducts

Production of raw alcohol in distilleries leads to production of a number of byproducts, essentially seeds, pulps, calcium tartrate, fertilizers, and compost. Great care was taken during collection of specific data for the LCA to identify only the inputs and outputs necessary and essential for the

production of raw alcohol and subsequent processing into pure neutral alcohol. We are referring here to the subdivision of processes, making it possible to isolate only the environmental loads relating to our FU and thereby avoiding having to resort to mass, energy, or economic allocations.

It should be emphasized that by opting for subdivision of processes, we are choosing not to take into account the benefits and avoided production of the raw alcohol byproducts recovery. It should nevertheless be reiterated that this method used by Quantis in the reference LCA²² clearly demonstrated the benefits of distillation by virtue of the avoided impacts.

2.3 System boundaries

The boundaries of the system studied in the LCA can be defined as: from the “gate” of the wine cooperatives/cellar to the “gate” of the UDM distillery.

This scope encompasses the four main production stages:

1. **The stage of collecting** grape marc and wine lees from wine producers and transporting (TSP) them to the Vauvert site.
2. **The stage of stocking in units (STK) and handling** grape marc during the silage process using construction equipment (e.g., loader).
3. **The stage of production of pure raw alcohol**, which entails these processes:
 - o Processing the ensiled grape marc (TT1).
 - o Distilling the silo juices (TT2).
 - o Distilling the wine lees (TT3).
4. **The stage of producing pure neutral alcohol** requiring a process of:
 - o Rectification (TT4).

These various stages are illustrated in the following diagram.

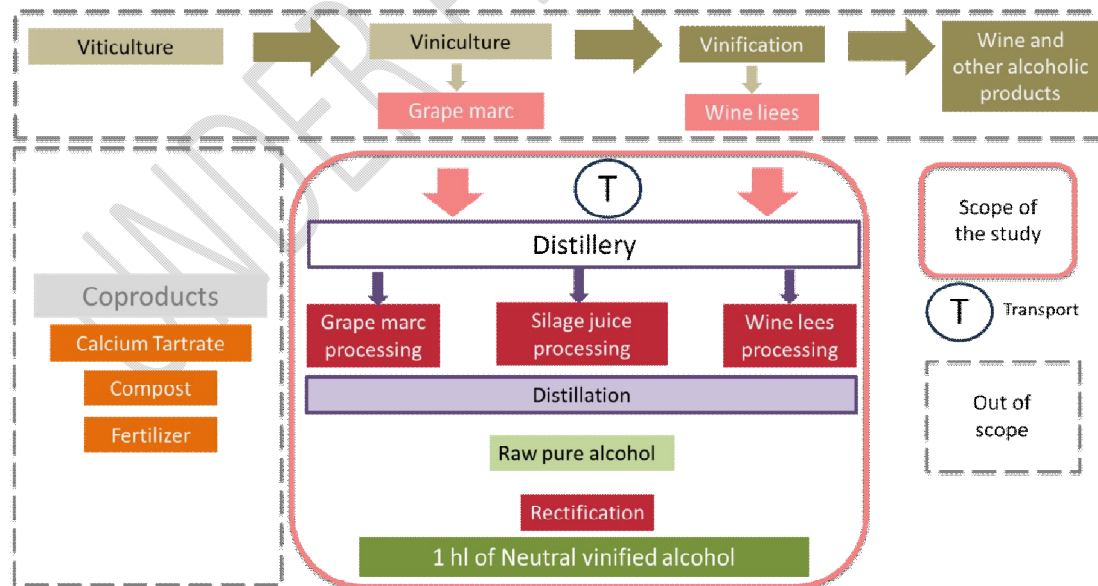


Figure 2: Study scope

Once the pure neutral alcohol is on the market, the heterogeneous nature of its uses does not allow for identification of a specific type of packaging, packaging which is also common to pure alcohols from other origins. No packaging was modeled in this study.

2.4 Calculation method

The LCA was carried out with the recent versions of the calculation tool and databases, which were SimaPro v9.5 and the ecoinvent® v3.9.1 database, respectively.

