



## **SA wine grape harvest excels despite drought**

### **I INDUSTRY TRENDS**

The South African wine grape harvest is slightly larger than last year following a dry season and consumers can look forward to exceptional wines from the 2017 vintage.

The wine industry body VinPro says the 2017 harvest, that is at 1 425 283 tonnes 1.4% larger than in 2016, was initially expected to be smaller. “A decrease was expected due to the second consecutive very dry, hot season. However, cooler nights throughout the growing season and the absence of significant heatwaves during harvest time buffered the effect of the drought to some extent,” says Francois Viljoen, manager of VinPro’s viticulture consultation service.

The Swartland and Paarl regions obtained much larger crops following sharp declines in 2016. Robertson’s production was close to the record harvest in 2016, while Olifants River and Breedekloof increased somewhat following small crops last year. Slightly smaller yields were noted in the Northern Cape, Stellenbosch and Worcester and a much smaller harvest in the Klein Karoo.

Although higher rainfall brought some relief in certain regions, it was still very much below average and the warmer weather conditions required producers to manage water usage very closely.

On the plus side, the dry conditions resulted in very healthy vineyards and smaller berries with good colour and flavour concentration. These conditions, along with the ideal cool weather during harvest time formed the perfect combination for an exceptional quality wine grape harvest, according to Viljoen.

Wines of South Africa CEO, Siobhan Thompson is positive, “Having spoken to many of our producers, general sentiment is that the harvest was one of the best seen in many years, specifically in terms of quality. The cooler than normal weather experienced in February saw to more even ripening periods and winemakers from various regions have commented positively on the outcome, despite the challenging weather conditions we’ve experienced. We are looking forward to seeing what this somewhat exceptional vintage does for South African wines as a whole in international markets.”

“We are grateful that the weather played along during the 2017 harvest, but looking towards the 2018 wine grape season that is around the corner, we are really hoping for rain during the upcoming post-harvest and winter period,” says Viljoen.

South Africa is the 8th biggest wine producer world-wide and produces about 4.1% of the world’s wine.

### Total crop size:

The 2017 wine grape crop is estimated at 1 425 283 tonnes according to the South African Wine Industry Information and Systems (Sawis) at the end of April 2017. This is 1.4% higher than in 2016.

The 2017 wine harvest – juice and concentrate for non-alcoholic purposes, wine for brandy and distilling wine included – is expected to amount to 1 106.3 million litres, calculated at an average recovery of 776 litres per ton of grapes.

### 2016/17 Growing season:

The post-harvest period (April and May) was very hot and dry, which led to early leaf-fall in some areas, and the accumulation of reserves was moderate.

Winter arrived late in most regions, but was cold enough to break dormancy. Although rainfall was higher than the previous season in some areas and could carry the harvest through, it was still below average and the dam and soil water levels remained under pressure. Producers therefore had to irrigate meticulously.

Spring arrived on time and warm weather in August contributed to somewhat earlier than normal, but even bud burst. However, cooler weather in September resulted in some instances of later and more uneven bud burst. October and November was characterised by cool nights and warm days, that was beneficial to flowering and berry set. Some producers in the Breedekloof and Worcester regions experienced black frost in October, which resulted in limited crop losses.

The growing season and especially harvest time will be remembered for cooler nights and warmer, drier days. Harvest time kicked off on time in most regions, with the exception of the Northern Cape that started two weeks late due to frequent rainfall. Big showers at the beginning of the Stellenbosch region's harvest resulted in bottle-necks in the harvesting of some cultivars.

The generally dry season resulted in very healthy vineyards with limited occurrence of pests, diseases or rot.

### Wine potential:

“Consumers can definitely look forward to an exceptional 2017 vintage,” said Viljoen.

The dry, warm weather resulted in healthy grapes and small berries with good intensity. Greater variation between night and day temperatures during the ripening stage gave the colour and flavour formation a further boost, which are indicative of remarkable quality wines.

Grape analyses look promising, with most regions characterised by sufficient sugar levels and low acidity.

