



## Smaller, high quality wine grape harvest from early season

### I INDUSTRY TRENDS

The South African wine industry will remember the 2015 season as one of the driest and earliest in years, with a somewhat smaller wine grape harvest promising exceptional wines.

According to regional viticulturists of VinPro – the representative organisation for close to 3 500 wine grape producers and cellars – this year’s harvest kicked off two weeks earlier than usual.

“The 2015 harvest had the earliest start in decades. Warm weather in August resulted in earlier bud break, after which a warm, dry and windy summer kept vineyard growth under control and accelerated ripening by approximately two weeks,” said Francois Viljoen, manager of VinPro’s Consultation Service. The dry weather also led to one of the healthiest seasons in years, with almost no losses due to diseases or rot.

The total harvest is expected to be 1% – 2% smaller than the record harvest in 2014. The Worcester region harvested the largest wine grape crop in the area’s history, with Robertson also realising a larger harvest. The intake of wine grapes in the Orange River, Olifants River and Breedekloof regions was close to the same as in 2014 and somewhat smaller crops were harvested in the rest of the regions.

Dryland vineyards in the coastal regions were affected by water shortages due to the drier weather conditions. A channel break in the Olifants River region during January did not have a substantial effect on its production.

South Africa is the seventh largest wine producer globally and produces 4% of the world’s wine. Close to 52% of the country’s natural wine is exported and 48% is sold locally.

#### **Total crop size:**

The 2015 wine grape crop is expected to reach 1 502 360 tons according to the latest estimate (30 April 2015) of the South African Wine Industry Information and Systems (Sawis). It is 1.1% smaller than the record harvest in 2014.

The 2015 wine harvest – including juice and concentrate for non-alcoholic purposes, wine for brandy and distilling wine – is expected to amount to 1 164.9 million litres, calculated at an average recovery of 775 litres per ton of grapes.

#### **2014/15 Growing season:**

Good reserves were accumulated during the post-harvest period in April and May, after which leaf fall generally occurred at the right time. A cold, wet winter led to the accumulation of sufficient cold units for the full breaking of dormancy, which contributed to even bud break.

Warm weather in August resulted in earlier bud break. A warm, dry and windy summer followed, keeping vineyard growth under control and accelerating ripening by approximately two weeks, which brought the harvesting season forward by two weeks.

With the absence of the usual heat waves in most regions, cooler than usual weather in February was ideal for ripening and harvesting. Lower temperatures at night during this time contributed towards good colour and flavour in especially the red cultivars.

Temperatures warmed up again during March, which led to the harvest ending close to two weeks earlier than usual in most regions.

Although the dry, warm conditions – and especially a lack of rain at the beginning of November – necessitated additional irrigation, the dry weather during the harvest time was ideal to ensure healthy grapes without diseases or rot.

#### **Wine potential:**

“Save up, beautiful wines are on their way!” said Viljoen. Exceptional wines are expected throughout the cultivar spectrum, and some winemakers laud this year’s harvest as one of their career highlights.

Grape analyses were good, with low pH and good acidity and sugar levels, which form the foundation for high quality wines.

Smaller berries, as well as moderate temperatures during the harvest time led to good colour and intense flavour in this year’s red wines. White wines are also of above average quality, with good wine analyses and flavour spectrums.

#### **Overview of the regions:**

**Breedekloof** – One of the best harvests ever in terms of quality, with a relatively large crop as bonus.

**Klein Karoo** – An unusually early, healthy season brings a high quality, but smaller harvest.

**Malmesbury/Swartland** – This dryland region’s crop decreased, but smaller berries promise remarkable quality.

**Olifants River** – Exceptional grape analyses and colour due to a more moderate summer; the same crop size as in 2014.

**Orange River** – A good harvest of the same size as in 2014, despite limited frost damage and heat waves.

**Paarl** – After kicking off very early, a smaller harvest of very high quality was taken in.

**Robertson** – A bigger harvest than in 2014, with exceptional quality wines.

**Stellenbosch** – Although somewhat smaller, this was one of the best, if not the best, harvests in years.

**Worcester** – The largest harvest in the region’s history, producing very good wines.

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## II OVERVIEW PER REGION

### BREEDEKLOOF

#### **Overview**

“The 2015 harvest is one of the best harvests I’ve ever seen in terms of quality – with a relatively large volume as bonus,” said Leon Dippenaar, VinPro viticulturist for the Bredekloof region.

