



Challenging season brings smaller wine grape crop

I INDUSTRY TRENDS

Challenging conditions led to a reduced wine grape crop for South African producers in 2016, but grapes were healthy and concentrated flavours promise good wines.

This according to the viticultural consultants of VinPro, the representative organisation for close to 3 500 South African wine producers and cellars.

The total wine grape crop is expected to be 6.7% smaller than in 2015.

“Although the crop is smaller, the industry still managed to reach higher productions than initially expected following a season characterised by abnormal heat and water shortages,” says Francois Viljoen, manager of VinPro’s viticulture consultation service.

Water supplies had a great impact on the harvest this year, especially in instances where vineyards were not buffered against the heat. Regions such as Robertson and the Klein Karoo, which received sufficient winter rainfall, had higher productions, while Worcester also obtained a bigger harvest. Most other regions produced smaller crops, but yields in Stellenbosch and the two dryland regions Paarl and Swartland were much lower than in 2015.

The weather was very warm, especially from the end of October towards the end of January, which restricted the growth and constituted lower bunch masses and smaller berries. However, the dry conditions led to the vineyards and grapes being very healthy overall.

Smaller berries led to more concentrated colour and flavour on the positive side and good wines are expected from the 2016 harvest.

South Africa is the 7th biggest wine producer world-wide and produces about 4% of the world’s wine.

Total Crop Size

The 2016 wine grape crop is estimated at 1 378 596 tons according to the latest estimate (30 April 2016) of the South African Wine Industry Information and Systems (Sawis). This is 6.7% lower than in 2015.

The 2016 wine harvest – juice and concentrate for non-alcoholic purposes, wine for brandy and distilling wine included – is expected to amount to 1 070.8 million litres, calculated at an average recovery of 777 litres per ton of grapes.

2015/16 Growing season

Good reserves were accumulated during the post-harvest period (April and May), after which leaf fall occurred mostly at the right time.

The winter started off late in most of the regions but the weather conditions were cold enough to break dormancy. Most of the regions experienced low rainfall with the exception of Robertson and the Klein Karoo. The dam and soil water levels were therefore not sufficiently filled up to prepare the vineyards for the warmer part of the season.

Spring came on time and the weather conditions were ideal which led to good, even bud burst. Most of the regions experienced heat waves as early as the end of October with extended heat conditions throughout the summer and a second heat wave during January, which affected the vineyards and berries adversely.

The heat wave during October occurred in several regions during the flowering and berry set period and the experts are convinced that it already started having a negative impact on production at that stage. Sun burn damage was experienced from the middle to the end of January, specifically with reference to Stellenbosch and Worcester. The extent of the damage will be determined in the months to follow.

The harvest period started a week early due to the warmer weather and it ended about two weeks earlier. However, the temperatures started cooling off from mid-February, which led to sluggish ripening in some cases, but it was advantageous for colour establishment in the late red wine cultivars.

One advantage of the dry season is that diseases and pests were limited. The areas that received sufficient rain were also followed up by ideal dry, warm weather which constituted healthy vineyards and grapes. Excessive and premature rainfall during mid-January in the Orange River region was fortunately followed by dry weather conditions.

Wine potential

“Adaptability was the keyword – winemakers produced the best product from a challenging 2016 crop by means of good decision-making and state-of-the-art technology,” says Viljoen.

The grapes ripened at lower sugar levels in general, which is positive with regards to wines with lower alcohol. The acidity levels were low, which necessitated adaptations in the cellar itself.

The smaller berries that were produced will lead to good colour and intense flavour in this year’s red wines. The white wines also appear surprisingly good, with great structure and good flavours.

Overview of the regions

Breedekloof: A slightly smaller crop than in 2015, but still above-average in size and of good quality.

Klein Karoo: A cold, wet winter and a warm, dry summer leading to a big and healthy crop.

Malmesbury/Swartland: A significantly smaller crop was taken in early and over a short period.

Olifants River: Despite challenging climate conditions and a significantly smaller crop, good quality wines are expected.

Orange River: A somewhat smaller crop with great variations in yields between producers.

Paarl: An abnormally small crop of which the cultivars all ripened early and simultaneously.

Robertson: Ideal seasonal conditions led to a bigger crop and promising wines.

Stellenbosch: A significantly smaller crop due to dry, warm weather conditions and veld fires.

