

SMALLER WINE GRAPE CROP EXPECTED

25 January 2023

In the 2023 wine grape harvest run-up, which runs from January to April, the second of four crop estimates by viticulturists and producer cellars indicates a smaller crop than in 2022 and the first estimate that was published in December 2022. The crop is estimated to be smaller at this early stage, maybe even the fourth smallest crop in 17 years.

"The season was characterised by mostly average cold units and fewer snow deposits on mountain peaks than in previous seasons," says Conrad Schutte, manager of the Vinpro team of viticulturists who issue the crop estimate together with industry body SAWIS. "However, it was still enough to meet the vineyards' cold needs. Winter temperatures were mostly warmer in all the wine-producing regions and rainfall was significantly less except for the Northern Cape."

A warmer spring and dry soil conditions resulted in budding occurring earlier. The evenness of budding was satisfactory, but for certain cultivars such as Chardonnay, budding was uneven in some areas. Flowering occurred earlier than normal in most vineyards and large differences occurred during the set of cultivars.

During the second week of December the season changed notably when downpours brought welcome relief to the mostly hot and dry season. The rain eased pressure on irrigation scheduling since groundwater levels were below normal and growers cannot properly apply irrigation scheduling due to load shedding. Along with the rain, there was sporadic hail damage in Paarl, Worcester, and Robertson. Fungal disease pressure, particularly powdery and downy mildew, was exacerbated by the wet conditions and growers had to adjust spray programmes accordingly. Damage also occurred to roads and other infrastructure.

"The decrease in the estimate is mainly attributed to vineyard expansions, especially the Northern Cape, Olifants River, and Swartland," Schutte says. "Furthermore, high disease pressure, especially the resultant powdery mildew infections in the Northern Cape, Olifants River, Swartland, Paarl, Stellenbosch, Cape South Coast, and Cape Town, will negatively impact the crop size. Heat peaks in December and January also caused sunburn, especially in the Swartland, Worcester, and Breedekloof. Across all regions, mainly the intensively irrigated areas, the lack of electricity needed for irrigation pumps to work will further negatively impact the crop size."

Wine grape production in the Klein Karoo is estimated to be higher than in the 2022 season thanks to young vineyards coming into production, and promising water levels.

The next crop estimate by viticulturists and producer cellars will be released in the third week of February 2023.

Kind regards,

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