A good post-harvest period in 2014, cold winter and sufficient soil water replenishment before bud break contributed towards a big vintage in 2015. The harvest started approximately 20 days earlier in 2014.

#### **Production trends**

This year’s harvest is approximately the same size as in 2014, promising good quality wines.

All cultivars delivered good tons, but the red wine grape crop had a slight decrease compared to the white cultivars. The Sauvignon Blanc and Cabernet Sauvignon crops were smaller, while Chenin Blanc delivered good tons. Cultivars that typically flower later generally produced a weaker crop, due to strong winds during the flowering period.

#### **Climate and viticultural trends**

The post-harvest period was favourable for the accumulation of reserves. Optimal climate conditions and the relatively minimal occurrence of diseases resulted in leaf fall occurring at the normal time.

May and June were wet and cold, followed by high rainfall in July, which led to a sufficient accumulation of cold units for the full breaking of dormancy. Higher rainfall occurred, although temperatures were also slightly higher than normal during August. The constant wet and cold weather throughout the winter was beneficial for the accumulation of underground water reserves and filling up dams.

The rainfall and temperatures were normal during September. The vineyards had earlier bud break with beautiful, even bud break in Chardonnay in particular. Shoot growth was outstandingly even this year, with shoots mostly experiencing bud break on the bearers. The nights were cooler, although October and January were generally warmer and drier than usual. This led to canopies growing less vigorously and large differences between day and night temperatures resulted in good colouration in the red wine cultivars. A good growth/yield balance was established this year.

The vineyards took longer to reach maturity from mid-March and some blocks, especially those with instances of leaf roll, struggled during ripening.

#### **General comments**

The 2015 season will be remembered as one of the healthiest ever. Almost no occurrences of downy mildew and botrytis were observed. Powdery mildew presented a problem in some cases, but fortunately only at a later stage without having a significant impact on the crop. Snails presented a problem at the beginning of the season, while mealy bug became a problem in certain areas later in the season.

Although the need for water was initially high due to the drier summer months, the soil water levels were sufficient in most cases. The cooler weather conditions thereafter contributed towards a decrease in water utilisation and the vineyards looked good in general. A few isolated hot days occurred during the ripening period, but no extended heat waves were experienced, as it had been the case for the past few years.

#### **Grape and wine quality**

A cool ripening period, and especially low night temperatures, contributed towards exceptional quality with regard to the flavour in all cultivars and colour in the red cultivars. This colour and flavour intensity was also established due to a warm and dry first half of the season, which led to a balanced canopy and smaller berries.

The flavour spectrums and intensity of the white cultivars are acceptable in general, with Chenin Blanc and Sauvignon Blanc standing out. The analyses were generally good, with sufficient acidity levels, low pHs and good sugars. The grapes matured very fast in some cases and high sugar levels were therefore reached, but the analyses still remained good.

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## **KLEIN KAROO**

### **Overview**

“The Klein Karoo experienced an exceptionally early, healthy season, which produced a high quality crop,” said Johannes Mellet, VinPro viticulturist for the Klein Karoo region.

Although a limited supply of water reserves constituted a decrease in the harvest in some areas, the smaller berries arising from this can be associated with high quality.

### **Production trends**

The total white grape crop had a slight decrease, while the red wine harvest was significantly smaller.

The production of Chenin Blanc – the Klein Karoo’s second biggest cultivar – has increased, which slightly evened out the declined in the other white cultivars. Red Muscadel and Colombar both produced slightly smaller crops. All other cultivars produced smaller to considerably smaller crops. Production in the mountain regions decreased the most, possibly because these regions had very little rain and irrigation water, and experienced more wind.

This year will be remembered for the early bud break and harvest, as well as healthy, dry conditions and smaller berries.

### **Climate and viticultural trends**

The 2015 season was very early and dry, unlike the previous year. The winter kicked off earlier with early and even leaf fall, which reduced the post-harvest reserve accumulation dramatically. Cold units were more than sufficient for the full breaking of dormancy.

