

Industry poised to deliver top quality wines in 2023

In the run-up to the 2023 wine grape harvest, January to April, the fourth estimate by viticulturists and producer cellars indicates a smaller crop than in 2022, and smaller than the previous three estimates published during the 2023 harvest season.



Source: wirestock via [Freepik](#)

"The harvest is predicted to be smaller than the 2022 harvest. Winemakers and viticulturists are however in agreement – the excellent quality grapes hold a big promise for the making of remarkable wines," says Conrad Schutte, manager of the Vinpro team of viticulturists that issues the crop estimate together with industry body South African Wine Industry Information and Systems organization (SAWIS).

The run-up to the season was characterised by a warm and dry winter that was mostly warmer than usual across all wine-producing regions, while the rainfall was significantly less, except for the Northern Cape. Budding occurred earlier and evenness was satisfactory. Strong growth driven by optimal photosynthesis together with the drier soil conditions affected set negatively in certain areas.

Colombar and Cabernet Sauvignon bunches, especially, appear looser at this stage, with eavy rains during the first week of December bringing great relief to the mostly hot and dry season. This welcomed rain eased pressure on irrigation scheduling, but increased fungal disease pressure, especially powdery and downy mildew.

The South African wine industry is spread over a wide geographical area with differences in climate and terrain that have a significant effect on the size of the harvest. With all three previous 2023 crop estimates, all regions except the Klein-Karoo were estimated lower than 2022. However, with this new estimate, all regions are now estimated downward compared to 2022's total yield.

Challenges affecting production

The decrease in the estimate is attributed to various challenges South African wine grape producers had to face, including Eskom loadshedding, where the lack of electricity in intensive irrigation areas left irrigation pumps failing to irrigate.

Together with the dry winter/spring conditions, this led to smaller berry sizes with a lower harvest weight.

Later cultivars such as Cabernet Sauvignon and Colombard are currently being harvested and as the bunches are weighed, the effect of poor setting is seen with lighter bunch weights. The uprooting of vineyards in the Northern Cape, Olifants River and Swartland in particular also caused the total area of the industry to shrink and rain showers during the ripening period, especially the heavy rains of the first and second week of March, brought further challenges.

"The climate over the next few weeks is crucial and can still affect crop size. It is now important to open fruit zones judiciously so that air and light movement takes place optimally during these challenging conditions with high disease pressure," says Schutte.

The fifth crop estimate by viticulturists and producer cellars will be released in May.

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