



Media release
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SMALLER WINE GRAPE CROP PACKS A PUNCH SOUTH AFRICAN WINE HARVEST REPORT 2022

South Africa's 2022 vintage will wow consumers with exceptional quality wines, albeit from a somewhat smaller grape crop than in 2021. This according to the annual South African Wine Harvest Report.

"A cool season and moderate weather conditions in most regions during harvest time slowed down ripening, which gave vines the opportunity to develop stunning flavour and colour in this year's wine grape crop," says Conrad Schutte, consultation service manager of the wine industry body, Vinpro. Harvest time was delayed on average by 10 to 14 days.

The 2022 wine grape crop is estimated at 1 378 737 tonnes, according to an estimate of industry body SAWIS (South African Wine Industry Information & Systems) on 25 May 2022. It is 5.5% smaller than the 2021 crop, but still larger than the five-year average of 1 346 024 tonnes.

The smaller wine grape crop can be attributed to a decline in the overall vineyard area due to the uprooting of vineyards, disease pressure caused by untimely rainfall just before or during harvest time, and isolated cases of sunburn as a result of heatwaves in certain regions.

"South Africa's wine industry is spread over a wide range of cultivation areas with diverse climatic conditions that affect the harvest differently in each region," Conrad says. Most wine grape growing regions yielded a smaller crop, except for the Cape South Coast and Stellenbosch regions.

Exceptional wines

"Wine lovers are in for a treat when buying wines from the 2022 vintage," Conrad says. "We're really seeing striking colour and flavour extraction from grapes in the cellar, thanks to a cooler season that slowed down ripening and provided the opportunity for these components to develop optimally."

Early cultivars were harvested at good flavour and sugar concentrations, with lower acidity and higher pH. Later cultivars benefited from dry, moderate temperatures during ripening, which led to full ripening at good sugar and alcohol levels.

The wine production for 2022 – including juice and concentrate for non-alcoholic purposes, wine for brandy and distilling wine – is expected to amount to 1 072.4 million litres at an average recovery of 778 litres per ton of grapes.

"Despite harvest 2022 being slightly more challenging for our winemakers, we have already had the opportunity to taste some of the first releases of white wines, which have shown

superb quality and are likely to aid the premiumisation of the category,” says Siobhan Thompson, CEO of WoSA (Wines of South Africa).

“While we are still seeing a continued interest in South African Sauvignon Blanc and Chardonnay, the continued challenges faced by exporters due to the global shipping chain constraints is somewhat of a dampener, which the industry hopes to mitigate in due time.”

South Africa is the eighth biggest wine producer world-wide and produces about 4% of the world’s wine. The wine industry contributes more than R55 billion to the country’s gross domestic product (GDP) and employs close to 269 000 people throughout the value-chain, of which more than 80 000 work on farms and in cellars.

2021/22 Growing season

Most regions had sufficient water to apply post-harvest irrigation and fertiliser. Leaf fall occurred at around the normal time in May, and most producers planted their cover crops somewhat later than normal. Where downy and powdery mildew occurred, wine grape producers applied post-harvest fungicides.

Winter conditions were excellent, characterised by mostly above-average cold units and frequent snow on high-lying areas of the Cape Fold Mountains. Most wine growing regions received higher-than-normal rainfall that supplemented groundwater levels, with the exception of the Northern Cape which is a summer rainfall region.

Due to a cool, wet spring, budding was seven to 14 days later than normal in general, but consistently good and even. The cool weather also delayed initial shoot growth. Most vines started to catch up by flowering, which occurred about five days later than usual.

Set occurred at a good tempo and was mostly even. Shoots and leaves started to grow vigorously as temperatures increased in December. This necessitated additional canopy management actions such as leaf removal, tipping and topping, according to growth per region, cultivar and wine goal.

Following a cool runup to the season, sudden heat peaks in December and January resulted in sunburn damage on grapes in certain regions. At the same time, other regions experienced unexpected rainfall, which led to high disease pressure that caused challenges in minimising the effects of powdery and downy mildew.

Harvest time was delayed by ten to 14 days in general. As temperatures remained moderate throughout the rest of the season vineyards took their time to reach optimum ripeness.

Overview of regions

Breedekloof

The 2022 season was late and drawn out and will be remembered for extremes including a cool growing season and a sudden heat peak in February. The crop is likely to be slightly smaller than the record harvest in 2021.

Cape South Coast

Availability of water, in conjunction with ideal winter conditions, laid the foundation for an exceptional season, despite challenges due to fungal pressure and cool, wet weather during summer months. The wine grape crop is expected to be somewhat larger than in 2021.

Klein Karoo

The 2022 vintage in the Klein Karoo region will be remembered for its particularly late harvest and although the crop may be smaller than in 2021, producers expect good quality wines.

Northern Cape

One of the toughest seasons in years for wine grape producers along the Orange River, characterised by above-average rainfall, high disease pressure and flood risks. Yields were much lower than normal, but producers remain hopeful that they will produce a larger crop in 2023.

Olifants River

A challenging season due to high disease pressure, heatwaves, and uneven ripening, however producers who followed good management practices, faced significantly fewer challenges and can boast with good yields. The region's wine grape crop was smaller than in 2021.

Paarl

The 2022 vintage will be remembered for a cool season, followed by a sudden temperature spike from January, which contributed to a smaller wine grape crop than last year. Where good vineyard practices were followed, vineyard blocks delivered exceptional grape analyses and wine quality.

Robertson

Although smaller than the record crop of 2021, this vintage still boasts an above-average yield and quality. The season was extremely drawn out with several challenges, but producers were fortunate to have sufficient irrigation water.

Stellenbosch

Ideal winter conditions that supplemented water reserves and contributed to even growth provided an excellent foundation for the 2022 crop, which is expected to be larger than the 2021 crop. Judging by the quality of the wines that are currently in the cellars, the region anticipates another classic Stellenbosch vintage.

Swartland

Harvest time started later than normal due to cool weather conditions until the end of December, followed by extremely hot weather during harvest time that accelerated ripening and placed pressure on cellar capacity. The average yield is lower than the previous year, but promising wines are under way.

Worcester

The 2022 harvest started later than normal due to a cool growing season. The crop was smaller than in 2021, but still above average for the region. Wine quality seems promising and consumers can expect outstanding red wines.

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PHOTO: SA Wine Harvest 2022.jpg
Consumers can look forward to exceptional quality wines from a smaller 2022 South African wine grape crop. (Photo credit: Leeuwenkuil Family Vineyards).

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