### Overview of regions:

*Breedekloof:* A slightly smaller harvest than in 2017 after one of the driest growing and ripening periods ever.

*Klein Karoo:* A much smaller harvest due to dry conditions and a shrinking area under vines.

*Malmesbury/Swartland:* A considerably bigger and exceptional crop after a sharp decline in 2016.

*Northern Cape:* A season of extremes and variation between producers contribute to an overall decrease.

*Olifants River:* Ideal weather conditions contribute to a slightly larger harvest of good quality.

*Paarl:* A good hike in production following a much smaller 2016 harvest, with favourable grape analyses.

*Robertson:* A dry, hot season resulted in an above-average yield, close to the record harvest in 2016.

*Stellenbosch:* A challenging season contributed to a smaller, but promising wine grape harvest.

*Worcester:* A healthy and average sized harvest for this region, but still slightly smaller than in 2016.

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## II OVERVIEW PER REGION

### BREDEKLOOF

#### Overview

The Bredekloof region experienced one of its driest growth and ripening periods ever, according to Leon Dippenaar, VinPro's viticulturist for this region. The 2017 season was also characterised by healthy grapes with good analyses. The colour, flavour and full-bodied characteristics of the wines are showing good promise. The Bredekloof extends over 13.2% of the industry's surface area under vineyards and contributes 17.7% towards the total production.

#### Production

The 2017 harvest is expected to be somewhat larger than the harvest in 2016, and bigger than initially expected. It could partly be ascribed to the production of late red cultivars. Chenin Blanc performed very well in particular, partly due to the minimal occurrence of rot. Limited cases of frost damage were countered by very good yields in the rest of the region.

#### Climate and viticultural trends

The post-harvest period in 2016 was characterised by healthy canopies which had overall sufficient time to accumulate good reserves. However, there were a few exceptions: Pinotage's canopies in particular suffered after a difficult and warm véraison period during January and did not recover completely during the post-harvest period.

The effect of leaf roll virus on cultivars that matured at a later stage such as Cabernet Sauvignon was also more prominent in 2016. These vineyards struggled with ripening and the canopies appeared weak in general after the harvest. Diseases were relatively limited during the post-harvest period.

The winter started off with a long, dry period after which we received good rainfall towards the end of the 2016 harvest. Most of the rainfall occurred from mid-June to August after this time but the total rainfall was only two thirds of the long-term average during this time. There was also much less snow on the mountains.

The night temperatures were overall very low with exceptional cold weather conditions at the beginning of July. Warm day temperatures during the last part of August and beginning of September resulted in good and even initial bud burst. Bud burst occurred about a week earlier than usual. However, the cold weather conditions at the end of September led to uneven growth in some places.

Almost no rain occurred during the growth season from mid-November to the end of January. However, the average temperatures, especially at night, were noticeable cooler in comparison with the 2016 season.

The vineyards showed good and balanced growth in this period, however in some areas vineyard growth stopped earlier than normal.

The ripening period was also cooler than usual as well as very dry. Initial ripening occurred more or less at the same stage than the previous year, but the later cultivars matured faster than usual.

#### General comments

Almost no diseases occurred in the 2017 season with the exception of a few cases of powdery mildew and botrytis rot. However, black frost in October and fires in November 2016 caused some damage and crop losses for individual producers in the region.

Good growth occurred in general without excessive or vigorous growth. The water supplies were sufficient in most cases to ripen the harvest optimally and even to apply it as post-harvest irrigation.

#### Grape and wine quality

Grape analyses appeared to be better than in 2016 with good acidity levels and lower pH levels. The grapes also didn't struggle to accumulate the sufficient sugar levels in general. The flavours of the Sauvignon Blanc wines appear to be very promising at this stage and the colour of this region's red wines is also looking good.

### Overview

“The 2017 season was both dry and healthy – in a nutshell – with moderate and consistent day temperatures, cool nights, fast and even ripening and high sugar levels. The harvest is smaller after a record harvest in 2016,” says Johannes Mellet, viticulturist for the Klein Karoo. This region extends over 2.7% of the industry’s surface area under vineyards and contributes 2.9% of its production.