This study was conducted in the methodological context of “Situation A: Micro-level decision support” of the ILCD Handbook, namely an “attributional” approach.

The calculations are based on the “EF Method 3.0,” a method developed by the European Commission as part of the Product Environmental Footprint (PEF) program with an assessment of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions at 100 years. This method takes into account the 16 categories of indicators and models recommended by the ILCD²³.

2.5 Data collection

The UDM Group’s internal data covers the period 2022-2023. Those specific to grape marc are from autumn 2022, as this substance is rapidly transported to the distillery after the harvest has been pressed. The data on wine lees are also for the 2022-2023 period, bearing in mind that lees are produced throughout the winemaking process, which can last several months.

Once collected, the Vauvert site takes control of the marc and lees as they begin the fermentation and distillation processes.

2.5.1 TSP - collection stage

The calculation of transport data for marc and lees during the 2022-2023 harvest was done using the postal codes of cooperatives and wine cellars coupled with the quantities collected and the number of collections (approximately 140 for the marc and approximately 200 for the lees).

The collection of marc and lees is done within an average radius of approximately 40 kilometers around the Vauvert site (Figure 3). All transportation over the course of a year results in an average ratio of **7.295 t/km per hectoliter of pure neutral alcohol**.

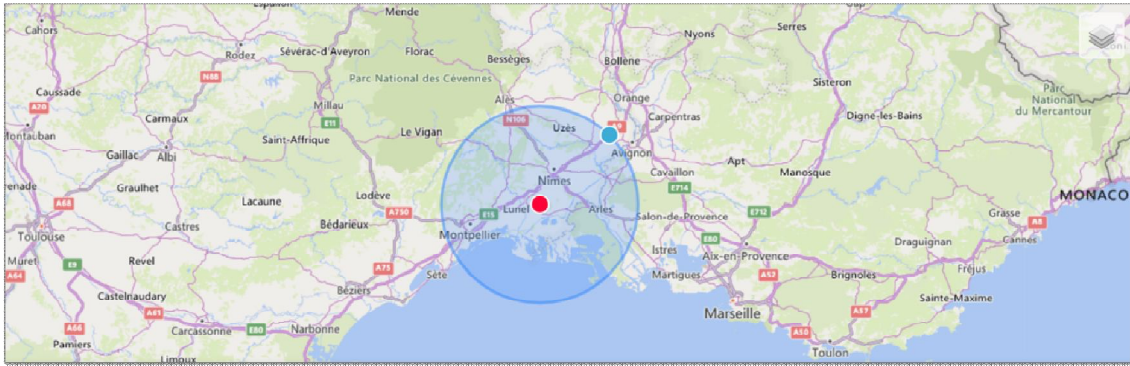


Figure 3: Collection area of grape marc and wine lees by the UDM Group²⁴

2.5.2 STK - stocking stage

This stage entails stocking the grape marc in large silage units. The use of large construction machinery (e.g., loader, bulldozer) is required and necessarily results in consumption of off-road diesel (ORD) fuel. The silage stage also makes it possible to recover the “silo juice,” which will subsequently be distilled.

Using a ratio of 0.29 liter of ORD per ton of marc, and taking into account the portion dedicated to the stocking stage alone, we can establish a consumption of 0.52 liter of ORD per hectoliter of raw alcohol.

The wine lees are stocked independently as they are delivered to the site.

2.5.3 Production stages - TT1-TT4

Once the marc and lees are managed on the site, the production of 96% pure neutral alcohol then involves four distinct processes, grouped into two main stages:

- **Stages TT1 to TT3:** obtaining 92% pure raw alcohol.
 - Processing the “silaged marc”: extraction technique on a distribution belt and distillation.
 - Processing the “silo juice”: fermentation and distillation technique.
 - Processing the wine lees: distillation technique.
- **Stage TT4:** obtaining 96% pure neutral alcohol.
 - Processing the raw alcohol: the water-alcohol mixture recovered at the extractor outlet then undergoes a distillation-rectification process.

