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News release  
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## **SOUTH AFRICAN WINE HARVEST REPORT 2023 COOLER VINTAGE DRIVES SLOW RIPENING FOR TOP QUALITY**

Wine lovers from all over the world can look forward to excellent wines from a much cooler and smaller 2023 wine grape season in South Africa. This according to the annual South African Wine Harvest Report 2023.

The 2023 wine grape harvest is estimated at 1 180 093 tonnes, according to the latest harvest estimate by industry body SAWIS (South African Wine Industry Information and Systems) on 12 May 2023. This is 14.2% smaller than the 2022 harvest.

“Compared to other seasons, the 2023 harvest is very similar to previous cooler seasons, such as 2014, 2015, 2018, 2019 and 2021,” says Conrad Schutte, consultation services manager of the wine industry body Vinpro. “It particularly resembles the combination of cold and wet conditions of 2014 and 2019. In terms of volume, 2023 may be one of the smallest harvests in more than a decade.”

### **2022/23 Growing season**

Winter temperatures were mostly warmer across all the wine-producing regions and the rainfall was significantly less except in the Northern Cape (traditionally a summer rainfall area). Average cold units and less snowfall than the previous season occurred on mountain peaks. However, it was still enough to meet the vineyards’ cooling needs.

“Physiological processes in the vineyard started earlier due to the mostly warmer spring and dry soil conditions,” says Schutte. “Budding generally occurred 7 - 10 days earlier than normal. The evenness of budding was satisfactory, but for certain cultivars such as Chardonnay, budding was uneven in some areas.”

Flowering in most vines occurred somewhat earlier than normal. Differences occurred in the set of cultivars. This trend may be attributed to optimal environmental temperatures for photosynthesis with sufficient water that led to rapid vegetative growth. Vegetative growth could compete with flower/set and later cultivars such as Cabernet Sauvignon experienced lighter set in certain regions.

A significant change in the season took place in the second week of December. Heavy rains brought relief to the mostly hot and dry season, easing pressure on irrigation scheduling since groundwater levels were below normal. It also relieved pressure on producers who could not properly adhere to irrigation scheduling due to loadshedding. Along with the rain, there was sporadic and limited hail damage in Paarl, Worcester and Robertson. Fungal disease pressure, especially powdery mildew and downy mildew, was increased by the wet conditions

and producers had to adjust spray programmes accordingly. Damage also occurred to roads and other infrastructure that needed to be repaired.

Véraison followed the same pattern as budding and set, arriving earlier than the previous season. This earlier trend introduced the possibility of an earlier harvest. However, cooler conditions delayed the ripening of the grapes and the harvest commenced at the usual time in early February. Experts at this point were impressed by grape analyses which showed low pH levels and high organic acids at ideal sugar levels. Dry conditions during cell division and enlargement resulted in smaller berries which benefited grape quality. Excellent flavour, as well as colour profiles, were observed.

The above average rainfall at the end of February and throughout March brought further challenges this season. Well thought-through decisions for optimal grape quality and winemaking methods focused on the production of high-quality wines, were of utmost importance. Well-managed vineyards throughout the season and timely adjustments to management practices by producers under these challenging circumstances resulted in excellent quality grapes that exceeded expectations.

The net decrease to the harvest is mainly attributed to the uprooting of vineyard in the Northern Cape, Olifants River and Swartland in particular. High disease pressure, especially powdery mildew infections and Botrytis in the regions of the Northern Cape, Olifants River, Swartland, Paarl, Stellenbosch, Cape South Coast and Cape Town has had a negative impact on the harvest size. Heat peaks in December and January caused sunburn especially in the Swartland, Worcester and Breedekloof. Across all the regions, especially the intensively irrigated areas, the lack of electricity to run irrigation pumps had a negative impact on crop size.

### **Excellent quality wine**

The 2022/2023 season will be remembered for the dry and warmer winter, generally good growing conditions during the vegetative growth phase, good rain shortly before véraison which benefited quality, and a cool and wet ripening period which gave grapes a chance to ripen optimally at a slower rate.

“Wine lovers can look forward to high-quality wines from this season,” says Schutte. “Smaller berries driven by the dry conditions during the cell division and enlargement stage benefited grape quality to deliver excellent flavour and colour profiles. Viticulturists and winemakers are particularly excited about excellent colour extraction, low pH levels and high natural acids in cases where vineyards have been effectively managed, all of which indicate exceptional quality wines.”

The 2023 wine harvest – including juice and concentrate for non-alcoholic purposes, wine for brandy, and distilling wine – is estimated to amount to 917.2 million litres, at a recovery of 777 litres per tonne of grapes.

“Despite what was by all accounts a challenging harvest for our winemakers, we are positive that we can look forward to superb 2023 vintage wines to share with our consumers around the world,” says Siobhan Thompson, CEO of Wines of South Africa (WoSA). “We have seen the demand for South African wines grow and anticipate our wines will continue to deliver the excellent quality we are becoming known for.”

South Africa is the ninth largest wine producer in the world and produces approximately 4% of the world's wine. The wine industry contributes more than R55 billion to the country's GDP and employs 269 069 people across the value chain, of which 80 173 work on farms and in cellars.

“The wine industry's stock levels are currently in equilibrium – unlike during the Covid-19 pandemic, during which the wine industry was not allowed to trade for 200 days, and the stock levels stood at 650 million litres,” says Rico Basson, Vinpro MD. “With the smaller harvest, excellent quality wines and the market that has turned from a buyers’ to a seller's market, the South African wine industry is ready for business.”

## **Overview of the production areas**

### *Breedekloof*

The year will be remembered for a two-part harvest, particularly berry sizes and problems with load shedding at farm and cellar level.

### *Cape South Coast*

Early season wines reflect an excellent vintage, while the late season wines showcase the expertise and ingenuity of the winemaking teams.

### *Cape Town*

The 2023 season set the table for excellent, fresh wine styles and lower volumes due to natural factors leading up to the harvest.

### *Klein Karoo*

An early vintage with good grape quality and exceptionally high summer rainfall.

### *Northern Cape*

A challenging wine grape season gave rise to a noticeably smaller harvest with an increase in flavour concentration and wine quality. Colombar’s prospects look especially good.

### *Olifants River*

This season will be remembered for its cool temperatures, wet and muggy weather from December onwards. Water security and energy availability largely determine the region's wine grape harvest.

### *Paarl*

The season is known for ideal weather conditions and the absence of severe heat waves. The pressing conditions were also particularly favourable until the end of February and grape quality was excellent.

### *Robertson*

Below average productions were delivered after a divided season. Ideal conditions prevailed until the first major rainfall in March during which some of the best grape quality in decades was observed.

### *Stellenbosch*

A cooler ripening period ensured high quality wine with early cultivars. Late cultivars have been more challenging, but good management practices produce high quality grapes.

### *Swartland*

The season was characterised by ideal, moderate weather conditions during the first part of the harvest, with early and mid-season cultivars achieving optimal, full ripeness at lower sugars.

### *Worcester*

A relatively dry winter and summer and warmer growing season led to smaller berry sizes in all cultivars – a determining factor for the region’s smaller harvest.

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**ADDITIONAL MEDIA ITEMS:**

Full report: [link](#)

Photo: SA Wine Harvest 2021.jpg  
The South African wine industry expects superior wines from the 2023 wine grape harvest. (Photo credit: Loriane Grobbelaar)

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