### Production

A smaller harvest was produced for all cultivars after a record harvest in 2016 as a result of a smaller surface area under vineyards and a dry season. The productions for early and rot-sensitive cultivars such as Muscadel, Chenin Blanc and Sauvignon Blanc had minimal decreases.

There were minor differences in the ripening of the various cultivars and areas this year. There was thus immense pressure on the cellar capacity regarding the intakes of the harvest in such a short time. Recoveries were normal.

### Climate and viticultural trends

The post-harvest period in 2016 was characterised by dry and slightly warmer than usual weather conditions but there was sufficient water for the necessary irrigation and fertilisation. The leaves were healthy and the weather was favourable for photosynthesis as well as the accumulation of reserves.

The days were sunny and warmer during the winter but the nights were normal. Cold units were as always sufficient for this region for the full breaking of dormancy. Only half of the normal rainfall occurred.

August produced little rain with sunny days. Bud burst occurred more or less at the normal time but the late cultivars experienced bud burst a week earlier. Bud burst occurred evenly and most of the cultivars had bud burst within two weeks. Flower clusters showed much promise this year and berry set was even with sunny, warm weather. The summer days were warm and sunny with normal night temperatures.

The weather was very consistent from December to the beginning of March. Almost each day was sunny with the mornings being 15°C and around a consistent 28°C to 33°C in the afternoons. No exceptionally warm or cold periods occurred during this time. Vineyard growth was moderate, but conditions were ideal for photosynthesis and the sugar levels increased very rapidly and evenly.

The harvest season started off more or less at the normal time. However, there was almost no difference between the ripening of early cultivars versus late cultivars. The night temperatures dropped rapidly towards the end of February. However, the days were still sunny and warm. The major difference between the day and night temperatures was very favourable for colour development and retaining the flavour. It was significant to observe no heatwaves during this time.

### General comments

The only exceptional weather condition was the occurrence of hail between Calitzdorp and Oudtshoorn. This year has been an exceptionally dry year. The absence of rain during the harvest season contributed towards healthy grapes with good quality and low acidity. The last major rainfalls occurred in June 2015. The water levels in the dams and underground sources are therefore very low.

### Grape and wine quality

The Klein Karoo’s grapes were exceptionally healthy this year. The sugar levels were high due to the ideal conditions for photosynthesis and the total acidity levels were low due to the drought conditions and less sunlight exposure to the smaller canopies. The red cultivars developed beautiful colours as a result of the cool nights during January and again from the end of February until the end of the harvest season.

The quality of the wines is looking very promising. The wines are full-bodied and have more tropical and genuine cultivar characteristics. Cultivars that are exceptional include Sauvignon Blanc, Colombar, Ruby Cabernet and Shiraz.

### Overview

A bigger harvest than the small 2016 crop with excellent grape analyses after a dry but moderate season. This is how Hanno van Schalkwyk, VinPro's viticulturist, describes the 2017 wine grape harvest for the Malmesbury/Swartland region.

"The 2017 harvest was extremely dry but the cooler night temperatures during the ripening process and harvest contributed towards the optimal ripening of the vineyards' grapes. It was evident in the excellent grape analyses at which they were harvested," he says. The region, which includes Malmesbury and Darling, extends over 13.5% of the industry's surface area under vineyards and contributes 8.0% to total production.

### Production

The total size of the harvest is bigger than in 2016 due to better winter rainfall and milder climate conditions during the harvest season, as well as cooler nights and the absence of serious heatwaves. Cultivars that were exceptional include Pinotage which produced a smaller crop and Chenin Blanc which had an increase in its harvest.

Cultivars ripened at the suitable time and the cellar space wasn't under too much pressure. The recoveries are appearing to be very good.

### Climate and viticultural trends

The Malmesbury/Swartland region have once again experienced an exceptionally dry and warm post-harvest period in 2016 and in many cases leaf fall occurred early due to very low soil water levels. Much needed rain showers during mid-April brought a degree of relief and cover crops could be sowed. May was very dry and the day temperatures were very high as well, which led to many vineyards starting to experience bud burst.