2.6 Data specific to the production of 96% neutral pure alcohol.

In addition to the above-mentioned consumption of ORD, production of our Functional Unit entails energy and water consumption throughout the technical phases.

2.6.1 Energy consumption

Distillation is an activity that intrinsically uses significant amounts of energy: from processing the marc to the final production of the pure, purified alcohol. To this end, the UDM Group uses two sources of energy:

- Network-sourced natural gas.
- Biomass to produce heat in the form of steam: the biomass used is wood chips.

With respect to heat production, and so as to be able to identify and correctly inform the LCIs of these two energy sources, we have determined the average distribution between “gas” and “biomass” energies for the 2021-2023 campaigns as follows²⁵:

- For natural gas: 76%
- For wood: 24%

For conversions into kWh, the average Lower Calorific Value (LCV) used per ton of wood is 3,850 kWh, with a moisture content of 25%.

2.6.2 Water consumption

The net water consumption is the result of two phenomena: first, gross consumption on the distribution belt during processing of the silaged marc and, second, during recovery of the condensates from evaporators coupled to the distillation column. The overall consumption for one hectoliter of pure neutral alcohol ultimately turns out to be negative (approximately -1 cubic meter). Nevertheless, considering the high degree of uncertainty in the calculations due to measurement challenges, we have used (kept ?) the gross consumption in the LCA inventory.

2.6.3 Life Cycle Inventory (LCI) data

To meet the Functional Unit, the reference flows for each process were established using the BOM (Bill of Material) provided us by the Technical & QHE department of the UDM Group. The objective is to associate the reference flows with the ecoinvent® LCI database to calculate the inventory. These reference flows shown in Table 1 have been grouped in such a way as to preserve a degree of confidentiality concerning the company's production process.

BOM : 1 hl of Neutral vinified alcohol	Gas consumption	Water consumption	Non-road diesel	Electricity consumption	Transport
	MWh PCI	m3	litres	kWh	t/km
Grape marc and wine lees transportation to the Vauvert distillery					7,295
Storage of grape marc in fermentation cell			0,584		
Set of 4 Treatment of grape marc and wine lees	0,748	1,581	0,909	31,313	
Total: BOM for 1 hl of Neutral vinified alcohol	0,748	1,581	1,493	31,313	7,295

Table 1: Inventory data for the production of one hectoliter of pure neutral alcohol

3 Results and discussion

3.1 Overall environmental assessment

The environmental impacts of a “hectoliter of neutral 96% pure alcohol for use in perfumery” resulting from the upcycling of grape marc and wine lees were assessed for each stage of production as well as per the inputs involved.

3.1.1 Results by “Production stage”

Table 2 illustrates the results in “Single Score” (SS). This score is based on the weighting and standardization of the results: a weighted average, expressed in millipoints (mPt), of the 16 indicators of the European PEF methodology²⁶.

Thus, for the production of our FU, it is quite clear that three damage categories total 75% of all 16 indicators:

- Particulate matter
- The use of fossil resources

- Climate change

We can also see that the “Processing of silaged marc” stage alone encompasses 65% of the impacts of all production processes. The final rectification stage to obtain neutral alcohol follows with 22% of the SS.

