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VDP Member Estates Complete the 2018 Grape Harvest Plenty of Sun from May to October

2018 was yet another winegrowing year marked by extremes. While 2017 is remembered by the VDP member estates as a turbo-harvest, starting early and running ultra-rapidly, this year began even earlier, but was conducted more placidly thanks to stable, sunny weather conditions.

"Choosing the optimal date to launch harvest is becoming an increasingly crucial decision for VDP winegrowers. The goal is to start early with the pre-harvest work in the vineyards so that you can bring in truly ripe grapes in just one or two rapid passes. Meticulous attention to detail was especially crucial in 2018 and was rewarded with precise, fresh musts that reflect the taste of the vineyard," says Steffen Christmann, President of the Verband Deutscher Prädikatsweingüter.

Vegetative period and harvest

January had plenty of rain to recharge water levels in the soil, followed by cold temperatures in February and March. Bud break arrived in mid-April, after which an unusually stable period of nice weather took hold all the way to harvest. Routinely high temperatures combined with the thankfully large water reserves in the soil delivered near-record growth in the vines. For the VDP winegrowers, this necessitated additional labor in the vineyards, despite a briefer-than-normal window of time. Little rain fell after mid-year. Access to water by the vines thus became the dominant topic of conversation in 2018. While the roots on older vines reached deep into the soil and handled dryness and summer heat well, young vines in particular struggled with the lack of rain from mid-July onward. Many VDP winegrowers invested in drip watering systems for their younger vine stands and vineyards that were otherwise at risk of drought stress. But consistent yield reductions, targeted canopy management and proper soil preparation were other key factors in easing stress on struggling vines.



VDP GROSSE LAGE® and VDP ERSTE LAGE®:

In a year where the harvest started early, the grapes at times reached their full ripeness within just a few days. For VDP GROSSE LAGE® and VDP ERSTE LAGE® sites, this necessitated quick and decisive action. These absolute top parcels in the absolute best vineyards inherently demand that their grapes be harvested in healthy condition at the optimal moment of ripeness, without tipping into overripe at all.

"The early harvest kept all the freshness in the grapes, and the wines are intensely clean, with sensational aromatics. The VDP ERSTE LAGE® and VDP GROSSE LAGE® sites in particular are producing grand, highly concentrated and expressive wines that will age beautifully," says Klaus-Peter Heigel, cellar master at VDP member estate Weingut Wirsching.

Voices from the regions

AHR – Harvest finished by October

"We didn't spend a single day of October harvesting. That hasn't happened on the Ahr since records have been kept. 2018 is an absolute Spätburgunder vintage. Consistent crop thinning allowed us to achieve very loose berry clusters, which in turn meant very good coloration."

Marc Adeneuer, VDP Weingut J.J. Adeneuer (Ahr)

BADEN – Harvest of VDP GROSSES GEWÄCHS wines started in mid-August

"For Baden, the early bud break in spring meant that harvest launched in some places in mid-August. For the hotter sites in particular, the first fully ripened grapes for VDP GROSSE GEWÄCHSE® were already ready shortly after we began."

Joachim Heger, VDP Weingut Dr. Heger (Baden)

FRANKEN – Silvaner, Pinots and red wines in general benefited from the extreme summer

"The span of most weights is not significantly different from other years, but the share of fruit suitable for high-end wines is significantly higher. The absolute winners are the late-ripening varieties, particularly Silvaner, the Pinot varieties and the red wines."

Robert Haller, VDP Weingut Bürgerspital zum Heiligen Geist (Franken)



MITTEL RheIN – Healthy grapes, concentrated Auslese wines

"The 2018 vintage truly offered us remarkable opportunities. With perfect sunshine and no rain at all, we saw individual berries in perfect health and ripeness that were already beginning to desiccate in early October. The raisins have been carefully selected and are being vinified into wonderfully concentrated Auslese wines."

Cecilia Jost, VDP Weingut Toni Jost (Mittelrhein)

MOSEL – High volumes to compensate for small yields in recent years

"The harvested fruit is showing tremendous aromatics and a good, fresh acid structure. The cool nights starting in mid-October have helped further sharpen the aromatics. We're seeing high-quality Botrytis as the harvest comes to an end, promising perfect Auslese, Beerenauslese and Trockenbeerenauslese wines. We're pleased to report that yield volumes have been strong this year as well."

Dr. Carl von Schubert, VDP Weingut Maximin Grünhaus (Mosel)

NAHE – Ideal conditions for strong VDP Gutswein and Ortswein

"Although the circumstances were similar in both years, the 2018 harvest took place about two weeks earlier than in 2003. The Rieslings were able to develop their essential acidic structure and estates successfully averted overly high alcohol levels. These ideal conditions are primed to make VDP Gutswein and Ortswein bottles even better than in years past."

Frank Schönleber, VDP Weingut Emrich-Schönleber (Nahe)

PFALZ – Major ripeness variations within the vineyards

"The weather that held right through harvest gave estates a certain degree of freedom in choosing a harvest date. No one wanted to harvest too early, because you can end up with unripe, boring and short-lived wines. Nor too late, because people just aren't drinking the kind of powerful, heavily alcoholic wines that we saw in the hot 2003 vintage. But the dryness meant that it wasn't always easy to determine when the grapes were perfectly ripe in the individual vineyards, as the age of the vines and the makeup of the different soils produced some real variation this year. We never would have achieved the same perfect results if we hadn't been constantly testing the grapes in the different vineyards."

Hans-Jörg Rebholz, VDP Weingut Ökonomierat Rebholz (Pfalz)



RHEINGAU – Healthy and ripe grapes with surprisingly high juice content

"A fantastic September delivered ripeness and aromatics to the Riesling grapes. We brought in healthy and ripe fruit with strong acid levels that, despite the enduring heat, nevertheless produced surprising volumes of juice. We also didn't have to worry about pests or fungal diseases that might normally have affected the grapes."
Wilhelm Weil, VDP Weingut Robert Weil (Rheingau)

RHEINHESSEN – Good water supply throughout the year

"The grape harvest in Rheinhessen launched in late August this year, the earliest in the history of the VDP Rheinhessen. Summer started for us all the way back in early May, with uninterrupted sunshine all the way into October. The very good water supply in our soils from the spring and a few storms at just the right times kept our vines growing outstandingly and ultimately gave us impressive grape quality in many places."
Philipp Wittmann, VDP Weingut Wittmann (Rheinhessen)

SACHSEN / SAALE-UNSTRUT – Good red wine vintage – a rarity in the Elbe Valley

"It is a bit of an oddity for the Elbe Valley, but it ended up being a very good year for the reds. The vintage produced powerful, intensely colored and tannin-rich red wines. The white Pinot varieties also did very well."
Georg Prinz zur Lippe, VDP Weingut Schloss Proschwitz (Sachsen)

WÜRTTEMBERG – Fabulous spectrum of aromas for the Lemberger

"The biggest challenge this year was the extreme dryness. Zero precipitation fell in the northwest and central sections of Württemberg after flowering was observed in mid-June, even as the southern section faced serious storms with hail and flooding at times. As a result, yields across the entire region fell to below average levels. The Lemberger handled the dryness especially well, producing highly expressive wines with an unprecedented spectrum of aromas."
Markus Drautz, VDP Weingut Drautz-Able (Württemberg)

***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.*