The first major rainfalls only started during the second week of June. June and July had better rainfall than the previous winter and the dam levels were filled up sufficiently but were still not replenished to full capacity.

The vineyards experienced bud burst reasonably early due to very warm weather during August. The initial bud burst of the vineyards was very even, but the cultivars that experienced bud burst at a later stage were somewhat uneven due to the cooler conditions at the beginning of September. The weather conditions during the flowering period was favourable and the bunches had good berry set.

After an initially slow growth tempo temperatures heated up in November and December, leading to stronger growth. By the end of December the constant south-easterly winds resulted in the stopping of active shoot growth.

The harvest season kicked off somewhat later due to the cooler night temperatures. However, the ripening rate accelerated by mid-February and the harvest season ended earlier than usual overall. Heatwaves during the harvest season were only brief and fortunately the cooler nights brought some relief.

### General comments

The grapes were very healthy and powdery mildew only occurred sporadically. Shoot growth and development were both normal and even better than the previous year, as a result of an increase in the winter rainfall. Water supplies and soil water levels were extremely limited due to the continuous drought.

### Grape and wine quality

Grape analyses are looking very good as well as the colour development for the red grapes. The quality of the wines will be above-average according to early predictions, with Chenin Blanc and Shiraz showing promise in particular.

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## NORTHERN CAPE

### Overview

An uncertain season and yields contribute towards a slightly smaller wine grape harvest in the Northern Cape/Orange River region. “The harvest time was characterised by the extremes in heatwaves and rain, which had an evident effect on the harvest. Some producers delivered record harvests, whereas others produced lower yields,” says Henning Burger, viticulturist at the Orange River Cellar.

The region extends over 4.8% of the industry’s surface area under vineyards and contributes 8.7% towards total production.

### Production

The Orange River region once again had a slightly smaller intake than in 2016. The red cultivars and Chenin Blanc produced considerably bigger harvests but Colombar delivered smaller yields due to botrytis rot. Recoveries were considerably better than the previous year.

### Climate and viticultural trends

The vineyards entered the post-harvest period with minimal diseases after a dry and warm 2016 harvest season. May was abnormally warm. Frost and night temperatures below freezing-point only occurred sporadically late in June. Minimal cold units were therefore accumulated during May and June and leaf fall was also late.

The first real cold night and day temperatures occurred during the last two weeks of July and the regular rain showers and high humidity during June and July were favourable for the yields in this region. The cold weather continued until August with a few nights below -2°C.

Earlier cultivars started with bud burst during the first week of September. Most cultivars experienced even bud burst at good bud burst percentages, despite the expectations that the cold units during May and June would lead to uneven bud burst. The growth of the vineyards accelerated after this and it continued consistently although there were major differences between night and day temperatures.

No rain was recorded during the spring but the days were warmer while the nights remained cool. November and December were exceptionally warm during the day and at night, with December consistently reaching 38°C. This led to the delay of important physiological processes for growth and maturation and some producers even had sunburn damage.

Unusually heavy rainfalls of up to 120 mm were recorded during the first week of January in particular the Grootdrink region, which led to berries bursting in the sensitive cultivars such as Sultanas. However, the wine grape cultivars endured the rain showers better with limited occurrences of botrytis rot.

Regular, light rain showers occurred during the harvest season, although it was followed by warm, dry weather conditions. The rain contributed towards the struggle to accumulate sugar levels for all cultivars and therefore the harvest season started two weeks later than usual. The first grapes were taken in during the last week of January.

### General comments

Powdery mildew occurred during the post-harvest period of 2016 but was controlled with post-harvest sprays. The prompt action of the producers after the heavy rainfalls during January and periodic rain showers during the harvest season led to the successful control of botrytis rot and downy mildew. However, late cultivars such as Colombar had some damage due to botrytis rot.

### Grape and wine quality

The region’s viticulturists and winemakers are impressed with the wine quality in spite of the high rainfall during the harvest season. The average pH levels were significantly lower and the acidity levels higher than in 2016.

