

2006 HARVEST REPORT

General Overview

- Exceptional quality wines were made from the 2006 harvest and winemakers are delighted about the reds in particular.
- It was a very healthy season with warm to very warm, dry periods during ripening and harvest.
- The growing season was windy, but although the vigour of the vineyards was impaired and bunch and berry size suffered accordingly, the canopies were smaller and better aerated, which, combined with the cooler weather, favoured the production of top quality wines with concentrated flavours.
- The widespread power outages put enormous pressure on many cellars during the crush, but did not impact negatively on the quality of the wines.

For quotations from winemakers in various regions, see below.

Crop size: The estimated 2006 crop of 963 million litres (1 249 435 tons) at an average recovery of 771 litres per ton of grapes represents an increase of 6,6% compared to the 2005 crop. This includes juice and concentrate for non-alcoholic purposes, rebate and distilling wine.

Initially the crop was thought to be slightly bigger, but factors such as the drought and windy conditions caused the crop to be reduced. Although there were more bunches, the berries were considerably smaller than in 2005, when abnormal thunder storms in the Western Cape in the spring of 2004 released nitrogen into the atmosphere, thereby stimulating vegetative and berry growth.

Autumn 2005: During the post-harvest period in May good rainfall occurred, with leaf drop at the usual time, resulting in good accumulation of reserves. The exceptions were the Orange River, where regular showers resulted in outbreaks of downy mildew and leaf drop occurred earlier than usual. The Olifants River region was dry throughout, with little or no water for post-harvest irrigation and budding that occurred at the tips of the shoots. The vines' demand for adequately cold weather was initially satisfied.

Winter 2005: It was a standard cold and wet Cape winter, after two dry winters, which meant that the vines could enjoy proper dormancy. End May and June were particularly cold, at night especially, with the coastal region receiving ample precipitation during this period. The first three weeks of July were warm and dry, however, which impacted on the budding of the late cultivars especially, Shiraz in particular. The end of July and August once again saw good, cold weather and rainfall.

Winter rains were above average and properly supplemented the water tables in most wine regions after three years of drought. Vineyards on clay soils in areas such as Darling, Philadelphia and Durbanville benefited from good water retention ability.

Since all the large dams in the Western Cape were full or almost full, the water supply was sufficient for the forthcoming growing season. Although the Olifants River had hardly any rain at all, the Clanwilliam Dam was full as a result of rain in the catchment area.

The 2005 growing season: Favourable weather conditions at the beginning of the growing season resulted in good, even budding and growth, of the early cultivars in particular. Budding was earlier than usual, but cold weather towards the end of September caused delayed budding, as well as uneven shoot growth. Budding and growth were uneven in Shiraz in particular and to a

lesser extent, Sauvignon blanc. By applying the appropriate canopy management practices, producers nevertheless obtained uniform growth and homogeneity in the vineyards.

Regular rainfall in the early growing stages increased pressure from fungal diseases, since conditions favoured fungal infections. However, few problems were experienced due to preventative spraying programmes and fast reaction by the producers. By so doing, threatening outbreaks of downy mildew were nipped in the bud. In the Orange River there was limited spring growth and in the Olifants River the dry climate reduced the pressure from pests and diseases.

The growing season from September to November was characterised by mild to cool weather, at night especially. During flowering and berry set in October and November weather conditions fluctuated, as usual, between warm and cold, windy periods. Many of the shoot tips were damaged, causing uneven growth, in Merlot especially – and in the Shiraz vineyards, where budding had already been uneven. Berry set varied according to the fluctuating weather conditions during flowering.

Initial growth in the Breede River was average to below average, and weaker spots in the vineyards were soon apparent. During the same period the Coastal Region experienced vigorous to very vigorous growth. Gale force winds at the beginning of November put pressure on growth from pea bud to veraison. To ensure even ripening and quality, producers aggressively thinned out the bunches, cutting green bunches and in some instances berries too.

The entire Western Cape experienced very strong southeasterly winds throughout summer, as from December, as well as a prolonged heatwave from the end of January to the middle of February, necessitating good irrigation management. Wind and heat caused soil moisture to dry up, especially in dryland vineyards in Malmesbury, Stellenbosch and Paarl. Shrinking water supplies affected irrigation vineyards in some parts of the Little Karoo, Olifants River and Worcester, resulting in smaller crops.

