

Waitrose to pull mock corks



Suppliers will be asked by Waitrose to use cork or screwcap closures

Rosie Davenport

Waitrose is taking its most decisive stand in the debate over wine closures by phasing out synthetic corks from its range.

The retailer said it would ask all its suppliers to switch to natural cork or screwcaps with the exception of a limited number of producers too small to withstand the cost of making the necessary technical changes. Simon Thorpe, Waitrose central wine buyer, said: "Customers are driving this because they don't like synthetic corks.

"They are not user-friendly

and people complain they are difficult to put back in the bottle."

Currently, 90 wines in the Waitrose range use synthetic cork closures compared with 63 screwcaps and 600 natural corks.

The president of synthetic cork manufacturer Neocork Technologies, Andy Starr, insisted Waitrose was being too hasty and that the second generation cork it produced did not have the same problems of extraction and reinsertion.

He added: "Any problems with synthetic corks are not good for the industry."

Simon Waller, vice-president for European sales at competitor Supreme Corq, agreed: "All synthetic corks are not the same."

Sainsbury said synthetic corks had achieved a "high level of acceptance" within its customer base and that it had no plans to withdraw them.

However, Tesco echoed Waitrose's concerns.

Product development manager Helen McGinn said: "We have had customer feedback that if they had to choose they would rather have a screwcap because of the difficulties getting synthetic corks back into the bottle."