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## OLIFANTS RIVER

### Overview

The Olifants River region is looking forward to good quality wines from a bigger wine grape harvest. “The 2017 season will be remembered for good grape quality due to the cooler than usual night temperatures, minimal heat peaks and moderate day temperatures,” says Gert Engelbrecht, VinPro’s viticulturist for the Olifants River. The region extends over 10.4% of the industry’s area under vines and contributes 15.7% towards total production.

### Production

A bigger harvest was produced than in 2016. Most of the cultivars delivered better productions due to the availability of irrigation water.

Chenin Blanc, Colombar and Cabernet Sauvignon have had the biggest increases. The crops for Chardonnay, Hanepoot and Pinotage were somewhat smaller, mainly due to the uprooting of the first-mentioned two cultivars. Interestingly enough, Shiraz produced good yields per hectare but major uprooting of this cultivar led to the harvest being the same size in comparison with 2016.

The cellars were under pressure since the beginning of March when Colombar, Shiraz and Cabernet grapes started to ripen simultaneously. There was a bottleneck situation this year, since the early cultivars started to ripen later than expected and the late cultivars ripened on time or even earlier.

### Climate and viticultural trends

With the large-scale water restrictions during the 2016 season, the post-harvest period was characterised by very dry conditions which led to early leaf fall. Many of the producers did not have sufficient water for post-harvest fertilisation.

Although the winter cold was sufficient, it was really brief. Accumulation of cold units only started to accelerate by mid-June. The winter also ended abruptly by an unusually warm August which led to a rapid and early bud burst of the vineyards. It was evident that many of these vineyards which suffered during the previous dry season, showed signs of uneven bud burst and initial growth. The conditions were favourable during the flowering and berry set period.

The region had cooler than usual night temperatures from October to February. There were also minimal heat peaks with unusually high temperatures during this time. The weather during the ripening process could therefore be described as moderately warm with cold nights and minimal rain. This is the ideal situation in many aspects.

It initially seemed as if the harvest season would start towards the end of January, just like in 2016, but the cooler than usual day temperatures during January has moved the start of the harvest forward with about a week. The rainfall was better compared to the previous season, but it was still below-average. The first heatwave only occurred mid-March and had a minimal effect on the crop of which most of it had been harvested already at that time.

### General comments

The dry weather conditions contributed towards the occurrence of minimal serious diseases, although mealy bug is still a major problem regarding plagues. The vineyards experienced very moderate growth this year.

The two main dependant factors for the success of this region are the Clanwilliam dam and the canal. The dam levels were higher than the previous season and more water was therefore available for irrigation purposes. However, a major fracture in the canal at a critical time during mid-January influenced the entire irrigation area and had a negative impact on the harvest.

### Grape and wine quality

Wine grapes were overall relatively healthy this year and showed good sugar, acidity and pH analyses. The colour of the red grapes were also very good in particular.

The region is expecting wines of good quality from the 2017 harvest for all the cultivars.

### Overview

Producers in the Paarl region received a larger crop than the small harvest in 2016. This region's harvest was small due to the dry weather conditions but the grapes were overall very healthy and the analyses as well as the colour were exceptional, according to Hanno van Schalkwyk, VinPro's viticulturist in this region.

"The region will remember the 2017 season for an initial sluggish ripening process which was caused by the cold nights. The harvest went smoothly with minimal interruptions caused by rain or heatwaves and the grapes were harvested at optimal ripeness," says Hanno. The region, which includes Paarl, Wellington, Franschoek and Tulbagh extends over 15.9% of the industry's surface area under vineyards and contributes 9.6% towards total production.

### Production

Although the continuous drought has constituted a below-average wine grape harvest, it was slightly bigger than in 2016 due to the better winter rainfall. Dry land vineyards survived better during the winter, especially later in the season when the soil water was depleted at times. Pinotage produced a smaller crop while Cabernet Sauvignon's yields increased. Minimal sunburn damage occurred and the recoveries were high.