The winter rainfall was very low during the winter, spring and summer – especially compared to the past few wet winters – but the dams were fortunately still full from the previous season’s rainfall during the spring and summer.

Above-average warm weather occurred during August, which led to the bud break being even, as well as two week earlier. This warm weather continued throughout September and October, which led to moderate initial growth due to less reserves and shorter day lengths. The potential was there for a big crop due to good bud break and the production of many flower bunches. However, berry set was inconsistent and the berries remained small due to less vigorous growth and drier conditions. On the plus side, the quality of the smaller berries was enhanced due to greater sunlight exposure.

The temperatures during December and January were normal. The harvest season started off and ended two weeks earlier than usual, as it has been the case with bud break. February was cooler than usual, which led to a slower and even initial maturation of the grapes during the peak-time. The cooler weather conditions also enabled cellars to keep up with intakes during the peak-time and resulted in grapes being harvested at optimal maturity.

### **General comments**

This is said to be the healthiest season in years considering this year’s low rainfall. Fungal diseases were managed easily and no instances of rot occurred. No rain interrupted the harvest.

The dry weather conditions limited the availability of irrigation water and smaller canopies coped easily with less water since the water reserves had been scarce since the beginning of the season. Producers

also managed these limitations very well in order to obtain improved quality with a minimal effect on the size of the crop. No prolonged heat waves or gusts of wind occurred during the harvest season, although frequent episodes of wind cooled down the vineyards, therefore limiting vigorous growth.

### **Grape and wine quality**

The overall quality of the wines are exceptional, due to the healthy season. Chenin Blanc reaped the benefit in particular of the absence of rot and smaller berries in the red cultivars resulted in higher quality.

The favourable weather conditions during the season contributed to higher sugars and lower pH levels. However, less vigorous vineyard growth led to the total acidity and nitrogen levels in the must being lower in some instances.

The cellar space was limited by stock transfers and the winemakers had to have good planning skills to utilise the remaining space optimally.

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## **MALMESBURY/SWARTLAND**

### **Overview**

“Smaller berries and cool temperatures during the harvest season in the Swartland region led to a concentration of flavour and colour, which held great promise in terms of quality”, said Hanno van Schalkwyk, VinPro viticulturist for the Malmesbury/Swartland region.

The 2015 season will be remembered for a wet winter, followed by an early, warm spring with early and even bud break. A very dry and warm growth season brought about an extremely early harvest, as well as lower production levels.

### **Production trends**

The region’s total production is generally lower than in 2014 due to very dry weather conditions and the fact that the dryland vineyards yielded very large crops the previous year. Producers who had sufficient irrigation water were affected less. Chenin Blanc and Pinotage produced good crops, but Cabernet Sauvignon produced significantly less.

### **Climate and viticultural trends**

Despite slightly drier conditions during April, there was still sufficient rainfall during the post-harvest period. The leaves were retained very well and vineyards experienced leaf fall at the normal time, as was the case in the dryland vineyards. The conditions for the accumulation of reserves were therefore optimal.

June was particularly cold and wet and sufficient cold units were accumulated during the first three weeks of June. This resulted in the full breaking of dormancy, contributing to good bud break. Rainfall during winter was sufficient to fill up the dams and soil profiles to full capacity.

Good, even bud break occurred about two weeks earlier than in 2014 due to high temperatures at the end of August. The growth season was however very dry, which led to smaller canopies and less canopy management.

Heat conditions occurred at the end of January and the actual harvest started 10 to 14 days earlier. February was generally very cool, followed by a few very hot days at the beginning of March. A heat wave during March caused great berry shrivelling, especially in Cabernet Sauvignon, leading to high sugars.

### **General comments**

Vineyards and grapes were very healthy overall and diseases and pests presented minor problems. Hail damage occurred early in the Halfmanshof area, but didn't have a significant impact on the region's yields. Producers with access to irrigation water started irrigating earlier than usual. Maturation could still be reached in the dryland vineyards despite these very dry conditions.

### **Grape and wine quality**

The grapes had exceptional quality and were very healthy overall. The smaller berries led to the concentration of flavour and most of the analyses were generally good. The grapes had exceptionally good and even colouration. The wine quality for Chenin Blanc, Pinotage and Shiraz look very good.

