

VDP Member Estates Complete the 2017 Grape Harvest

Turbo harvest ends with strong quality but low yields for some estates

The VDP Prädikatsweingüter finished their 2017 harvest earlier than in almost any other year in history. In southern winegrowing regions in particular, the last batches of grapes were already headed toward the presses by late September. In addition, extreme weather such as late frost and hail put tremendous strains on many VDP winegrowers.

"2017 was a year that forced us to dig deep into our decades of hard-won experience. First it was too dry, then too wet in some places. The key thing was to keep a cool head. But right now we're looking at outstanding young wines in our cellar with fine acidity and good structure, wines that will fit well into the progression of recent vintages and that are destined to become a real point of pride," says Steffen Christmann, President of the Verband Deutscher Prädikatsweingüter.

Vegetative period and harvest

After a winter marked by a lack of precipitation, mild temperatures throughout the vegetative period pushed the development of the vines well ahead of their average. The first buds began to open during the initial weeks of April, almost 3 - 4 weeks earlier than normal. This early bud break brings with it inherent risks for the vines. And sure enough, a cold snap and late frost hit certain regions in late April, causing a significant number of those young shoots to freeze. In June and July, the extended dry weather from the first half of the year came to an end, and some regions experienced extensive rainfall. The good news: the vineyards' deep-lying water reserves were replenished.

The late summer brought most regions warm, dry weather and with it ideal conditions for maturation of ripe and healthy grapes. The bad news: the good condition of the vines didn't help in the face of isolated but significant storms, including heavy rains and hail, that caused extensive damage and in some regions even ruined the hanging fruit.

As harvests began in late August – earlier than ever before – the cool nights and mild days promoted a slower ripening process and optimal aroma development. The gathered grapes showed a perfect balance of must weight and acidity.



VDP GROSSE LAGE® and VDP ERSTE LAGE®:

The fruit in the VDP GROSSE LAGEN® and VDP ERSTE LAGEN® sites ripened early, forcing winegrowers to take bold action and begin their harvests earlier than anticipated. These absolute top parcels in the absolute best vineyards demand that their grapes be harvested in healthy condition at the optimal moment of ripeness, without tipping into overripe at all.

"Our expectation is that the VDP ERSTE LAGE® and VDP GROSSE LAGE® wines will be very good. Meticulous canopy management this summer and a green harvest helped us focus on TOP quality and prepare for any eventuality. That preparation paid off!" wrote Robert Haller of VDP member estate Bürgerspital (Würzburg)

"Once again this year, the golden yellow grapes from the VDP GROSSE LAGEN® offer tremendous potential for outstanding wines. We're looking forward to a fascinating journey to that goal." Johann Fitz - VDP member estate Fitz Ritter (Bad Dürkheim)

Voices from the Regions

AHR – The earliest autumn on record

"The earliest autumn on record! I can't remember ever starting the harvest so early," says Hella Hehle, owner of Deutzerhof. "The Frühburgunder wasn't going to tolerate much more rain," adds Operations Director Hans-Jörg Lüchau. "By harvesting early, we achieved the same volume as a year ago. The Oechsle levels are also almost unchanged from 2016. All of the Ahr winegrowers breathed a sigh of relief when the rainy period ended in the second week of September. That raised hopes for our remaining unharvested varieties. Our last vineyards were harvested by October 4, another record! Volumes were higher than in the pessimistic forecasts, but were still below levels from a year ago. The reds are already presenting as delicately fruity and structured."

Hans-Jörg Lüchau – VDP member estate Deutzerhof (Mayschoß)

BADEN – Warm weather in October a boon to Auslese and Trockenbeerenauslese wines

"Late frosts reduced the number of shoots across the entire winegrowing region. A period of moderate warmth and rain throughout the entire vegetative cycle promoted very good development of the grapes. The generally low amounts of fruit on the vines encouraged earlier physiological and aromatic ripening in the remaining grapes, which in turn triggered harvests starting in mid-August in some places. The enduring cool weather that followed, with numerous hours of sunshine and little rainfall, drove ripening and laid the groundwork for a rapid harvest of healthy grapes. Some locations had already finished their harvest work by early October. Then came a 14-day stretch of October with nearly summer-like weather, including temperatures hovering around 25°C, which dried out the still-hanging berries and helped many estates produce naturally sweet wines ranging from



Auslese to Trockenbeerenauslese. On average, 20-35% fewer grapes were harvested in the various growing districts. With fermentation complete, the young wines have shown signs of complex structure. For the most part they'll now rest in their barrels, on the lees, until late spring 2018." Joachim Heger, VDP member estate Dr. Heger (Ihringen)

FRANKEN – No easy year, but grand wines

"After a very brief vegetation period, we've now kicked off our harvest on the fifth (!) of September. For the early ripening varieties, the historical 100-day average vegetation period (from blossoming to harvest) shrunk to 81 - 88 days in some cases. Precipitation throughout the summer and temperatures resembling high summer put the grapes through a rapid ripening process. Harvest yields varied greatly across the region, with some areas strongly affected by frost and hail. No easy year, but grand wines sometimes are born through struggle!" Robert Haller, VDP member estate Bürgerspital (Würzburg)