The harvest: For producers in several regions the 2006 vintage was characterised by uneven ripening, especially among the red wines, as a result of cold, rainy weather during the budding season. On the whole growth was good, however, and the canopy sufficient, with warm, dry weather in February resulting in excellent, slow ripening conditions which contributed to good phenolic ripening. The vineyards and the grapes were healthy. Extensive sorting formed part of the quality management process. The harvest was drawn out and most cellars finished about two weeks later than usual.

Runaway veld fires had a negative impact on the industry and increased by 40% in the Western Cape's protected areas this season. Some producers in areas such as Franschhoek, Wellington, the Overberg and Steenberg lost part of their crop due to the fires. Large tracts of valuable fynbos were destroyed and extensive soil erosion is expected throughout the winelands this winter. The hope has been expressed that farmers will implement preventative measures, in line with the Biodiversity and Wine Initiative.

The wines: Winemakers are confident that quality wines were made across the spectrum. The effect of the wind was that berries were smaller, growth was less vigorous and the crop lighter, thereby favouring the concentration of fruit flavours, colour and extract in the wines.

On the whole red cultivars produced excellent quality grapes. The Shiraz grapes had a very intense character and the wines already show exceptional flavour concentration – full-bodied, with outstanding maturation potential. Pinotage had very good colour and flavour, and the Cabernet Sauvignon is likewise very promising.

White cultivars showed remarkable grape flavour and balance. Top quality Chardonnay and some of the best Sauvignon blanc in recent years were made.

Little Karoo: An exceptionally healthy year. Elegant white wines, good quality, with good keeping ability are expected. Sauvignon blanc and Chenin blanc in particular worth noting.

Olifants River: The second largest crop in history. An outstanding year for Sauvignon blanc, Colombar and Hanepoot, Cabernet, Merlot and Ruby Cabernet.

Orange River: Unfavourable drying conditions meant that large quantities of Sultanas and table grapes were crushed, mainly for concentrate. Regular showers from the beginning of January caused rot, downy mildew and oidium infections.

Paarl: One of the healthiest seasons in many years for wine producers. The crush was long and drawn out. An average year for production and wine quality.

Robertson: Once again a vintage with singular challenges. Excellent red wines, Shiraz in particular. Due to the cooler season Sauvignon blanc and Chardonnay are looking very promising.

Stellenbosch: Good quality Chardonnay, Chenin blanc and some very interesting Sauvignon blanc wines. Full-bodied, exceptionally flavourful Merlot, Cabernet franc and Shiraz. Cabernet Sauvignon variable.

Swartland: The overall cool climate favoured flavour retention in cultivars such as Sauvignon blanc and Chardonnay. Dry, warm conditions towards the end of February and beginning of March caused the sugars to climb rapidly and put enormous pressure on cellars due to limited facilities.

Worcester / Bredekloof: Many young vineyards came into full bearing, especially Chenin blanc and Colombar. Accelerated ripening due to the heatwave, very good wine quality nevertheless. As a result of weak grape prices, lots of red grapes were offered and delivered for rebate.

II. MOST IMPORTANT WINE REGIONS

LITTLE KAROO

Production trends

The 2006 crop amounts to 36 432 tons, which is 2,1% lower than the 2005 crop. Because it was an exceptionally healthy year, early and disease prone cultivars generally fared well. Due to drought conditions towards the end of the season and wind, the yield of mass bearers and late cultivars was reduced as a result of smaller bunches. Production of cultivars such as Chenin blanc increased, while that of cultivars such as Colombar decreased.

Climate

The 2005 post-harvest and spring rain was more than sufficient, but there was hardly any rainfall until mid-November. From November onwards water requirements of the vineyards were entirely dependent on irrigation. The availability of irrigation water had a huge impact on the amount of grapes produced in these areas. Whereas Montagu, Barrydale and Calitzdorp had sufficient irrigation water, Oudtshoorn and Ladismith did not.

There was sufficient winter cold, but a few warm days towards the end of winter caused uneven budding in cultivars such as Shiraz. In most of the other cultivars budding was normal and even. Spring temperatures were mild, with cool days in between. The average night temperatures were markedly lower. Cold conditions during flowering caused weaker set in bunches.