Impact categories	Unit	Grape marc processing	Rectification: 1hl Neutral vinified alcohol	Wine lees processing	Silage juice processing	Grape marc & Wine lees transportation to UDM	Site construction: Ethanol fermentation plant	Total	Relative share of damage categories
Particulate matter	mPt	2,169	0,777	0,340	0,153	0,017	0,0000058	3,456	33,83%
Resource use, fossils	mPt	2,005	0,648	0,265	0,117	0,025	0,0000041	3,059	29,95%
Climate change	mPt	0,754	0,253	0,107	0,048	0,038	0,0000121	1,199	11,74%
Water use	mPt	0,294	0,173	0,036	0,020	0,001	0,0000006	0,524	5,13%
Photochemical ozone formation	mPt	0,284	0,095	0,041	0,018	0,010	0,0000021	0,448	4,39%
Resource use, minerals and metals	mPt	0,186	0,052	0,017	0,007	0,005	0,0000363	0,266	2,60%
Acidification	mPt	0,147	0,050	0,021	0,009	0,006	0,0000038	0,234	2,29%
Ionising radiation	mPt	0,166	0,040	0,010	0,003	0,000	0,0000003	0,220	2,15%
Land use	mPt	0,111	0,040	0,017	0,008	0,001	0,0000018	0,178	1,74%
Eutrophication, terrestrial	mPt	0,108	0,038	0,016	0,007	0,005	0,0000011	0,175	1,71%
Eutrophication, marine	mPt	0,072	0,025	0,011	0,005	0,003	0,0000007	0,115	1,13%
Human toxicity, non-cancer	mPt	0,072	0,024	0,010	0,004	0,002	0,0000036	0,112	1,10%
Eutrophication, freshwater	mPt	0,060	0,020	0,008	0,003	0,002	0,0000039	0,093	0,91%
Ecotoxicity, freshwater	mPt	0,055	0,016	0,007	0,003	0,003	0,0000018	0,084	0,82%
Human toxicity, cancer	mPt	0,028	0,010	0,004	0,002	0,001	0,0000015	0,044	0,43%
Ozone depletion	mPt	0,005	0,002	0,001	0,000	0,000	0,0000000	0,008	0,08%
		6,516	2,263	0,911	0,408	0,119	0,000080	10,216	100%
		63,8%	22,2%	8,9%	4,0%	1,2%	0,001%	100%	

Table 2: LCA results in Single Score of the FU by stage

3.1.2 Results by “Input”

An alternative approach to assessing environmental impacts involves taking into account the inputs necessary for production of the FU. As is evident, the most-impacted damage categories are logically identical to those of the stage-by-stage approach²⁷.

More than 90% of environmental impacts can be explained by energy consumption, excluding transportation. The emission of particulate matter (PM) comes almost exclusively from the use of wood for heat production. Gas more specifically impacts the fossil resource consumption indicator. Lastly, these three energy sources have a combined impact on GHG emissions (Table 3).

Catégorie de dommages	Unité	Wood Chips brûlés - UDM	kWh Gaz naturel PCI - UDM	Electricité Mix FR - UDM	Litres d'eau du réseau - UDM	Litres de GNR Diesel - UDM	Transport Marcs & Lies vers UDM	Site de Fermentation d'éthanol	Total	Part relative des Catégories de dommages
Particulate matter	mPt	3,331	0,071	0,028	0,003	0,003	0,017	0,000005827	3,453	34,4%
Resource use, fossils	mPt	0,067	2,392	0,478	0,008	0,081	0,025	0,000004123	3,051	30,4%
Climate change	mPt	0,114	0,918	0,077	0,009	0,036	0,038	0,000012116	1,193	11,9%
Photochemical ozone formation	mPt	0,182	0,225	0,012	0,001	0,017	0,010	0,000002094	0,447	4,5%
Water use	mPt	0,002	0,021	0,008	0,343	0,001	0,001	0,000000633	0,376	3,7%
Resource use, minerals and metals	mPt	0,037	0,067	0,153	0,002	0,001	0,005	0,000036262	0,265	2,6%
Acidification	mPt	0,107	0,093	0,021	0,002	0,003	0,006	0,000003801	0,233	2,3%
Ionising radiation	mPt	0,011	0,006	0,200	0,002	0,000	0,000	0,000000293	0,219	2,2%
Land use	mPt	0,171	0,003	0,002	0,000	0,000	0,001	0,000001821	0,177	1,8%
Eutrophication, terrestrial	mPt	0,104	0,057	0,006	0,001	0,002	0,005	0,000001141	0,175	1,7%
Eutrophication, marine	mPt	0,066	0,038	0,006	0,001	0,001	0,003	0,000000726	0,115	1,1%
Human toxicity, non-cancer	mPt	0,059	0,026	0,020	0,003	0,001	0,002	0,000003637	0,111	1,1%
Eutrophication, freshwater	mPt	0,026	0,038	0,020	0,004	0,001	0,002	0,000003874	0,091	0,9%
Ecotoxicity, freshwater	mPt	0,017	0,046	0,008	0,001	0,009	0,003	0,000001829	0,084	0,8%
Human toxicity, cancer	mPt	0,017	0,019	0,004	0,002	0,000	0,001	0,000001511	0,044	0,4%
Ozone depletion	mPt	0,000	0,008	0,000	0,000	0,000	0,000	0,000000005	0,008	0,1%
		4,314	4,029	1,043	0,381	0,156	0,119	0,000080	10,041	100%
		43,0%	40,1%	10,4%	3,8%	1,6%	1,2%	0,001%	100%	

