

Vintage 2009 – Low Yields but Top Quality

An Overview of Germany's 13 Wine-growing Regions

Sometimes, less is more. This aptly describes the 2009 grape harvest in Germany. Without exception, all 13 wine-growing regions rate the quality of this year's crop as very good. As the German Wine Institute/Mainz reports, ideal weather during September and October enabled growers to harvest healthy and very ripe grapes with a correspondingly harmonious acidity. According to preliminary estimates, the size of this year's crop is somewhat short of nine million hectoliters, or about ten to fifteen percent less than last year's yield and the long-term average, but in line with market requirements. During the coming weeks and months, an exceptionally high number of new, fruit-driven wines of top quality and substance will mature in German cellars. Both red and white wine enthusiasts have every reason to look forward to the wines of vintage 2009.

The German Wine Institute has compiled an overview of harvest results in each of the wine-growing regions.

Ahr

The main harvest began with Frühburgunder, one of the many Pinot Noir mutations, the last weekend of September and ended, for the most part, some four weeks later. No problems were reported during that time – the weather was good and the grapes were in excellent condition, thereby eliminating the need to separate healthy from unhealthy fruit. According to estimates of the local wine-growers' association, mild damage from winter frost and losses from coulure, due to unseasonably cool weather during blossoming, naturally reduced yields to a modest 65 hl/ha, or about 25% less than the crop of 2008, which itself was undersized. In particular, Spätburgunder, the Ahr's most important grape variety, profited from the good weather in late summer. The berries developed a very good color and above-average must weights of over 90 degrees Oechsle.

Baden

Although picking started on 14 September with the early-ripening Müller-Thurgau, the main harvest of other varietals, including Baden's most important red wine grape, Spätburgunder, began a week later. With few exceptions the harvest was completed by 12 October in the southern portion of the region, while in the north, harvesting continued until mid-October, not least because of Riesling, a late ripener. Ideal weather during the main harvest enabled growers to bring in the crop without stress. Compared with last year, grapes ripened about a week ahead of schedule in 2009 and the year is rated a "great vintage." Must weights of 95 degrees Oechsle were not uncommon; the Pinots often achieved 100 degrees; and even Gutedel averaged some 85 degrees in Markgräflerland, Baden's southernmost district. As such, vintage 2009 is marked by an

extraordinarily high proportion of Prädikat wines (up to 90% of the total crop). The high must weights bode well for fuller-bodied wines than their immediate predecessors. Thanks to sunny autumn weather, the crop was both healthy and ripe, with a harmonious acidity. The deeply colored Spätburgunder grapes yielded wines with an excellent overall structure, and thus, good aging potential. The young white wines are showing a play of fruit aromas that is comparable with vintage 2007, and the white Pinots, in particular, are quite a success. The warm, dry weather led to a natural reduction in overall crop volume. Some 75 to 80 hl/ha were harvested, or at least ten percent less than last year. Massive damage from hail and storms in May resulted in a loss of up to 60 % in the vineyards near the Bodensee (Lake Constance). In general, growers had hoped for somewhat higher yields among the white varieties. The shortage could mean moderate price increases. On the other hand, this year's harvest and existing cellar stocks of red wines will suffice to meet market demand.

Franken

The weather was splendid throughout the relatively brief, month-long harvest in Franken. Picking was more or less completed by mid-October. People are already talking about a "great vintage" that could be comparable with 2003, 1975 and 1953. Professionals are describing the vintage as "perfect, with crystal clear aromas and a finely structured acidity." Silvaner put in a winning performance. Müller-Thurgau and Bacchus grapes yielded fruit-driven, delicate Kabinett wines. The red wines are impressively firm and deep in color. Spätburgunder was particularly successful this year. The average yield in Franken was 77 hl/ha, with a total estimated volume of 460,000 hl, which is about the same as last year. . On average, must weights achieved 93 degrees Oechsle, a full seven degrees higher than in 2008. Although nearly 100% of the wines are in the Prädikat wine range, the high quality of the vintage is not expected to effect notable price increases.

Hessische Bergstrasse

Seldom has the harvest started so early in the Hessische Bergstrasse: picking of Frühburgunder and Müller-Thurgau began the first weekend of September in 2009. The harvest lasted well into October, i.e. some six weeks in all. All varieties could be picked at optimal ripeness and the stellar results eclipsed all vintages of the recent past. Riesling must weights averaged nearly 90 degrees Oechsle and had an optimal level of acidity, while Spätburgunder achieved an average of 106 degrees Oechsle. The white Pinots, Grauburgunder and Weissburgunder, yielded small quantities of top quality wines. As such, prices for white wines could increase in the near future. On the other hand, consumers will find many a bargain in that numerous wines of Spätlese ripeness will be marketed as QbA wines in liter bottles. The region's total harvest is estimated at 32,000 hl, or 20% less than in 2008.