Regular cool winds occurred and limited the vigour of vineyards, while also reducing bunch and berry size. Moderate vigour is usually conducive to quality, seeing that the nutrients are spread

more evenly between vegetative growth and bunch feeding. The resultant canopy was smaller and better aerated, which, combined with the cooler weather, favoured the production of top quality wines. The wind also caused the development of more short lateral shoots, which increased the leaf surface of the vineyards and made a special contribution to good ripening towards the end of the season.

Grape and wine quality

Red cultivars generally produced excellent quality grapes. Berries were small with lovely colour. Very good quality red wines are expected, with good colour, extract and ripe tannins. Merlot and Pinotage especially should produce exceptional wines.

White cultivars benefited greatly from the cool weather conditions. Grape flavour and balance were particularly good.

As a result of the dry season, no damage was caused by fungal diseases such as downy mildew and rot. Oidium, which is able to spread without free water, did occur however. The first infections in November and December were mostly easy to control. Late infections also occurred, especially in January and also in February and March. By then the grapes were no longer susceptible to oidium and only the leaves were affected.

Power outages complicated the task of winemakers. Good communication between the electricity supplier and winemakers nevertheless enabled better planning. Due to the weak red wine prices and surplus, a fair amount of red grapes were used to make alternative products instead of dry red wines.

OLIFANTS RIVER

Production trends

The total crop for the Olifants River currently amounts to more than 200 650 tons, which makes it the second largest crop in history, after the 2003 crop. This increase consists of a 15.5% increase in red and an 8.5% increase in white grapes, which represents a total increase of 10% compared to 2005. This, despite the fact that Chardonnay and Pinotage produced drastically less than in 2005. The increase in red is due mainly to new plantings coming into bearing or full bearing, while the greater availability of irrigation water compared to the previous two seasons is the main reason for the increase in white.

The biggest increase in crop size, namely 21%, occurred at Citrusdal Cellar, where a large percentage is dryland which benefited from the colder winter and cooler early summer. The Vredendal/Lutzville area shows an increase of approximately 12%, while the smallest increase (approximately 4%) occurs in the Klaver/Trawal area.

Climate

The cold demand of the vineyards was initially satisfied during the first weeks of June, but this was followed by exceptionally warm weather in July, that was 2°C warmer than the long term average. This warm weather probably contributed to the poor and uneven budding of Chardonnay and Pinotage especially and in some instances also Shiraz. After budding many Shiraz, Ruby and Chardonnay blocks showed serious symptoms of borium shortages/toxicity; these symptoms disappeared later in the season.

The spring and early summer were notably cool and the first proper heatwave occurred only towards the middle of February. This meant that the sugars of the red cultivars especially shot up very quickly, thereby putting great pressure on the cellars with regard to fermentation space. The regular power outages during this period, as well as those that were anticipated and then failed to materialise, further complicated matters.

Grape and wine quality

Although total acids were generally high, the malic acid was in most instances much higher than the tartaric acid. Even so, this year promises to be one of the better years and hopefully winter will experience sufficient winter rainfall.

It was par excellence a year for Sauvignon blanc, Colombar and Hanepoot among the white wines, and Cabernet, Merlot and Ruby among the reds. Chardonnay did not bear well and budding was uneven. Blocks of Chardonnay have already been uprooted and the region may possibly experience shortages of this cultivar in future. Serious consideration is also being given to the possible replacement of red blocks, which are not producing economically viable crops due to the lower prices, with white grapes, even those that are still very young.

ORANGE RIVER

Production trends

The 2006 crop is 12,7% bigger than the meagre crop of 2005. The increase may be ascribed to large quantities of Sultanas and table grapes that were pressed after the abnormal rainfall that occurred regularly throughout the entire area from 30 December onwards, causing unsound harvesting conditions. The vines were bearing very well until the rains came, whereafter rot started to set in. At the cellars in Hartswater and GWK the crop was 25% lighter than the previous season and the red cultivars up to 50% lighter.

Climate

The first proper frost occurred on 25 May, followed by good cold until June. From the middle of June and July in particular it was relatively warm with few frost nights. The days were generally warm, regularly above 20°C. There was no rainfall after May.

The first half of August was characterised by exceptionally warm weather for this time of the year. In general the vineyards started budding very early, from the second week in August, in the warmer period. The temperature was above average from mid-September onwards. The night temperatures in October remained low, causing great fluctuations between day and night temperatures. The temperature fluctuation resulted in much delayed budding and growth arrest symptoms were evident in Sultana and Merbein Seedless especially, and to a lesser extent in the wine grape cultivars that started budding in the cold period. With the exception of a few limited areas in Kakamas, Friersdale and Grootdrink, which experienced hailstorms and light frost, hardly any hail and frost damage were reported this season.