Table 3: LCA results in Single Score of the FU by input

3.1.3 Climate change potential

The production of one hectoliter of pure neutral alcohol from recycling grape marc and wine lees emits approximately 43 kg of CO₂e, i.e. approximately 0.430 kg per liter or 0.530 kg per kilogram of alcohol using a l/kg ratio of 0.81.

Figure 4 illustrates in absolute value the breakdown of inputs on the climate change indicator. The consumption of natural gas in all stages of production generates 77% of total GHG emissions.

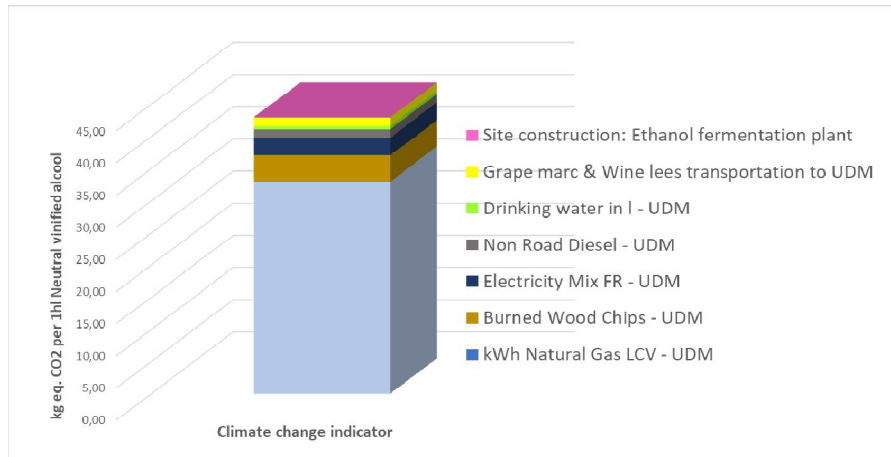


Figure 4: Breakdown of GHG emissions by inputs for 1 FU

3.1.4 Particulate matter emissions

Unlike the advantages in terms of GHGs generated by using wood resources, such use contributes significantly to particulate matter emissions. This means that, while the biomass only contributes to 24% of heat production, it is responsible for 96% of the impacts of this indicator.

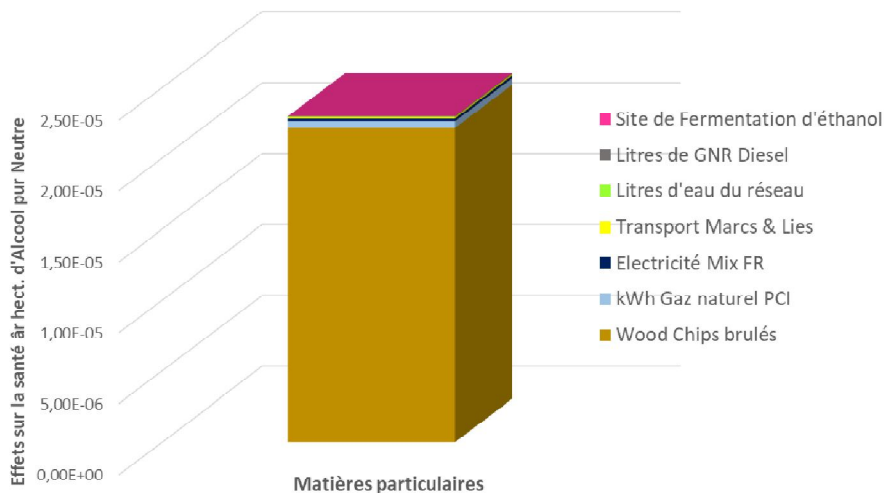


Figure 5: Breakdown of the health effects indicator by inputs for 1 FU

3.1.5 Use of fossil resources

Unsurprisingly, 94% of the “Use of fossil resources” indicator comes from the life cycle of natural gas (78%) and, to a lesser extent, from the production of the French electricity mix.