### Climate and viticultural trends

The blocks with low soil water levels experienced leaf fall very early after a very warm and dry March in 2016. Leaf fall occurred at the normal time in cases where the producers were able to irrigate. However, the leaves were hardened due to sunburn damage, which led to less than the optimal accumulation of reserves. May was very warm and the vineyards had wide-spread bud burst on the ends of the shoots.

Good winter rains and cold weather conditions only occurred from mid-June and the dam levels were replenished during July, but the big storage dams were still emptier at the end of the winter than the previous year. The total winter rainfall was below-average, although better than in 2016.

Warm conditions during August caused the vineyards to have bud burst relatively early. The early cultivars such as Chardonnay and Chenin Blanc were harvested first in particular and had even bud burst. Certain Cabernet Sauvignon, Shiraz and Cabernet Franc blocks which had bud burst at a later stage, experienced uneven bud burst due to a cooler September.

Shoot growth was very sluggish early in the season due to the cooler weather. However, it accelerated from November onwards and the shoot lengths were overall sufficient.

The weather conditions during berry set were reasonably favourable and berry set was overall good. Cases of berry shatter due to strong winds occurred in some of the Cabernet Sauvignon vineyards that experienced late flowering. Strong south-east winds during December halted active shoot growth at the time of véraison and led to smaller berries in some of the areas.

Harvest time was characterised by cool nights, which brought some relief after the heatwaves later in the season.

### General comments

Some vineyards experienced problems with snails early in the season which damaged the vineyard buds and gave the impression of uneven bud burst. Fungal diseases such as downy mildew, powdery mildew and grapevine disease (phomopsis) were observed sporadically due to the wet spring, but it didn't cause great losses.

Water supplies were under immense pressure. The producers' irrigation scheme quotas have been cut with 30% since the beginning of March 2017 which affected the irrigation of the vineyards in the post-harvest period.

### Grape and wine quality

Grape analyses were excellent with initial good acidity and pH levels. The acidity levels started declining rapidly after the warmer weather towards the end of February. The grapes were extremely healthy and the colour of the red cultivars is very impressive.

The harvest is overall of great quality with premium blocks promising exceptional wines this year. Chenin Blanc, Sauvignon Blanc and Pinotage show promise in particular.

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## ROBERTSON

### Overview

“A dry, warm 2017 season produced an above-average harvest in terms of size and quality,” according to Hennie Visser, VinPro’s viticulturist for the Robertson region.

The region extends over 14.5% of the industry’s surface area under vineyards and contributes 17.4% towards total production. “Low rainfall and high day temperatures – without any heatwaves – led to unusually healthy grapes with excellent colour and flavour,” says Hennie.

### Production

The 2017 wine grape harvest was approximately the same size as the record harvest in 2016; therefore above average. Almost no rot or downy mildew occurred as a result of the dry season and rot-sensitive cultivars such as Chenin Blanc, Sauvignon Blanc and White Muscadell produced good yields in particular. The harvests for the later cultivars such as Colombar, Ruby Cabernet and Cabernet Sauvignon were smaller. No other natural phenomenon had a negative impact on the harvest size with the exception of limited black-frost damage during October.

Fermentation space in the cellars was under immense pressure due to the early ripening of the late cultivars. Later recoveries are expected as a result of smaller berries.

### Climate and viticultural trends

Leaf fall occurred relatively early after a tough season with many heatwaves during 2016. However, the canopies were healthy, which led to the sufficient accumulation of reserves.

The Robertson region had a good, cold winter and mid-May to mid-June were cold enough to conform to the requirements of the vineyards. July’s day and night temperatures were normal. The total winter rainfall was slightly higher than in 2016 with significantly higher rainfall during June and July.

The rainfall became drastically less since August and the temperatures started increasing. The warm, dry weather conditions led to the later cultivars experiencing bud burst a few days earlier, although the vineyards had bud burst on the normal time in general. Bud burst occurred even, mostly on the bearers, with minimal water shoots. The initial shoot growth was good and even but the cold nights and wind in October stunted growth and led to unevenness.