The flowering period was 14 days earlier than usual. Wind during the flowering period meant lighter bunch mass. Showers occurred throughout the entire area on 11 November and ranged from 10 to 25 mm, with a few bands of hail in the vicinity of Kakamas.

November and beginning December were relatively cool and at night especially the temperatures were lower. From 30 December onwards there were regular rainshowers; parts of Groblershoop received more than 400mm and Hartswater more than 600mm for the season. On 6, 18 and 21 January, as well as 3 February, it rained between 20 and >40mm on each occasion throughout the entire area, from Friersdale to Groblershoop. Regular lighter showers of 2 – 15mm occurred with intervals. There was ample irrigation water throughout.

Grape and wine quality

The quality of the Sultanas in particular suffered greatly as a result of splitting at the cap stem, so that grapes wilted and dropped. Heavy bearing and ample rain caused sugars to remain low for the greatest part of the harvesting season. The humidity from the beginning of January was high throughout and consequently there was dew every night; as a result the Sultanas dried very

slowly on the drying beds. This meant that more grapes were delivered to the cellars, mainly for juice concentrate. For the cellars the crush was long and the increased intake put a lot of pressure on the cellar personnel and capacity.

At this stage the white wines are neutral and quiet on the nose, but healthy.

PAARL

Production trends

The total crop size of \pm 139 000 tons is the same as in 2005. According to figures compiled by SAWIS, approximately 500ha of vines were planted in 2003 and 2004, which came into full bearing this year. These young vines made a contribution of more than 2 500 tons to the total of the region, but were balanced out by factors such as the drought and plentiful wind, which caused the crop to shrink.

The production of white cultivars is much the same as the previous season, with Colombar showing the biggest decrease. Many old Chenin blanc vineyards produced less, but there were no significant deviations from either Chardonnay or Sauvignon blanc. New plantings of Viognier as well as Nouvelle are coming into production or full bearing everywhere.

Among the red cultivars Cinsaut, Pinotage, Merlot as well as Ruby Cabernet and Shiraz showed decreased production compared to 2005. The fact that Cinsaut is largely established as dryland vineyards is probably the biggest cause of the decrease. The uneven budding of Shiraz caused many bunches to be dropped in order to obtain even ripening, which had a further effect on the crop size.

Climate

Due to the good winter rains in 2005, which filled most of the dams, it seemed early in the season that the 2006 crop would be bigger than that of the previous season. There were more bunches and more berries per bunch, except for Pinotage and Merlot. Water consumption figures were above average, as a result of approximately 30% more wind than the long term average over the entire region, especially from December to February, combined with consistently above average maximum temperatures. Rainfall in the period from middle November 2005 to March 2006 was only about 30mm, compared to the long term figure of \pm 120mm. All these factors played a role in the berry size being smaller, thereby resulting in a smaller crop.

On the whole 2006 was one of the healthiest seasons in many years for wine producers. However, in the post-harvest period oidium occurred everywhere on leaves, which may result in early leaf drop, thereby impacting negatively on the accumulation of reserves. During the harvest dryland vines in Wellington/Agter-Paarl showed acute moisture stress due to the absence of summer rain, combined with wind that exceeded the long term average by far.

Grape and wine quality

The crush was long and most cellars finished approximately two weeks later than usual. Slow ripening and limited cellar space were the biggest drawbacks. There were no dramatic losses of quality due to power outages.

White wines from the region are average or even better than the 2005 vintage, but the warm, dry conditions exacted a toll. At this early stage the red wines in the various quality categories are showing positively with regard to fruit and structure. The 2006 season will be remembered as an average year for production and wine quality in the region.

ROBERTSON

Production trends

The 2006 vintage will once again be remembered for the challenges it presented to producers, viticulturists and winemakers. Although the crop in the Robertson Wine Valley was 5,2% bigger than the very small 2005 crop, at 167 000 tons being crushed it is nevertheless below average.