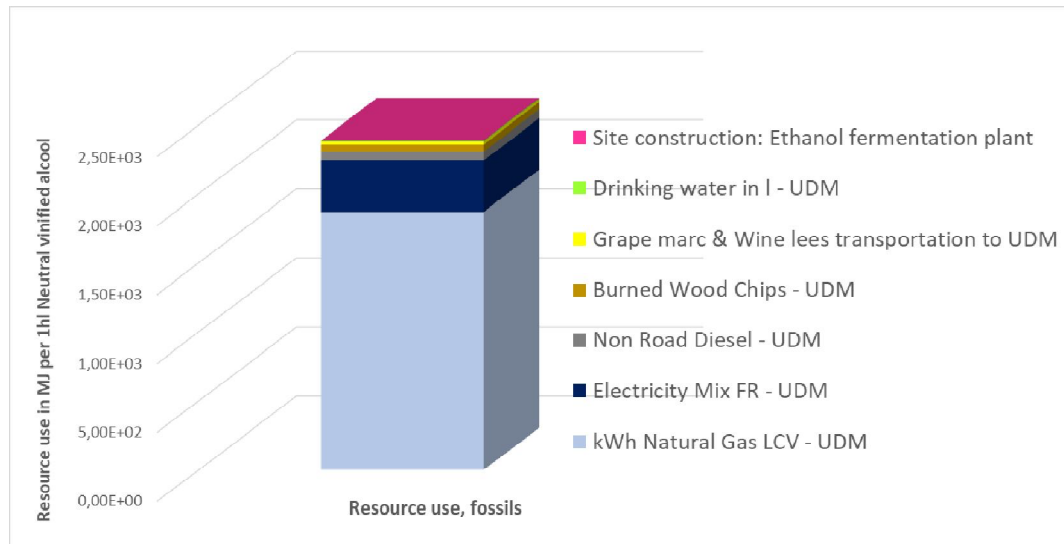


Figure 6: Breakdown of fossil resource usage by inputs for 1 FU

4 Comparison with sugar beet alcohol

As mentioned in the introduction, alcohol made from sugar beets is still very widely used in perfumery today. In light of this widespread use, we have demonstrated the olfactory qualities of alcohol produced from the distillation of grape marc and wine lees. Its comparative environmental performance remains to be demonstrated.

In the absence of specific data for the production of alcohol from sugar and molasses resulting from the processing of sugar beets, the LCA results for the alcohol of the UDM Group will be compared to those of the sugar beet alcohol (specifically in the form of ethanol) calculated using the LCIs from the ecoinvent® database²⁸.

4.1 Sugar beet alcohol: finished product, coproduct, or byproduct?

Viewing ethanol as a product in its own right, it is entirely justified to include upstream agriculture in the scope of the LCA. Demonstrating its byproduct status is more complex and taking upstream agricultural factors into account would then meet allocation criteria that are often complex to set. The status of sugar beet alcohol can therefore change: It can be considered a finished product in its own right if it comes from:

- a first pressing of “green juice”;
- a first crystallization; or
- a second crystallization²⁹.

Alcohol, being produced from a third crystallization, is indeed a byproduct, in this case resulting

from the fermentation of the molasses itself resulting from this third crystallization.

Furthermore, the methods chosen by industrial processors of “green juice” (sugar beet pressing), whether crystallization or fermentation, remain confidential: These choices depend on fluctuations in raw material and energy prices. For the record, the agricultural upstream of the production of 96% pure neutral alcohol from the UDM Group (i.e. winegrowing and winemaking) was excluded for the reasons given in §3.1. In the context of this study, we feel it is logical to associate sugar beet cultivation with the LCIs of ethanol as modeled in ecoinvent®.