Worcester: A bigger harvest than in 2015, despite limited water, unusual heat and veld fires.

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II OVERVIEW PER REGION

BREDEKLOOF

Overview

Producers and winemakers were surprised by die extent and quality of the 2016 crop, after severe drought and heat initially predicted a hopeless picture for the Breedekloof region's intakes. This is according to Leon Dippenaar, VinPro's regional viticulturist for the Breedekloof.

Production trends

The 2016 wine grape crop is slightly smaller than in 2015, but it's still above-average in size and has good quality. The smaller crop could possibly be ascribed to abnormal heat conditions during the late flowering and berry set period, warm and dry conditions during the growth period, which led to smaller berries, as well as damage caused by veld fires.

Both the white and red cultivars delivered good yields, although the red wine grape crop was slightly smaller. Cabernet Sauvignon's tons are significantly lower, Ruby Cabernet and Merlot's crops are just slightly smaller and the Pinotage crop increased quite radically, possibly as a result of more young vineyards. The Chardonnay crop is considerably smaller, Sauvignon Blanc had a slight decrease and both Colombar and Chenin Blanc delivered good tons.

Climate and viticultural trends

Minimal diseases occurred in die post-harvest period in 2015, the canopies showed good promise and the leaves appeared to be looking healthy long after the harvest. Sufficient reserves have been accumulated during this time.

However, dry conditions during the autumn led to many producers not sowing cover crops. The winter started off very late with the first real cold weather occurring from mid-June. The Breedekloof region had very good rainfall during June and July but the total rainfall for the winter was far below the long-term mark.

The vineyards had bud burst on the normal time and it appeared good and even, specific with reference to the Chardonnay vineyards. The spring was characterised by even shoot growth and the shoots mostly had bud burst on the bearers. However, berry set was adversely affected by the abnormal heat which occurred towards the end of October 2015. All cultivars which normally experience bud burst and berry set later, were affected the most severely.

Practically no rainfall was recorded from November through to the end of March, which had a negative impact on berry growth. It thus led to a smaller crop on the negative side, but it promoted the quality on the positive side.

The ripening process decelerated overall as from mid-March and some blocks, especially those blocks which had instances of leaf roll virus, struggled to mature.

General comments

The 2016 crop will be remembered as one of the healthiest crops ever as was the case in 2015, with practically no occurrence of downy mildew and *Botrytis* rot.

Powdery mildew presented a problem in some instances but it occurred much later in the season and didn't have a significant influence on the harvest. Some late cultivars and especially blocks with a big percentage of leaf roll virus, struggled with maturity towards the end of the season. *Botrytis* rot presented a problem in a few single late blocks after the rainfall at the beginning of April.

The season was furthermore characterised by extreme heat and drought during December and January, which led to sun burn damage in a considerable number of blocks. Sporadic veld fires

occurring early in February close to Waboomsrivier, caused further damage to the vineyards and water availability is increasingly becoming a problem.

Grape and wine quality

The quality appears to be relatively good. The flavour spectrums and intensity of the white cultivars are acceptable and the good quality of the Chenin Blanc and Sauvignon Blanc cultivars are quite surprising, despite the warm season. The quality of the red wines is also quite acceptable. Acidity levels were overall low this year, which necessitated great adaptations to these acidity levels.

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KLEIN KAROO

Overview

“A Particularly cold, wet winter followed by a warm, dry summer in the Klein Karoo which led to a big and healthy harvest,” says Johannes Mellet, VinPro viticulturist for the Klein Karoo region.

The region’s vineyards retained its green canopies and grape quality, regardless the warm and dry summer, as a result of the sufficient soil water and irrigation water.

Production trends

Almost all the cultivars had higher yields this year than in 2015. This could mainly be ascribed to good reserves, a cold, wet winter and a healthy summer. Pinotage, Sauvignon Blanc and Colombar delivered bigger crops in particular.

Climate and viticultural trends

The post-harvest period in 2015 was dry and healthy. The leaves were retained well and the temperatures and sunlight were both favourable for photosynthesis until the end of May.

The cold weather came late but it was on time and sufficient enough for the breaking of dormancy. The Klein Karoo experienced a cold and wet winter, unlike the other regions. Half of the region’s annual rainfall occurred during the first week of July, which led to bore holes being flooded and some fountains began flowing again for the first time in 30 years. Light follow-up rain showers during the rest of the winter and spring kept the soil water levels high after this.