The main reason for the bigger crop is the exceptionally healthy year. Last season botrytis rot caused crop losses, but rot did not play a significant role in the 2006 vintage. The crop was smaller than initially anticipated, since Colombar, Pinotage and some Sauvignon blanc and Chardonnay vineyards gave smaller productions. Reasons are mainly the regular, strong winds during flowering, resulting in smaller, looser bunches with smaller berries. A further factor is the occurrence of early spring frost in McGregor, hail damage in Bonnievale and drought conditions among the mountainside farmers who do not have access to scheme water (especially in the vicinity of McGregor).

Climate

The 2005/2006 harvest was once again preceded by a dry winter. Sufficient cold occurred in the dormancy breaking period to satisfy the requirement of the vines. Although the past winter was very dry, enough rain fell in the catchment area of the Brandvlei Dam. This caused the dam to be maximally full and producers had enough water for the season. Dry conditions during winter necessitated irrigation.

Initial budding was up to 10 days earlier in the case of Chardonnay and Colombar vineyards. In general budding was very good and even, except for Shiraz and some Sauvignon blanc vineyards. Warm weather in July, together with cooler weather later in August and at the beginning of September, may have resulted in the late and uneven budding of the Shiraz vineyards especially.

Vigour was not nearly as good as last year. The reason might well be the serious downy mildew of last season, the incessant strong wind from October to December, cold nights (up to 3°C cooler than the long term average minimum temperature) and two dry winters in a row. There was little to no rain during the growing season.

Grape and wine quality

As mentioned, the absence of diseases, as well as a cooler ripening period (especially with regard to night temperatures) were characteristic of the past season. The looser bunches meant that there was low risk of rot, which, together with the smaller berries and cooler ripening period, ensured excellent wine quality. Ripening of the early cultivars especially (Chardonnay and Sauvignon blanc) was earlier, with optimal ripeness being achieved in all cultivars at lower sugars. Acids, and malic acid in particular, were high at the beginning of the season, but later on there were problems with low acids, especially after the heat early in March. Red wine colour is also looking excellent at the moment, mainly due to the smaller berries and cold nights.

Seeing that the red wine prices are still under pressure, far less red grapes were used for red wine and more for alternative products (such as rebate). Consequently the quality of the red wines at the moment is very good. Shiraz in particular is very promising, despite the uneven budding. Due to the cooler season the quality of Sauvignon blanc and Chardonnay should also be very good.

STELLENBOSCH

Production trends

The 2006 crop was approximately 2% bigger than the 2005 crop, mainly as a result of a particularly disease-free season and red wine plantings that came into full bearing. Chardonnay, Chenin blanc and in certain instances Sauvignon blanc all had bigger crops. The red cultivars had good crops, except for Pinotage, which had a slightly smaller crop, just like last year. In some instances weight losses in bunches of the late red cultivars resulted in a smaller crop.

Climate

Good rains fell during the post-harvest period, which benefited the accumulation of reserves in the vine. This was followed by good winter rain and cold weather, bringing water levels in catchment dams close to normal. The spring and early summer were cooler than usual, but also drier than the long term figures. The beginning of 2006, until the beginning of March, were characterised by warm to very warm, windy and dry conditions.

Budding was normal to later than the previous season. Although the budding was very even, shoot growth was uneven, with the accompanying uneven bunch development. This was the case in Shiraz and Cabernet Sauvignon especially. Fertility was good in all cultivars. The flowering of the early cultivars, Chardonnay and to a certain extent Merlot, was influenced by cooler climatic conditions and resulted in looser bunches, as well as small, unfertilised berries. Red cultivars in particular also had smaller berries.

The warmer, drier conditions at the beginning of 2006 necessitated early irrigation. The persistent warm, windy and dry conditions increased the irrigation demand, which was advantageous for crop size and quality. In dryland vineyards there were a few instances of berry shrinking in late cultivars. There were also a few cases of sunburn damage. Both these aspects impacted on bunch weight and therefore crop size.

The season was exceptionally healthy with regard to fungal diseases. There were isolated incidences of botrytis on Chardonnay and Sauvignon blanc, but no financial losses. Early in the season snails and snout beetles caused damage to leaves and shoots. Mealybug was exceptionally quiet this year and there were no major outbreaks.

Grape and wine quality

Grape analyses were good, with good increase in sugar, especially after the very warm conditions. There was great pressure on cellar space, especially from the mid- and late season cultivars.