4.2 Acomparative result: “grape” vs. “sugar beet”

Lacking primary data to conduct an LCA specific to French alcohol production from the distillation of sugar beet juice, we must rely on the ecoinvent® database, in which there are several life cycle inventories (LCI) relating to ethanol production.

The three LCIs selected feature scenarios similar to a French, at least European, reality. The following table shows the results of these LCIs, as well as that of our FU for the “Climate Change” indicator.

We can see that the GHG emissions from the production of pure neutral alcohol by the UDM Group compare fairly positively to those from production of ethanol from sugar beets (Table 4). Furthermore, we do not know to what extent the rectification step is integrated into the ecoinvent® LCI data. As we have pointed out, this stage involves significant energy consumption, especially for obtaining an alcohol which requires optimized purity.

ICV d'Ecoinvent et Agribalyse	Emissions de GES en kg éq. CO2 par kg d'éthanol
<i>"1 kg Ethanol, without water, in 95% solution state, from fermentation [CH] ethanol production from sugar beet Cut-off, U"</i>	0,388
<i>"1 kg Ethanol, from sugar beet molasses, animal feed, at plant [FR] U" (du projet AGRIBALYSE - unit)</i>	0,518
<i>"Production d'1 kg d'alcool neutre 96° à l'UDM" : ratio l/kg de 0,81</i>	0,530
<i>"1 kg Ethanol, without water, in 95% solution state, from fermentation [CH] ethanol production from sugar beet molasses Cut-off, U"</i>	0,682

Table 4: Comparison of GHG emissions of alcohol production from grapes and from sugar beets

5 Conclusion

Using a conservative scenario, factoring in all the processed data and information, and taking into account the inherent uncertainty in agro-environmental models in constructing life cycle inventories (LCI), we can nevertheless ensure that the environmental impact of the UDM's production of pure neutral alcohol is positively comparable with alcohol from the distillation of sugar beet juice, more specifically in the following ways:

- Greenhouse gas emissions per hectoliter of 96% neutral pure alcohol are comparable or lower when considering the “size” element of ethanol production sites, which are in no way comparable (25,000 hl/ year for the Vauvert distillery versus 1,000,000 hl/year for the average distillation capacity of sugar beet alcohol production facilities).
- A raw-material-collection area that is geographically limited to a radius of approximately 40 kilometers.
- Sustainable management of winemaking wastes classified as soil pollutants (COD, VOC).

- As grape marc and wine lees are inedible, they have no impact on food-resource availability.
- Collaboration with the winegrowing and winemaking worlds and closed-loop production of recoverable byproducts in the wine industry: compost, fertilizer, TCA, etc.
- Grapevines in the form of vineyards, unlike field crops, constitute significant carbon sinks, much in the same way forests do.

Naturally, one should also consider the intrinsic quality of the “product” – extra-neutral grape alcohol for use in perfumery.

While bearing in mind the distortions inherent in the calculations of environmental impacts (i.e. specific production data for a UDM Group site and weighted LCI modeling of an agro-industrial activity for sugar beet alcohol), extra-neutral grape alcohol remains unquestionably efficient in terms of greenhouse gas emissions. Here we should emphasize the production capacity differential (factors of 20 to 40) and the resulting effects of economies of scale to the advantage of sugar beet distilleries. Lastly, we wish to highlight “non-LCA” arguments, such as the technical and economic complementarities of the UDM Group with local wine producers and grape alcohol’s intrinsic olfactory qualities.

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⁷The ecoinvent® database is considered by the profession to be the world’s leading source of life cycle inventory data.

⁸LCI: Life Cycle Inventory

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²⁷The difference of only around 0.1% on average on the 16 indicators is due to rounding in the calculations.

²⁸The ecoinvent® database is the international leader in the realm of LCA data.

²⁹Experts are nevertheless still debating this point.