The temperatures had a sudden rise as from mid-August. The vineyards experienced exceptional fast and even bud burst. Bud burst occurred on the normal time for the early cultivars but it occurred early for the late cultivars on the other hand.

October was very warm, followed by a cooler November month. Flowering and berry set were excellent in most of the vineyards but somewhat weaker in some of the vineyards in the late regions.

December and January were warm and dry in general. The region had above-average rainfall during January in the east, while the rest of the region was very dry. However, sufficient irrigation water was available and the vineyards remained a beautiful green colour despite the heat. *Véraison* was even and all cultivars experienced full *véraison* in a short period.

The harvest period, which only kicked off in February in the Klein Karoo, started off as normal to slightly later. The weather was dry during the harvest season, which led to healthy grapes with normal and even cooler than usual weather during February and March. Late cultivars were overall slightly earlier and the harvest season ended early as well.

General comments

The region had a warm summer as was the case in the rest of South Africa, but they didn’t suffer because of the droughts or veld fires. In fact, the drier weather conditions constituted healthier grapes.

The vineyards tolerated the heat very well with the sufficient irrigation water, except for a general observation of lower acidity levels. Snout beetles and erinose were also more common because of the warmer and drier season.

The bigger than usual crop placed some pressure on the cellars but the modern equipment and co-operation between the winemakers and producers contributed greatly to process the crop timeously and effectively.

Grape and wine quality

Sufficient irrigation water, cooler nights during February and even the cooler than usual temperatures during March contributed conjointly to retain the quality of the wine grapes throughout the harvest period.

Wines will deliver more natural, tropical and berry-like flavours this year than green, grassy and fermentation flavours. The colour of the red cultivars and young wines are particularly beautiful. The sugar levels seem to be high this year, but the total acidity is lower and should mostly be adapted before the wine-making process.

Chenin Blanc, Shiraz, Cabernet and Merlot are the cultivars that could produce promising and exceptional quality wines this year.

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MALMESBURY/SWARTLAND

Overview

“The Malmesbury/Swartland region will remember the 2016 season as extremely dry and warm, which led to smaller berries and a significantly smaller wine grape crop,” says Hanno van Schalkwyk, VinPro viticulturist for this region. The harvest season was early and short.

Production trends

Both the red and white cultivars delivered significantly smaller crops, but a particular decrease in Chenin Blanc’s production caused the total crop of the white wine grapes to be smaller than that of the red wines. The blocks that delivered good crops in the past as well as the cultivars which ripened later, showed big decreases in particular. Grenache Noir, Cinsaut and particularly Cabernet Sauvignon delivered smaller crops this year.

Climate and viticultural trends

The Swartland region experienced an extremely dry and warm post-harvest period and leaf fall occurred early due to low soil water levels. Producers who sowed cover crops at a late stage didn’t have much success for this reason.

The first rainfall only arrived in June, but the cold fronts were overall weak and only half or even less than the normal rainfall was recorded in many cases. Cold units started accumulating later than the previous two winters. However, sufficient cold units were accumulated over a period at the beginning of June.

Bud burst occurred on the right time and was very even in general. The growth season was very warm and the vineyards with sufficient water grew vigorously. Growth halted early in the dry land areas where the rain was scarce and in certain instances the shoot lengths were weaker than usual. January was extremely warm in particular and the temperatures only started cooling off towards the end of February.

The harvest season started off very early as was the case in 2015 and it was finalised in a shorter period than usual. The later Chenin Blanc and Cabernet Sauvignon vineyards struggled to reach full ripeness towards the end of the harvest season.

General comments

The heat waves during January as well as the lack of water led to photosynthesis and berry development being adversely affected. Late cultivars such as Cabernet Sauvignon, Cinsaut and Mourvèdre struggled to reach even *véraison*. The grapes were healthy overall and there was less pressure regarding the intakes at the cellars due to the small harvest.

Grape and wine quality

The wines from the Swartland region will have good quality overall according to early indications. Smaller berries led to an intense concentration of flavours with the promise of beautiful tropical fruit flavours for Chenin Blanc and Chardonnay as well as good colour for the red wines.