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## **OLIFANTS RIVER**

### **Overview**

"The 2015 season boasts with exceptional grape quality, as well as good colour and grape analyses in the Olifants River, due to a more moderate summer than usual," said Gert Engelbrecht, VinPro viticulturist for the Olifants River region.

Little rain and less diseases during the season led to healthy grapes and vineyards, which is also reflected in the wines. Productions remain stable and the focus is shifting towards high production cultivars and clones.

### **Production trends**

The Olifants River's total production was approximately the same as in 2014. The red cultivars reached good production levels compared to the white wine grape cultivars, which realised somewhat smaller crops. Newly planted vineyards played a vital role in increased production, with Pinotage reaching the largest increase in crop size. Chardonnay's production increased substantially with regard to the white cultivars and Chenin Blanc produced the same size harvest. Colombar and Sauvignon Blanc crops were somewhat smaller than in 2014.

### **Climate and viticultural trends**

Early leaf fall during the post-harvest period – mainly due to a high occurrence of downy mildew and powdery mildew, especially on the younger leaves – led to a big concern with regard to the accumulation of sufficient reserves.

The Olifants River experienced a favourable winter with a colder than usual June and July. It was also relatively dry with only 75 mm of rain from May to August. Full breaking of winter dormancy was sufficient, as could be seen in even bud break. Bud break, however, occurred two weeks earlier due to warmer weather during the first half of the season. August and October were on average 0.5°C to 1°C warmer than usual.

Although the flowering and berry set were good with regard to the early cultivars, the cold, wet conditions at the beginning of November led to weaker flowering and berry set in the later cultivars. Constant dry summer conditions occurred shortly after this, which continued until March, without the characteristic severe heat at this time of the year. The total hours above 40°C for the entire growth season was about 90% less than the long-term average. The harvest season kicked off about two weeks earlier, as it had been the case for bud break.

### **General comments**

The vineyards were healthier with less fungal diseases, and appeared much better than during the previous season. Mealy bug commonly occurred later in the season.

A channel break during January and consequent week of water shortages led to a significant decrease in rot. Any production losses on account of the channel break are, however, difficult to determine.

A warm spring led to vigorous growth. Water usage in the vineyards decreased due to the absence of heat waves. Some of the vineyards which experienced waterlogged conditions due to too much irrigation, had to be managed properly.

### **Grape and wine quality**

Wine quality will be exceptional, with grape analyses characterised by high acidity levels, low pH and good colour. The early white cultivars such as Chenin Blanc, Sauvignon Blanc and Chardonnay showed high quality in particular. None of the red cultivars can be singled out; they all show promise.

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## **ORANGE RIVER**

### **Overview**

A good harvest of the same size as in 2014 was taken in this year in the Orange River, according to Henning Burger, viticulturist at Orange River Cellars.

Optimal climate conditions during the winter and dry weather conditions during the harvest season led to healthy grapes with good quality. Despite major differences in the crop sizes of individual producers in this region, the total harvest was the same size as in 2014.

### **Production trends**

Chenin Blanc's average yield was higher, but the yield for Colombar was lower than in 2014. The red cultivars had approximately the same production levels.

The impact of frost damage during September is reflected in lower than expected intakes in the Kakamas region. The low temperatures just before and during bud break most likely led to the forming of secondary buds, which consequently led to the damaging of primary bunches and below-average bunch weights.

### **Climate and viticultural trends**

The first real cold weather first occurred at the end of May. June was very cold and wet, which led to a greater accumulation of cold units and a week of high humidity. Severe instances of frost however caused early leaf fall. The cool weather continued during July, with significantly warmer nights during the last week of this month.

The first three weeks of August were cold, after which the warmer weather accelerated bud break by a week. The early cultivars started with bud break during the first week of September. Bud break occurred evenly in most of the cultivars with a good bud break percentage, except for certain Colombar blocks, which showed white shoot (growth arrestment phenomenon) symptoms.

The fertility was overall good in both Colombar and Chenin Blanc, which mainly presented double bunches. Frost occurred during the last week of September in certain regions of the lower Orange River, which caused major damage for individual producers.

The warm, dry conditions since October suppressed diseases and pests. These weather conditions continued until the end of January, which led to vigorous growth in the vineyards.

