

Wine industry expects good quality grape harvest

According to VinPro's latest harvest report, the South African wine industry expects an average sized, good quality wine grape harvest, with exceptional harvests in especially the coastal regions.



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The harvest commenced one to two weeks later than normal, due to late, cold winter conditions and a cooler spring. High rainfall mid-November and in January led to producers having to irrigate much less, but applying stricter disease control measures at higher input costs to limit losses.

Above average yields of exceptional quality were specifically obtained in the coastal regions, while irrigated areas also achieved good crops despite loss due to rot. The effect of a greater drive from producers to increase production and enhance profitability is evident from increased crop levels. However, the Orange River experienced the greatest frost damage in years, which had a substantial effect on the harvest.

The total harvest will be approximately 2.6% smaller than the record harvest in 2013 and consumers can look forward to high quality wines from the 2014 harvest year. The 2014 wine grape crop is expected to reach 1,459,636 tons according to the latest estimate (30 April) of the SA Wine Industry Information and Systems (Sawis). It exceeds the record harvest in 2013 by 2.6%.

Growing season

The 2014 wine harvest - including juice and concentrate for non-alcoholic purposes, wine for brandy and distilling wine - is expected to amount to 1,130.5 million litres, calculated at an average recovery of 774 litres per ton of grapes.

A very good cold and wet winter filled water supplies to capacity, ensuring even bud burst. Initial vineyard growth was slow due to late cold fronts in August, followed by cool, wet weather at the beginning of the growing season. This led to a high incidence of disease, and rainfall mid-November further hampered effective disease control by creating challenging

spraying conditions and limiting access to vineyards. As a result, downy mildew resulted in crop losses early on in the season in some areas.

The climate was favourable for flowering thereafter, and good berry set was obtained. However, after the high rainfall mid-November, vigorous growth ensued, requiring extra input to ensure high grape quality and disease prevention via good canopy aeration and sunlight exposure.

Widespread rainfall at the beginning of January - more than 150 mm in the course of four days in the Breede River Valley - increased pressure due to disease and rot even further, while the coastal regions weren't affected as severely by the rain.

Ripening delayed

Ideal dry, moderate conditions reigned during ripening in January and mid-February, after which a warm period accelerated ripening and resulted in great pressure on intakes in some areas. Cooler weather in March enhanced colour formation and flavour retention in later red cultivars. Regular rainfall at the end of March delayed ripening again and extended the harvest to mid-April.

Producers, viticulturists and winemakers look forward to a promising harvest with regard to quality. Moderate climate conditions during the harvest season contributed to intense colour, exceptional flavour and good structure in the red cultivars. White wines are expected to be particularly fruity and tropical, with fresh characteristics.

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