The region harvested at lower than usual sugar levels which gave rise to wines with lower alcohol. However, the acidity levels were low and the pH levels were higher than normal. Recoveries are lower due to the smaller berries.

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OLIFANTS RIVER

Overview

Despite an extremely challenging climate and a significantly smaller crop, the Olifants River are looking forward to good wines.

“Adaptability and good decision-making were the keywords – producers and winemakers did an excellent job,” says Gert Engelbrecht, VinPro viticulturist for the Olifants River region.

Production trends

Yields for the Olifants River are significantly lower than in 2015. The early white cultivars such as Chenin Blanc, Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc in particular had the most decrease in productions. Productions for the red cultivars were consistently low with the exception of Pinotage as a result of young vineyards coming into production.

Climate and viticultural trends

Sufficient irrigation water was available although the post-harvest season was extremely dry, and the vineyards only experienced leaf fall during May and June with the start of the first cold weather.

The winter rainfall was lower than usual, which led to a lower water level in the Clanwilliam dam. June and July were colder than usual, which had a great increase in the accumulation of cold units in comparison with previous years.

The temperatures during August compared well to the long-term average, as observed as a normal start for the time of bud burst at the end of the month. Bud burst occurred even, possibly due to the good accumulation of cold units.

The season continued with moderate weather except for extreme heat towards the end of October. A great deal of vineyards had poor berry set due to the heat and didn't really recover afterwards. A 40% decrease in water allowance per hectare due to the lower dam levels had a great effect on the vineyards' ability to recover in the warmer areas during this time.

The warm temperatures continued throughout January, during which the amount of hours above 35°C were double the norm.

General comments

The Olifants River experienced a healthy season in general. Late instances of powdery mildew were first observed during December in cases where producers stopped their disease management programmes too early. Chenin Blanc had sporadic cases of rot during February. However, an increasing occurrence of mealy bug required urgent attention.

Some vineyards started showing symptoms of drought stress as early as November, which is usually characterised by small canopies. Scorching heat during December and January also contributed to sun burn damage in the warmer areas.

The smaller crop implied that cellar capacity was under less pressure and that the winemakers could utilise the space more wisely.

The average age of the vineyards in the Olifants River region is still increasing as the planting rate is not up to date, due to economic pressure on producers and a preference for alternative farming activities. It might be more challenging in the future to manage production levels.

Grape and wine quality

The winemakers are optimistic about the 2016 wines. Although the acidity levels were lower and the pH levels were higher than in 2015, it seems the wines will perform well. Chardonnay and Colombar in particular seems promising and Sauvignon Blanc shows surprising promise despite the heat waves during January.

However, the red cultivars had more challenges. Blocks indicated physiological ripeness on low sugar levels which made the optimal harvest time difficult to determine. The colour was very good in general but there were some sporadic spots in the vineyards that struggled to gain good colour.

The wine-making process ran smoothly overall and minimal problems were encountered with settling and sluggish fermentations.

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ORANGE RIVER

Overview

The Orange River produced a somewhat smaller crop, mainly due to heat waves during the season. The harvest was of an interesting nature – some producers delivered very good crops while others had much lower harvests. This is according to Henning Burger, viticulturist for Orange River Cellars.

Production trends

Bunch weight – and thus production – was lower than usual, due to abnormal heat during October and January which led to the disruption of vital physiological processes.

Chenin Blanc's yields were lower but Colombar's was similar to the 2015 crop. Red wine grape cultivars produced smaller crops overall.

Climate and viticultural trends

The dry, warm weather conditions during the 2015 harvest season contributed towards a very healthy post-harvest period, despite the initial powdery mildew which was managed rather well. May was particularly warm with no occurrence of frost.

The autumn and winter were initially warmer than usual which led to leaf fall and pruning being delayed. The accumulation of cold units were low and several vineyards showed signs of bud burst on the tips of the shoots as early as the beginning of July. Regular rain showers and high humidity occurred during June and July. It became very cold towards the end of June and July.

Bud burst started at the beginning of September, which is a week earlier than usual. Even bud burst and a good bud burst percentage was noticeable in most of the cultivars. Uneven bud burst was initially expected as a result of the low cold units but a long and healthy post-harvest period and consequent good reserve accumulation prevented any negative effects thereof.