The harvest season started off in mid-January. The severe, constant heat caused the sugar levels to increase rapidly and acidity levels to decrease rapidly. Scattered thunder showers during the last week of January caused some relief. Almost no rainfall occurred until the end of March, after which regular rain showers didn't have a significant impact on the small amount of producers who were still busy harvesting. The last grapes were taken in during the first week of April.

### **General comments**

The Orange River region experienced a very healthy year in terms of diseases. The very dry, warm weather conditions from January to March mainly limited the outbreak of downy mildew and botrytis. Limited frost damage in Kakamas and hail damage in the Grootdrink region occurred during October. Heat wave conditions during January interfered with the growth and was noticeably reflected in moderate to poor growth in the vineyards.

### **Grape and wine quality**

Average pH levels were very good early in the season, but increased gradually as a result of the warm weather during the harvest season. Wine quality in cellar is good throughout the cultivar spectrum, with better recoveries than in 2014.

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## **PAARL**

### **Overview**

The harvesting process started early in die Paarl region with a smaller vintage of exceptional quality.

“A good winter, followed by a warm spring, resulted in early but even bud break. Vegetative growth was suppressed by dry weather conditions and constant wind during the growth season, which led to the harvest season being very early this year,” said Hanno van Schalkwyk, VinPro viticulturist for the Paarl region.

### **Production trends**

Total production in the Paarl region decreased due to dry conditions in the dryland regions, as well as wind, which led to weaker growth and smaller berries.

Cultivars with early flowering such as Pinotage and Chardonnay produced very good crops, compared to cultivars such as Sauvignon Blanc and Cabernet Sauvignon, which had noticeably weaker crops. The harvest season started off exceptionally early and some producers began harvesting up to two weeks earlier than usual. Cellars were under immense pressure due to large intakes over a short period of time.

### **Climate and viticultural trends**

The Paarl region experienced a slightly drier than usual post-harvest period. Good rainfall during May resulted in leaf fall occurring as scheduled, following the optimal accumulation of reserves.

June was particularly cold and wet with good accumulation of cold units, which created a stable foundation for even bud break. The levels of the irrigation dams were very favourable and soil water levels were filled to capacity.

Augustus and September were warmer than usual. Signs of bud break were already evident in August – two to three weeks earlier than in 2014 – and the vineyards started full bud break at the beginning of September. Bud break was very even in most areas.

The growth season was generally very dry. Vegetative growth was suppressed by constant wind, although it was also warmer. Cultivars such as Pinotage and Chardonnay which experienced early flowering, had good berry set. Cabernet Sauvignon had noticeably looser bunches. The harvest season was overall relatively cool, especially during February with the exception of warm conditions at the end of January and the beginning of March. No real constant, warm periods occurred.

### **General comments**

The season was generally disease free and the vineyards and grapes were very healthy. However, snails occurred in great quantities during the spring, as in the previous season, necessitating continuous control by producers. Resistant horseweed (tall fleabane), narrow leaved ribwort and rye grass still remain a major problem in certain areas.

Vineyard growth was weaker than usual due to the constant wind in certain areas, which had an adverse impact on berry and bunch development. Smaller berries had a direct impact on crop weight and juice recoveries. Irrigation was already necessary at an early stage, due to a lack of rain, as well as the drying effect of the wind.

### **Grape and wine quality**

The Paarl region's wine grapes were of exceptional quality this year and were generally very healthy. Analyses were very good despite the heat at the end of January, which was further assisted by a cooler February.

The grapes had particularly good colouration, which is also reflected in the cellar. It is expected that the quality of the Chenin Blanc, Chardonnay, Pinotage, Cabernet Sauvignon and Shiraz will be especially good.

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## **ROBERTSON**

### **Overview**

An above-average size vintage was produced in the Robertson region, with a promise of exceptional wine quality.

“The region experienced a very good vintage with little rain, exceptionally good grapes and good grape analyses. The harvest was early with good, fast-forming sugar accumulation,” said Hennie Visser, VinPro viticulturist for the Robertson region.

### **Production trends**

The Robertson region produced an above-average crop in 2015 – the third largest crop in the history of this area.