Robertson only received a third of its normal rainfall from September to the end of March. December and March were warm during the day but somewhat cooler than usual at night. Berry set was overall very good due to the dry, warm weather conditions and sufficient irrigation water occurring around the flowering period, but some Colombar and Ruby Cabernet blocks experienced reasonable berry shatter. The berries were also noticeably smaller this year.

November and December reached higher temperatures than the long-term average, with December being especially hot. Very little rainfall was recorded during these two months, only 15% of the long-term figure. Growth stopped relatively early due to the dry, hot weather. Canopies showed less vigorous growth than normal.

Early cultivars ripened at the normal time but the ripening process accelerated as the season continued. The vineyards accumulated very good sugar levels. The harvest season went smoothly due to minimal rainy days. The vineyards endured the warmer temperatures and heatwaves during March successfully and there were minimal sunburn damage in particular.

## **General comments**

Disease pressure was very low as a result of the low rainfall with no occurrence of downy mildew and only a few cases of powdery mildew. Almost no botrytis rot occurred which were specifically observed in the higher productions of rot-sensitive cultivars.

Wild animals such as bucks and hares caused many problems due to the natural vegetation being very dry. Mealy bug break-outs were more common than usual.

Most of the producers had sufficient irrigation water despite water restrictions from the irrigation scheme and a greater need for water due to the dry, warm season. Good irrigation management also played a vital role.

## **Grape and wine quality**

The wine quality appears to be very promising. The pH and acidity levels were overall good at the beginning of the season. Grapes were characterised by high pH levels and low acidity levels later in the season due to the warm, dry weather conditions. The colour of the red wines is excellent due to smaller berries and a greater variation in day and night temperatures.

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## **STELLENBOSCH**

### **Overview**

A challenging season led to a smaller but exceptional wine grape harvest in the Stellenbosch region. Producers experienced the second consecutive very dry season and endured limited irrigation water in order to ripen the harvests, according to Conrad Schutte, VinPro's viticulturist for this region.

"However, these challenging conditions led to healthy and high quality wine grapes which will definitely produce wines of exceptional quality," he says. This region, which includes Stellenbosch, Overberg, Helderberg, Constantia and Durbanville, extends over 16.1% of the industry's surface area under vineyards and contributes 7.8% towards total production.

### **Production**

Dry, warm weather conditions, limited water supplies as well as a decline in area under vines contributed to a smaller wine grape crop in the Stellenbosch region, compared to 2016.

However, there were major differences in the region according to the availability of irrigation water. Smaller productions were observed in the earlier cultivars such as Pinotage and Chardonnay as well as in the later cultivars such as Shiraz and Cabernet Sauvignon. Chenin Blanc and Merlot had an average to above-average performance.

The ripening process accelerated towards the end of the harvest season and placed immense pressure on cellar space. Recoveries are average to even below-average.

### **Climate and viticultural trends**

Leaf fall occurred at the normal time. Less cold units were accumulated at the end of May to the beginning of June, which prepared the producers to start using chemicals for the breaking of dormancy at an early stage.

The rainfall from June to August was lower than the previous year and the day and night temperatures were warmer. Vineyard blocks that didn't receive sufficient post-harvest irrigation, experienced bud burst towards the end of June and these vineyards had to be pruned earlier than usual in some cases.

A warm spring led to some of the early cultivars experiencing bud burst earlier. The bud burst occurred significantly uneven in Sauvignon Blanc, Shiraz and Chardonnay as a result of the cold units and in particular in vineyards where chemicals for breaking of dormancy were not used. The warm temperatures cooled down again during September which had a delaying effect on shoot growth.

October to November were warm with regular but light rain showers, especially during the flowering and berry set period of later cultivars such as Cabernet Sauvignon. This explains the poor berry set and loose bunches in these cultivars.

December was drier and slightly cooler than usual during the day. Constant wind and low rainfall caused the soil to dry out very quickly towards the end of December. The berries were therefore much smaller and the producers were urged to irrigate earlier than usual.