Most of the cultivars showed good fertility which is characterised by double bunches occurring in most of the Colombar and Chenin Blanc vineyards.

No frost damage has been recorded for the first time in three years because of the minimal differences between day and night temperatures, than what the region usually experiences during September. Vineyard growth therefore had a good start.

The day and night temperatures suddenly started rising from October. No rain occurred during the spring and therefore no diseases or pests were observed. November to mid-January were characterised by exceptionally high average day and night temperatures.

The day temperature was consistently higher than 40°C during the first week of January. This led to the disruption or delay of physiological processes such as cell enlargement, acidity production and sugar accumulation.

The heat was followed by seven days of rain in mid-January. The annual average rainfall even occurred in this one week in some areas, which had a negative impact on Sultana grapes but it didn't have an evident effect on the other wine grape cultivars. The harvest season was warm and dry.

General comments

The extreme heat at the beginning of January led to sunburn damage in certain cases, since the producers were not able to satisfy the water needs of the vineyards.

High rainfall during mid-January led to limited rot on blocks with mainly a history of *Botrytis* rot. Prompt preventative action by producers as well as the warm, dry weather after the rain period limited the occurrence of *Botrytis* rot and the development of downy mildew.

Grape and wine quality

The average pH levels were significantly higher and the acidity levels lower than in 2015 due to the constant warm climate during the growth season and harvest period. Regular heat waves furthermore contributed towards this.

However, the quality of the wines is consistently good as a result of the application of technology and adaptations by winemakers in the cellar. Recoveries were significantly lower than in 2015.

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PAARL

Overview

“An abnormally small crop after a dry, warm season” as described by Hanno van Schalkwyk, VinPro viticulturist for the Paarl region's wine grape crop. The harvest was early and the cultivars all ripened simultaneously. However, the smaller berries holds good promise for concentrated wines with beautiful colour and flavour.

Production trends

Low rainfall, limited water supply and extreme temperatures led to very small berries and consequently smaller crops. There were severe losses due to sunburn damage in cases where the irrigation water was limited.

The white wine grape crops had a higher decrease than the red wines, with Chenin Blanc in particular which delivered a much lower crop. The red cultivars such as Shiraz, Cinsaut and Cabernet Sauvignon produced less than usual.

Climate and viticultural trends

The Paarl region had an extremely dry and warm post-harvest period. They had leaf fall on the normal time where producers could still irrigate after the harvest. The accumulation of reserves was also sufficient.

Leaf fall was premature which had a negative effect on the root growth and the accumulation of reserves, in cases where the irrigation water was exhausted as well as in the dry land vineyards.

The first proper winter rainfall only started at the beginning of June and cold units only started actively accumulating late. Theoretically speaking, there was still sufficient cold to satisfy the needs of the vineyards. The winter rainfall was very low and several dams were only about 40% to 60% full. Producers who were in a situation to do so, started pumping early from the Berg river. The soil was not fully replenished to veld capacity by the breaking of spring in several areas.

The warm weather conditions at the beginning of September brought about good and even bud burst. Bud burst occurred later than in the previous season but was closer to the normal time. Bud burst occurred early for Chardonnay and Chenin Blanc and producers had to start early with preventative fungicide sprays.

The weather conditions during berry set were favourable and it was overall good with the exception of Cabernet Sauvignon which indicated poor and uneven berry set. This is possibly caused by temperature shifts towards the end of October, including heat waves.

The growth season was overall dry and warm with long periods of extreme heat, especially at the end of December and January. The ripening process was accelerated although bud burst occurred later, as could be observed in the early lignification of the shoots. The harvest season started off very early and the cultivars ripened simultaneously.

February was cooler in general and the night temperatures were significantly cooler than in January. Ripening was very slow during the third week of February but the sugar levels increased again after a few warmer days following this.

General comments

Roll leaf symptoms occurred earlier than usual and was rather severe due to the dry and warm conditions during the post-harvest period. Several producers were not able to sow their cover crops.

Powdery mildew occurred sporadic and certain individual farms and blocks had suffered great damage.

The growth of the vineyards was initially good due to the warm conditions, but the growth rate halted earlier in instances where the soil water was depleted earlier. Sun burn damage occurred in particular where the vineyards were initially intensively irrigated.

Grape and wine quality

The grapes ripened at lower sugar levels in general, which is positive with regards to wines with slightly lower alcohol. The acidity levels were very low and pH levels were higher than usual.