Very big flower clusters were obtained and berry set was overall very good. The size of the berries were smaller than usual, but the production was still good due to a drier season and consequently virtually no losses due to botrytis and downy mildew. Cultivars susceptible to rot such as Chenin Blanc and Muscadel delivered very good yields in particular. The cultivars with late flowering trends such as Sauvignon Blanc, Cabernet Sauvignon and Ruby Cabernet delivered smaller yields.

Producers are still actively aiming to increase productions to relieve pressure on profitability. Robertson maintains a net increase in total hectare wine grapes.

### **Climate and viticultural trends**

The vineyards experienced earlier leaf fall during the post-harvest period and less reserves were accumulated than usual due to infections of powdery and downy mildew.

A colder than usual May led to the full breaking of dormancy and good bud break was expected. The night temperatures during June had been the coldest in a decade, with normal day temperatures. Frequent, smaller rain showers occurred and the cover crop status was good, although the total rainfall was quite lower than usual.

The vineyards experienced bud break very early this year due to the warmer weather during August – in most cases almost ten days earlier than usual. Even bud break was obtained, with very good bud percentages – with the exception of uneven bud break in blocks which experienced early leaf fall.

Initial shoot growth was good and even, although some vineyards appeared yellow in colour due to a few cold periods during September, combined with low soil temperatures. Flowering was also about ten days earlier than usual and the berry set was good, despite a wetter than usual spring.

Overall temperatures were normal during spring with the exception of a warm November, although rainfall was less than usual during the summer. Véraison occurred approximately ten days earlier and the first batch of grapes matured early in the season.

### **General comments**

This was one of the healthiest seasons in years, without the occurrence of any natural phenomena which might have had an adverse impact on the crop size.

After an initial high occurrence of diseases which was caused by high rainfall during spring, the rest of the season was characterised by very low pressure from diseases such as downy mildew, powdery mildew and botrytis. Erinose was less problematic this year, compared to snails which presented problems as usual. Mealy bug outbreaks were problematic later in the season.

Irrigation water was sufficient during the season despite the low rainfall, as producers dependent on mountain water started off the season with full dams.

The harvest season was relatively moderate with no prolonged periods of extreme heat.

### **Grape and wine quality**

The 2015 harvest was characterised by a smooth production flow due to the absence of rainy days, although cellar space was under immense pressure because of stock transfers.

The pH levels were generally lower than usual with good acidity levels. The colour of the red wines are exceptional due to smaller berries, low pH levels and the variation between day and night temperatures.

Wine quality looks promising at this stage, due to optimal seasonal conditions, as well as the absence of major diseases and rot.

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## **STELLENBOSCH**

### **Overview**

A great year on a gallop. The Stellenbosch region produced a slightly smaller crop but with exceptional quality, which was taken in earlier and faster than the previous years.

“Viticulturally speaking this year can be described as one of the best or even *the* best in years with regard to quality. The type of year you only dream of. Save up, this year brings beautiful wines!” said Conrad Schutte, VinPro viticulturist for the Stellenbosch region.

### **Production trends**

The total vintage is still a very good size, although it's less than in 2014. Early cultivars such as Pinot Noir, Pinotage and Chardonnay produced good yields overall. Decreases in productions were observed in cultivars such as Sauvignon Blanc and Cabernet Sauvignon, and could possibly be ascribed to rain during the flowering and berry set period. Cabernet Sauvignon's berries were small due to stress conditions during the cell enlargement period, which had a negative impact on the production.

### **Climate and viticultural trends**

Leaf fall occurred normally and most of the vineyards accumulated sufficient reserves for initial growth after bud break. The region experienced an above-average wet winter and sufficient cold units had been accumulated for the full breaking of dormancy with a significantly colder than usual June and July.

Above average warmer weather during August continued until the spring months, during which the rainfall was below average. Bud break occurred one to two weeks earlier than usual – depending on the location of the vineyards and cultivar – and was generally very even. Cool and wet weather conditions

during bud break caused slow initial shoot growth. The first warm sunny days during October, however, accelerated shoot growth.

November was warm with above average rainfall at the beginning of the month during the berry set of Sauvignon Blanc and Cabernet Sauvignon, causing uneven and weaker berry set.

Slightly warmer days and cooler nights occurred during December, with somewhat less rain. The temperatures during January gradually started increasing again at the start of the season, causing the grapes to mature earlier and the harvest to kick off one to two weeks earlier than usual.