Interesting wines and wine styles were dictated by the climatic conditions – a healthy growing season with warm to very warm, dry periods during ripening and harvest. Good quality was obtained from Chardonnay, Chenin blanc and in certain instances Sauvignon blanc. Due to the warmer conditions and ripeness Sauvignon blanc wines are interesting, with a few wine styles differing from that of previous years.

The quality of Merlot, Cabernet franc and Shiraz is exceptional with full-bodied, flavourful wines. The grape quality of Cabernet Sauvignon is equally special, although variable.

SWARTLAND

Production trends

The total crop size for the Swartland district amounted to 104 714 tons, which is 6,1% bigger than the 2005 crop. This increase in crop size is due mainly to the good post-harvest period of 2005, the wet and cold winter period and low disease pressure during ripening. The crop size could

have been even bigger had there been timely rain in December and January. The protracted drought conditions, in dryland vineyards especially, meant that berry sizes did not develop to their full potential.

Climate

Good rainfall in the post-harvest period of 2005 ensured sufficient reserves for budding. Some dryland vines lost their leaves very early in the post-harvest period. The cold temperatures, especially towards the end of May and beginning of June, ensured that sufficient cold units were available for optimal dormancy breaking.

From May until July 2005 the average temperatures were slightly below the long term average, although there were two weeks of abnormally warm weather in July. The total rainfall for this period was significantly more than for the same period in 2005. This period was clearly very beneficial to good dormancy breaking and soil water- as well as dam levels.

Warm weather in August and September caused good, even and strong budding in early cultivars. Further growth and development were curbed by cold, windy weather in September. It will be remembered as the season of unevenness as regards Shiraz and Merlot. Budding in Cabernet Sauvignon was uneven, but to a lesser extent. In some instances even Pinotage had problems with budding. On the whole budding was good and even in Chardonnay and Chenin blanc. Chenin blanc had quite a few shoulder bunches and the older vineyards especially did well this year. Good fruit set occurred in almost all instances, despite the presence of much harmful wind in this period.

Warm, humid thunder conditions midway through October created conditions conducive to downy mildew infection, but good control was exercised. After the initial high disease pressure in the middle of October, the rest of the season was fairly disease free. On the whole the grapes were free of botrytis infections and little to no crop losses can be ascribed to diseases.

November and December were generally characterised by moderate day temperatures and cool nights especially. At the beginning of January there was a short warm period when day temperatures were very hot, but on the whole the entire month had cool nights.

The beginning of February was warm to extremely hot. The wind did not stop blowing and there was little to no rain, causing the water demands in the Swartland to shoot up.

As a result of the warm, dry and windy weather there were hardly any diseases. In exceptional instances new infections of downy mildew and oidium were observed from November until January. Mealybug, snails and boll-worm remain problematic, but no other pests caused major problems in this period.

Grape and wine quality

The overall cool climate favoured flavour retention in cultivars such as Sauvignon blanc and Chardonnay, but where soil water levels were not carefully monitored, and stress was caused by the bigger water demands, there was a considerable loss of flavour. The Sauvignon blanc vineyards suffered as a result of the heatwave at the beginning of February, which benefited sugar ripeness rather than physiological ripeness. Late cultivars ripened earlier, putting great pressure on cellar capacities. In the period end February, beginning March, accelerated ripening combined with regular power outages put additional pressure on cellars.

On the whole red cultivars had good colour. At the beginning of March the sugars shot up due to dry, warm conditions. In many instances grapes were left on the vines for too long due to rapid accumulation of sugar combined with limited cellar facilities.

Minimal rot occurred and may be considered one of the reasons why a cultivar such as Chenin blanc fared so well (quality and quantity).

This year the wine grape producer in the Swartland really felt the reality of lower wine prices and grape production for a specific wine goal is increasingly prevalent. Some producers were not entirely dedicated to quality practices in red wine blocks this year in order to realise a profitable yield per hectare. Many red wine blocks were also produced for rebate.

WORCESTER / BREEDEKLOOF

Production trends

In 2006 311 955 tons of grapes were produced, which represents an increase of 11,4% compared to the previous year. This increase may be ascribed to various factors. Firstly, 999 hectares of vines were established in 2003, which represents approximately 11 000 tons of grapes (white @ 12 ton/ha and red @ 10 ton/ha).