Wines of good quality are expected overall, with Chardonnay, Pinotage and Shiraz showing great promise.

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ROBERTSON

Overview

An ideal season led to above-average wine grape production and promising wines in the Robertson region. The season was characterised by extreme heat, but sufficient irrigation water and healthy grapes, according to Hennie Visser, VinPro viticulturist for this region.

Production trends

The 2016 wine grape crop is above-average for the Robertson region and is bigger than the 2015 crop. However, the berries were smaller than usual during the harvest season although various and big flower clusters occurred and berry set was overall very good.

Chenin Blanc delivered good productions once again, but the focus was on Sauvignon Blanc and Colombar which delivered significantly better productions. Pinotage productions also increased in comparison with last year. However, Cabernet Sauvignon delivered low productions.

Producers are actively aiming to increase productions by means of alternative pruning, canopy management practices and trellis systems, since profitability is under great pressure.

Climate and viticultural trends

The vineyards experienced leaf fall late in the autumn after the 2015 harvest, and the vineyards were healthy, without the occurrence of powdery mildew and downy mildew. This led to sufficient accumulation of reserves.

Robertson had a good, cold winter and sufficient cold units were accumulated from mid-May to mid-June for the breaking of dormancy. Both June and July were cold months, after which August was slightly warmer than usual. The region had very good winter rainfall – about 70% higher than normal, with the most rainfall occurring during June, after which July and August were drier.

Bud burst occurred on time this year in the vineyards, with the exception of some of the other cultivars that experienced bud burst a few days earlier. Bud burst was very good and even with good bud burst on the bearers and minimal water shoots. The initial shoot growth was good and even.

The period from November to January was above-average warm but with 25% higher rainfall than usual. The favourable weather and sufficient irrigation water during this time gave rise to good berry set.

The grapes in the vineyards ripened at the normal time, with the exception of some of the Cabernet Sauvignon and Ruby Cabernet blocks which ripened much earlier than usual. February was much cooler than usual and the rainfall during February and March was about 25% lower than the norm.

General comments

After the initial high pressure of diseases (especially downy mildew) due to the high rainfall during the spring, the later rainfall during February and March improved the situation. *Botrytis* rot occurred early in the harvest season but it cleared up on account of the favourable weather conditions. Erinose seems to be less of a problem this year than in previous years. However, instances of mealy bug were higher than usual.

The vineyards initially showed vigorous growth because of the good winter and spring rainfalls. A few heat waves during the season halted the growth and led to smaller berries. There was surprisingly little sun damage on the grapes, although some of the leaves were scorched.

Producers had sufficient irrigation water to attend to the high water needs (due to the warm weather and bigger canopies) of the vineyards despite the water restrictions.

Grape and wine quality

The harvest season ended off well because of the low rainfall. The quality of the wine seems to be good at this stage. The pH levels were overall higher than usual with lower than normal acidity levels. This could be ascribed to the heat waves during the season.

The colour of the red wines is good as a result of the smaller berries and variation in the day and night temperatures.

Cellar capacity was under immense pressure because of higher volumes of wine carried over from the previous vintages. The recoveries are normal at this stage, but less red wine recoveries are achieved as a result of smaller berries.

STELLENBOSCH

Overview

“The 2016 season is characterised by a particularly dry, warm season as well as sun burn damage that led to a significantly smaller wine grape crop in the Stellenbosch region,” says Conrad Schutte, VinPro viticulturist for this region, stretching from Constantia through Stellenbosch and to the Hemel-en-Aarde Valley.

Production trends

A smaller wine grape crop could mainly be ascribed to drought conditions throughout the season as well as sun burn damage during January.

Cabernet Sauvignon productions were especially low, while the productions for Pinot Noir, Pinotage and Chardonnay were average to above-average in cases where irrigation water was sufficient.

Climate and viticultural trends

Good reserves were accumulated in the vineyards because leaf fall occurred later than usual and the harvest process was concluded early in general.

Sufficient cold units were accumulated for the breaking of dormancy although the cold weather only occurred from June to the end of July. The winter was exceptionally dry with far below the expected rainfall and consequent low soil water, irrigation and dam levels. August therefore also had above-average heat.