It was cooler during the earlier maturation phase in February, but the very high temperatures during the first week of March picked up the rapid harvesting pace.

### **General comments**

Producers had to effectively manage a large amount of snails during bud break and the occurrence of bud mite symptoms were a concern.

A few major veld fires occurred in this region during the harvest season. The vineyards had a few instances of damage and the smoke hovering above the vineyards might have a negative impact on the eventual grape quality.

There were no significant heat waves during the maturation period and early harvest, however continuous, strong winds from October to December, along with high temperatures, caused the soil to dry out faster than usual. Water usage was therefore higher and the vineyards had to be irrigated earlier and more frequently, which placed some pressure on the irrigation systems and dams.

### **Grape and wine quality**

Stellenbosch's vineyards experienced a very rapid growth season, but fortunately the vineyards stopped growing and started maturing grapes at the right time to ensure very good wine quality.

Grape analyses were good with low pH levels and good acidity and sugar levels. The colour of the wines show good promise and the acidity levels retained well during the harvest season despite warm weather. The sugar levels increased faster than usual and optimal maturity was generally reached with higher sugar levels.

Chardonnay and Cabernet Sauvignon particularly had exceptional quality, although the quality was outstanding across the entire cultivar spectrum. The prolonged rapid maturity rate placed immense pressure on cellar space throughout the harvest season. Recoveries are good to above-average.

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## **WORCESTER**

### **Overview**

“The Worcester region produced the largest wine grape harvest in its history, with healthy grapes ensuring very good wines,” says Pierre Snyman, VinPro viticulturist for the Worcester region.

A cold winter and slightly warmer spring led to good and even bud break, after which the dry conditions provided for healthy wine grapes and earlier than usual ripening. The cooler nights during the harvesting period were especially favourable for good colour and flavour, which ensured wines of top quality.

### **Production trends**

The Worcester region harvested the largest wine grape crop in the area's history – even larger than the record harvest in 2014. Chenin Blanc produced higher yields in particular.

The bigger crop could possibly be ascribed to a bigger volume of healthy grapes, due to the absence of rot, as well as an increase in new plantings of especially Chenin Blanc, Colombar and Pinotage in 2012, which are now in production.

### **Climate and viticultural trends**

The post-harvest period was very favourable for the accumulation of reserves. Leaf fall occurred normally in general, although some vineyards experienced early leaf fall as a result of downy mildew and powdery mildew.

The region experienced little winter rain, but was accompanied by good snowfall, resulting in sufficient cold units being accumulated for the breaking of dormancy.

The weather was warmer than usual at the beginning of the spring and therefore led to even bud break, which started off ten to 14 days earlier. Frost damage occurred in isolated cases. The water supply in the underground reserves and farm dams were more than sufficient, although the water usage was high at the beginning of the growing season.

The cold winds during flowering had an immense impact on berry set of later cultivars. Big vine leaves also had an overshadowing effect, which required leaf-breaking actions.

It was a particularly dry season with no rain during ripening or the actual harvest. January was warmer, but February was considerably cooler than usual.

The harvest season unexpectedly early for many producers and cellars. The first half of the harvest season started at a rapid rate and the cellars soon reached their daily quotas. The second half was characterised by physiological maturity at lower sugars. The vineyards with a lower virus status, such as Merlot, struggled to reach optimal sugar levels.

### **General comments**

This was an exceptionally easy and good harvest compared to challenges in the previous season. Many healthy grapes were consistently delivered throughout the cultivar spectrum. However, weevil damage presented a problem in certain areas and snails were a major problem at the beginning of the growth period.

The Worcester region also didn't experience any extreme heat waves during the harvest season, which was advantageous for flavour-sensitive cultivars such as Sauvignon Blanc.

Cellar space became a problem very early this year because of relatively large stock transfers, lower rebate quotas and rapid ripening.

### **Grape and wine quality**

A very good year in terms of quality. Top quality Sauvignon Blanc and Chenin Blanc wines are expected throughout the region. Cool nights after véraison were also very optimal for colouration with regard to the red grapes, especially where leaf removal techniques were applied.

The grape analyses were consistently good, while the acidity levels decreased gradually during the second half of the harvest season.

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