MITTEL RheIN – Lovely concentration, especially for late-harvested vineyards

"The VDP winegrowers from the Mittelrhein brought in a very small harvest - a mere 30 hl per hectare on average. With that said, we are very satisfied with the fruit we gathered. We were able to harvest highly ripe, healthy golden yellow grapes with musts notable for their lovely aromas and a wonderful, well-integrated acidity. The late-harvested vineyards in particular, where multiple preliminary passes were undertaken, have delivered amazing concentration!" Jochen Ratzenberger, VDP member estate Ratzenberger (Bacharach)

MOSEL – Mittelmosel and Saar harvest nobly sweet TBA

"The frost in late April led to harvest losses of 20-30% on average for VDP winegrowers on the Mosel, Saar and Ruwer. The Rieslings are presenting very good potential acidity, and thanks to the low yields are bursting with extracts. On the Mittelmosel and Saar, strong volumes of Beerenauslese and Trockenbeerenauslese fruit were harvested. Fortunately, the rare Burgunder family varieties grown on the Mosel actually in many cases handled the difficult weather conditions without problem." Carl von Schubert, VDP member estate Maximin Grünhaus (Mertesdorf)

Nahe - Low volumes - Quality good to very good, especially for Riesling

"The Riesling grapes in particular were harvested in good health and with ripe aromatics. The Burgunder-family grapes often required more intensive selection, but ultimately produced good to very good results. The must acidity values were exactly where we'd want them, and the must weights were solid. In some cases fruit for Beerenauslese and Trockenbeerenauslese wines were harvested. Overall yields are approx. 20% below the historical average, but sites affected by the late frost often produced less than 50% of their normal yields."

Frank Schönleber, VDP member estate Emrich-Schönleber (Monzingen)

PFALZ – Notable varietal aromatics

"After a mild winter and mild damage from late frost, all signs pointed to an early harvest, even during blossoming. The thinner clusters and alternating warm and wet weather in August pushed the vegetation cycle even further ahead of schedule. We started the harvest on September 4 – earlier than ever before – and brought in 20% of the harvest directly in that first week. The harvest maintained its turbo pace – not least because of heavy rains on September 14/15 – and so the 2017 harvest was already complete by September 28.

Due to the lower yields and earlier ripening, the quality of the grapes is outstanding, with the different aromatics for each variety very well developed. The acidity values were initially higher than average, but slipped to moderate by the second week of harvest. Harvest volumes are modest, with Riesling totaling 40% less than a year ago." Jan Eymael, VDP member estate Pfeffingen (Bad Dürkheim)

RHEINGAU – Yields down 50% in some locations

"The entire 2017 vintage was one massive challenge from start to finish: it started with frost damage just after bud break in the spring, including unprecedented levels of hail in summer and then rainy weather leading into harvest, which caused early onset of rot. The weather pretty much put every hurdle you could imagine in our path at our VDP member estate Kaufmann – Hans Lang this season. The extreme variations in ripeness and health in the different stands of vines meant that we could only satisfy our stringent quality standards through a radically selective hand harvest. Due to these conditions, yields were reduced by roughly 50%. There is a positive side too, of course. The measures to reduce yields (frost, hail) meant that the grapes that remained had plenty of resources. While the team, and Urban Kaufmann in particular, isn't happy about the small volumes that it has to work with, we are quite pleased with the aromatic density and the substance of the fermenting must. There aren't going to be many bottles this time around, but enologist Eckart Waitz is confident that it's going to be a fascinating, very high quality assortment of wines that gets bottled."

Eva Raps, VDP member estate Kaufmann, Hattenheim



RHEINHESSEN – Massive manual effort required, promising Rieslings

"The very early bud break in April and the lovely summer months pushed the grapes to ripen in a hurry. That meant that the last four weeks of the harvest required massive manual effort; thanks to the tireless dedication of our harvest team, which didn't even get a single day's break, we were able to harvest our vineyards in full. The quality, especially for Riesling, is really very promising. The sole blemish: it is also one of the smallest harvests in recent history. Volumes are approx. 40% below a _____ year _____ ago."

Philipp Wittmann, VDP member estate Wittmann (Westhofen)

SACHSEN /SAALE-UNSTRUT – Largely spared from bad weather, good harvest volumes

"Saale-Unstrut and Sachsen were largely spared from capricious weather this year, which led to good harvest volumes for the VDP winegrowers. We harvested ripe and healthy grapes to ideal sunny autumn weather. In particular, a patch of summer-like weather in mid-October meant a perfect end to the harvest. Those with the patience to let late-ripening varieties like Riesling hang were ultimately rewarded." Georg Prinz zur Lippe, VDP member estate Proschwitz (Meißen)

WÜRTTEMBERG – Earliest Harvest in 60 years, significant frost damage

"A very early and rapid wine harvest is now concluded for the VDP Württemberg member estates. The frost event in late April meant 35% lower yields on average, although the damages varied greatly, ranging from 0% to 80%. Quality is above average, and from juicy base wine for Sekt to concentrated Trockenbeerenauslese wines, all quality levels were achieved." Markus Drautz, VDP member estate Drautz-Able (Heilbronn)

The Verband Deutscher Prädikatsweingüter (VDP) is the oldest national association of fine winegrowing estates anywhere in the world. The 195 VDP Prädikat Estates have committed to strict internal quality standards and benchmarks – from the grape to the cellar. The VDP classification pyramid defines 4 quality tiers for wines, based on their origin: VDP.GUTSWEIN, VDP.ORTSWEIN, VDP.ERSTE LAGE® and VDP.GROSSE LAGE®. The VDP eagle logo embossed on the top of the bottle is a promise of quality. It stands for artisanal wine preparation from excellent vineyards.