Bud burst occurred on time overall, with the exception of a few blocks where bud burst occurred early due to stress conditions. The initial shoot growth was even with a fast rate which was caused by above-average temperatures. October and November were warmer than usual, which accelerated flowering and berry set. It was also a very dry period which placed immense pressure on the vineyards and led to the reduction in the amount of berries per bunch.

Producers started irrigating earlier and the rainfall during December improved the dry conditions somewhat. *Véraison* occurred unusually early and fast. The growth of the canopies in several of the vineyards halted before *véraison* which facilitated canopy management and constituted good vineyard balance.

A very warm and windy January placed immense pressure on the irrigation infrastructure. The wind damage appeared to be minimal during this period, on the positive side. The drier conditions during the cell enlargement and division phase led to smaller wine grape berries.

Vineyards were harvested earlier or on the normal time. Early cultivars ripened simultaneously, while the later cultivars ripened with good intervals.

General comments

Dry conditions during the season facilitated fungal control and diseases occurred minimally. Powdery mildew was observed in several of the Chardonnay blocks during early ripening in the Elgin area.

Destructive veld fires raged against the slopes of the Simonsberg mountains and in Elgin at the beginning of the harvest season in January. The damage included smoke damage to bunches, scorched canopies and consequent removal of grapes to vineyard blocks with so much permanent damage that it had to be replaced. The total extent of the damage can only be determined after the wine-making process.

Late cultivars such as Shiraz and Cabernet Sauvignon experienced *véraison* over a lengthy period and quite a few pink berries could still be observed on the bunches shortly before the harvest. This abnormal phenomenon required additional selective harvesting and sorting inputs in the vineyards and cellars.

Grape and wine quality

Smaller berries give rise to good colour and flavour creation in the bunches, which forms the basis for good quality wines. Producers who irrigated their vineyards skilfully where sufficient water was available, will be rewarded with wines of outstanding quality.

Sauvignon Blanc, Merlot and Shiraz are especially excelling in terms of good wine quality. The late cultivar Cabernet Sauvignon is expected to produce outstanding wine quality, in cases where irrigation scheduling was properly applied.

Warm temperatures had a challenging effect on the management of pH and acidity levels, but the desired sugar levels were easily reached and recoveries were surprisingly good. The cellar capacity was not under such pressure this time because of the smaller harvest.

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WORCESTER

Overview

The wine grape crop for the Worcester region is bigger than in 2015 after a warm, dry season with high quality wines to be expected. This is according to Pierre Snyman, VinPro viticulturist for this region.

The 2016 season will be remembered for limited water supplies, abnormal heat and pressure on cellar capacity.

Production trends

The weather conditions during the season initially indicated a smaller crop, but the eventual production was higher than last year, mainly because of newly planted vineyards coming into production.

The berries were overall smaller with looser bunches and the production levels differ from cultivar to cultivar. Yields for Sauvignon Blanc and Pinotage were reasonably close to those of last year's. However, Shiraz, Cabernet Sauvignon and Chenin Blanc produced lower yields.

Climate and viticultural trends

The post-harvest period was warm, with leaf fall occurring on the normal time.

Below-average winter rainfall and minimal snow falls led to the farm dams not being fully filled.

Bud burst occurred about 7 to 10 days earlier than usual and occurred relatively even. The growth season started off and continued reasonably even and smoothly. However, heat waves during the flowering period led to the set of cultivars being adversely affected, which had flowering early in these warm conditions.

No rain was recorded from November to the end of the harvest season. These particularly warm, dry conditions ensured healthy grapes but had a negative effect on the berry size and total crop.

The harvest season was about a week earlier than in 2015 and many cultivars ripened with close intervals. The sequence of ripening of the cultivars was abnormal, with most of the Shiraz blocks that were harvested before the Merlot.

General comments

It has been a healthy year with little to no diseases. The weeds were less than in previous years due to the climate and vigorous growth was not common.

Veld fires caused great damage to the vineyards in the region as a result of the dry conditions.

Grape and wine quality

The grapes were overall very healthy with good flavours. The chemical analyses of the grapes were above-average good.

Good colour is expected for the red cultivars, especially in cases where producers applied leaf removal techniques on a big scale.

The higher volumes of wine carried over from the previous year in the cellars placed immense pressure on the storage of new wines and numerous cellars had to arrange for alternative storage.

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