Furthermore the previous season's climate during bunch initiation increased the fertility of the vine buds in most cultivars. This was especially true for the younger generation of Chenin blanc and Colombar vines (4-12 years old). The thoroughly cold and wet winter, as well as a very healthy year with little to no crop losses due to diseases, also contributed to the bigger crop.

Climate

The 2005 post-harvest period was very beneficial to the vines, enabling them to accumulate good reserves for the new season, on the one hand because leaf drop took place relatively late, on the other hand because the rain in April was accompanied by thunder.

It was a cold, wet winter which compared very well with the long term averages for the region. There was sufficient cold to ensure dormancy breaking of the buds. In July there was a 10 day period of abnormal warmth, which impacted on the budding of the late cultivars, Shiraz in particular. The Brandvlei Dam was approximately 75% full after the end of winter, compared to 45% in 2004.

It was a cool summer with very windy conditions, especially during flowering. This impacted negatively on berry set and played a role in the slightly smaller than anticipated crop. Summer was dry, with very little to no precipitation. Disease pressure was very low with botrytis occurring only sporadically.

Early in January the Western Cape was hit by a heatwave. The nights remained cool however. The early cultivars were not really affected and the crush took place in ideal circumstances. Sauvignon blanc in particular benefited greatly.

The beginning of February was warm to extremely warm, which, combined with the wind, caused the water demand of the vines to shoot up. The heatwave accelerated ripening in many vineyards, causing simultaneous ripening of many vines and cultivars. In many cases sugar rather than physiological ripeness was achieved and such grapes had to be crushed purely to avoid high alcohol levels in the wines. Cellar capacity was strained to the utmost. Constant power outages further complicated arrangements around the crush.

Grape and wine quality

The persistent winds as well as the drought conditions which resulted in relatively smaller berries, were very positive for wine quality.

Grape prices were under enormous pressure, however, and grapes outside the co-operative system were freely available. Wholesalers also cut down on some of their contracts just before the harvest. The result was that much red grapes were offered and delivered for rebate.

III. ELSEWHERE IN THE SOUTHERN HEMISPHERE

Australia

Australia's 2006 crop was minimally smaller than the record crop of the previous year. The figures, estimated at 1 900 million tons, do not include 60 000 tons of wine grapes that were left unpicked, hanging on the vine.

Although the 2006 crop is the third largest in history, it is expected to help balance out supply levels in the Australian wine industry with a 5 per cent decrease in red grapes and a 4 per cent increase in white grapes. The industry is busy working away stock levels of red wine and has succeeded in producing less the past three years.

The growing season was generally characterised by above average rainfall in the spring and early summer, which promoted vigorous growth and canopy development. Above average day temperatures in most regions encouraged ripening and in many instances the crush started and ended two to three weeks earlier than usual, except in Western Australia, which had one of the coolest seasons ever. In all regions the quality this year is outstanding, with good to excellent wines being expected from the 2006 vintage.

New Zealand

Viticulturists and winemakers were initially delighted by the good weather during the 2006 harvest season. The grapes were lovely and the 2006 crush started about three weeks earlier than usual, thanks to a dry summer. The grapes ripened quickly, with many cultivars ripening simultaneously, until rain at the end of March delayed the crush. The season's large, dense canopies made the vineyards more susceptible to botrytis.

IV. VINTAGE GUIDE

The number of wine regions, their geographic distance and climatological diversity defy generalisation, but the overall characteristics of the previous seven vintages may be summarised as follows:

2005: A difficult vintage with a very dry winter, excessive rainfall during the crush and a scorching heatwave towards the middle of February. Smaller crops meant concentrated flavours and lovely colours. Magnificent red wines, but careful selection is mandatory.

2004: The harvest seemed to drag on forever, but it was well worth the wait. Elegant wines with greater maturation potential due to a cooler season. Lower alcohol and soft tannins characterise this vintage.

2003: An excellent vintage, one of the very best in recent years. White as well as red wines impress with full-bodied structure and complexity.

2002: Pay attention to individual cellars, rather than general trends. Downy mildew caused widespread havoc. Good Sauvignon blanc, Chardonnay, Shiraz, Merlot, Pinotage and new clone Cabernet Sauvignon wines.

2001: The summer was very hot and dry with few diseases. Wines were high in alcohol, with very concentrated flavours.

2000: The crop was small. Some excellent red wines that will keep well. Big, alcoholic white wines.

1999: Large crop, warm summer. Excellent ripening conditions. Reds high in alcohol, will develop in time. Fruity whites.