Major rainfalls from up to 100 mm within a few hours occurred in some places during the first half of the harvest season. This caused bottleneck situations during the harvesting period for the later Chardonnay blocks although this was a much needed relief in terms of irrigation.

The temperatures cooled down at a later stage, especially at night, which caused the sugar levels of the vineyard blocks to slowly increase. The harvest season was therefore finalised in March with warm, dry weather which accelerated the ripening process, especially in the later cultivars. The region was fortunate that no significant heatwaves occurred during the harvest season.

### **General comments**

Late rainfalls during the cover crop growth period led to a poorly covered surface of cover crops and above-average challenges in terms of weed control.

Snail control had to be applied after the rainfalls during the winter and during berry set. Low levels of fungal diseases were observed in cases where preventative control programmes were applied and major amounts of weevils and katydids were effectively controlled, especially in the Simonsberg region.

Vegetative growth was rather inconsistent, mainly according to the available irrigation water. The vineyards stopped growing faster than usual under dry land conditions, since it was the second consecutive dry season. Irrigation scheduling was under immense pressure and deep irrigation had to be applied in an attempt to support the blocks during the harvest season.

### **Grape and wine quality**

The quality of the 2017 wine grapes from the Stellenbosch region is appearing to be excellent, mainly because of its smaller grape berries which led to better colour and flavour intensity.

Grape analyses also showed higher acidity levels in general and cellars were therefore able to add less than the normal amount of acidity to the wines. Good colour and average pH levels were observed.

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## **WORCESTER**

### **Overview**

The Worcester region expects an average wine grape harvest of very good quality after an exceptionally dry year. Pierre Snyman, VinPro's viticulturist for this region, says that the 2017 harvest was characterised by healthy grapes with smaller berries in particular, that holds promise for good quality wines.

The Worcester region extends over 8.9% of the industry's surface area under vineyard and contributes 12.2% towards total production.

### **Production**

An average size crop was harvested – bigger than initially estimated, but still smaller than the record harvest in 2016. The drier conditions led to minimal to no losses due to botrytis rot and the losses were initially over-estimated as a result of frost damage that occurred during the spring. It was a good year for Chenin Blanc with a slightly smaller Colombar yield.

The harvest itself was characterised by prolonged heatwaves and the effect led to the cultivars ripening simultaneously and fast. The cellars were therefore under immense pressure with the intakes and processing of the grapes.

### **Climate and viticultural trends**

The conditions were favourable in the post-harvest period of 2016 with leaf fall occurring on the normal time. There was sufficient time for the formation and accumulation of reserves in the vineyards.

The winter was dry with less than the usual rainfall than the previous year and compared to the long-term averages. There were light snow falls on the mountains and sufficient cold units were reported which was necessary for the breaking of dormancy of the vineyard buds.

Bud burst of the vineyards occurred fairly evenly and slightly earlier than the previous year. It was a cool growth season with a high occurrence of uneven shoot growth, which required regular tipping action. The climate during the flowering period was moderate with relatively minimal wind which led to good berry set.

The vineyards showed good growth until just before the end of 2016, but stopped thereafter, mainly due to the warm weather and dry soils.

The ripening process was characterised by heatwaves and very dry conditions. The berries were overall smaller with looser bunches. The harvest kicked off about a week earlier than the previous year and in many cases the grapes were harvested at sugar levels that were higher than preferred.

### **General comments**

The season was characterised by no diseases and minimal plagues which led to very healthy grapes.

The entire Breede Valley from Rawsonville to Worcester experienced serious black-frost damages during October. The frost damage was further assisted by the dry soil and great crop losses were expected. Individual producers suffered greatly in the Worcester area but the after-effects only became apparent during the harvest time.

Dam water levels were very low and even critical in certain areas. It was difficult to apply a good post-harvest fertilisation in some cases.

### **Grape and wine quality**

The occurrence of smaller berries had a positive effect on the grape analyses as well as the colour of the red cultivars. The wine quality appear to be very good, with Sauvignon Blanc showing good potential in particular in providing a variation of flavours.

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