V. QUOTES FROM THE REGIONS

Darling

Lukas Wentzel, Grootse Post: "It's been a good harvest. The average quality is better so I'm happy. Chardonnays are looking nicely concentrated, and Pinot Noir (at 420m) is probably the best vintage yet – a cooler December/January period and better vineyard management likely contributed."

Durbanville

Johan Kruger, Diemersdal (Durbanville) and Sterhuis (Bottelary, Stellenbosch): "An interesting 2006 factor was that everything ripened quite quickly, but grapes were physiologically ripe at lower sugars. The whites should have 0.5 - 1% lower overall alcohols, and we're even seeing that with reds. We started harvesting earlier than 2005, but sugars sat a bit. Then everything started ripening at the same time. Most days we were processing between 70 and 100 tons. One of the challenges with this vintage was timing: you could not pick on sugar only."

Helderberg

André van Rensburg, Vergelegen: "I've worked here nine harvests and this is the first time I've had physiological ripeness with brown pips. The Sauvignon Blanc is very good and the Sémillon fantastic."

Little Karoo

Riaan Marais, Barrydale Wine Cellar, Southern Cape Vineyards: "During the past harvest only one thing was predictable as far as the weather is concerned: the fact that it was totally unpredictable. I can honestly say that I've never had such a tough season at Barrydale Wine Cellar. Due to regular strong winds growth was not very vigorous, resulting in more balanced vineyards, smaller berries and looser bunches. The quality of the wines is looking good, especially the red cultivars, such as Cabernet Sauvignon, that have a higher than usual acid content. The colour of the red wines is very good due to the smaller berries. I am also particularly happy with the Chardonnay and Merlot."

Olifants River

Pieter Verwey, Vredendal Wine Cellar, Westcorp International: "Our crop is 10% bigger – we crushed 87 000 tons. Conditions were very favourable. The berries were smaller with more concentrated fruit. The wines are above average, fruity and full-bodied."

Robertson

Lolly Louwrens, Robertson Wine Cellar: "Our crop is 5% bigger than 2005 - mostly due to new plantings coming into bearing. It was a quick season, with 85% coming in over about five weeks, between 850 and 1 000 tons per day. We've been fortunate with no rain during the season. I haven't seen grapes this good since 82! Reds and whites are exceptional. Sugar, acidity, pH balance... I think 2006 can go down as a good vintage."

Stellenbosch

Gyles Webb, Thelema: "Fire damage between 3 and 6 January affected about 100 Chardonnay vines. It was our highest vineyards. We have quite serious firebreaks so we managed to retain it, but there's a lot of fynbos damage as well. The only thing we don't know yet is the effect of smoke damage on grapes. In 2000 we chucked away 20,000 litres of wine because of smoky flavours."

Swartland

Andries Blake, Swartland Winery: "The intake of the grapes went smoothly due to the absence of prolonged heatwaves. The physical appearance of the red grapes was better than that of the white grapes, which may be ascribed to the dry conditions during the ripening period. Red wines are fruity and above average. The white wines are average quality with a few that are above average, especially Sauvignon Blanc and Chardonnay."

Tulbagh

Pierre Wahl, Rijk's Private Cellar: "We experienced double the 2004 winter rains during winter 2005, hence vines didn't look too stressed. Strong wind had a negative effect on the first few rows of some blocks, but they acted as windbreaks for remaining rows."

Overberg

Niels Verburg, Luddite, Bot River, as well as consultant to other wineries in the area: "Quality is good because we had fairly moderate conditions - the highest temperature was 34°C, on 6 March when the rest of the Boland had that 40°C day. My Luddite Stellenbosch Shiraz was three weeks later than normal. At Iona we may have the best vintage ever. I kicked off with Stanford Pinotage for Weltevrede farm on February 10, it had nice ripe flavours. Shortly afterwards Southfield Sauvignon Blanc from a warmer part of Elgin came in with stunning flavours. I am very excited about the Sauvignon from new Hawston Bay Vineyards in the mountains near Bot River. Overall the Overberg whites and reds will be slightly fuller, with excellent quality."

Worcester

Albie Treurnicht, Stettyn: "The crush started on 19 January – the earliest ever. Premium and select blocks of noble cultivars produced high quality fruit as well as wine. It was the healthiest viticultural year in two decades!"