Mittelrhein

The all-important Riesling harvest in the Mittelrhein took place primarily in the second half of October and yielded a very limited quantity of high quality, very ripe grapes. Compared with must weights of 75 to 80 degrees Oechsle for Müller-Thurgau, Riesling usually achieved 85 degrees, with optimal levels of acidity. Lower yields were already anticipated after uneven blossoming and the ensuing development of the grapes. The onset of mildew in summer led to further reductions in yield in some parcels. Yet thanks to ample rainfall in early summer and lots of sunshine in late summer, the quality of the crop was quite high. As such, the majority of the wines qualify for upper Prädikat wine status, but volume barely reached two thirds of a normal vintage.

Mosel

This year, Mosel growers began harvesting quite late. In many cases, Müller-Thurgau was first picked around 25 September. Both this varietal and Elbling, an ancient white grape seldom found elsewhere in Germany, yielded excellent quality and good quantities. The Riesling harvest first began as of 10 October and in steep sites, continued into November. Riesling, which accounts for 65% of the region's vineyard area and is its most important grape, was once again able to take advantage of a very long ripening period, during which it developed must weights that were considerably higher than in 2008: on average, 85 degrees Oechsle, but often more than 90 degrees. The young Riesling wines have a harmonious acidity that is perceptibly lower than the year before. With less than 90 hl/ha for Riesling, the volume of the crop was exceptionally small. In all, an estimated 780,000 hl were harvested in the Mosel. Although the quantity harvested was below average, quality was very good. Vintage 2009 in the Mosel is marked by a broad spectrum of wines in all Prädikat categories and styles.

Nahe

Under good weather conditions and thus, without time constraints, the main harvest in the Nahe began in October and continued through most of the month. By mid-October must weights had already reached an average of 90 degrees Oechsle, comparable with the high level reached in 2007. Acidity levels bode well for very harmonious wines this year. The majority of the 2009 crop was of Prädikat wine ripeness. Except for Müller-Thurgau, which yielded more or less a normal-sized crop, the overall volume of the crop was smaller than last year. Due to the lengthy period of dry weather in August and September, the berries of the Pinots, in particular, remained very small and highly concentrated, with must weights of over 100 degrees Oechsle. As such, one can expect well-structured wines. Yields were about a quarter less than in 2008. The quantity of Riesling harvested was also some 10 to 20 percent below the long-term average. All in all, consumers can look forward to a broad range of very high-quality Nahe wines from vintage 2009.

Pfalz

The first early-ripening varieties for the production of “Federweisser” (young, fermenting grape juice) were picked in August and marked the kickoff of this year’s harvest in the Pfalz. By mid-September, ripening was ahead of schedule and growers were able to begin the main harvest. It continued well into October, under dry and sunny skies. Seldom has there been such a healthy and very ripe crop. Unusually low precipitation and temperatures that were considerably higher than normal in August and September created an optimal basis for an outstanding vintage. The overall yield in 2009 is estimated at 2.2 million hl, or somewhat less than the average size of 2.4 million hl, primarily due to losses from coulure during blossoming. Without exception must weights reached above-average levels: Dornfelder, with more than 80 degrees Oechsle, and Riesling and Silvaner, more than 90 degrees. Red and white Pinots achieved sensational highs of more than 100 degrees, and optimal acidity levels. Even Müller-Thurgau was considered a winner this year. Numerous wine estates were also able to harvest grapes of Beeren- and Trockenbeerenauslese ripeness. The young white whites are already quite fruity and promising. The reds are deep in color and remarkably ripe, with good tannins and high extract.

Rheingau

After a period of calm autumn weather, the harvest of the region’s most important varieties, Riesling and Spätburgunder, was completed at the end of October. Growers anticipate exceptionally good vintage wines. Although nearly 100% of the crop was of Prädikat-level ripeness, a large portion will probably be marketed as QbA wines. Riesling must weights were 90 degrees Oechsle and higher, with an acidity of 9.5 g/l. Most of the Spätburgunder crop reached Oechsle levels of 100 degrees, and thus, the Rheingau can rate 2009 as a good red wine year, comparable with the 2003 vintage. The white wines are rich in aromas, or similar to the wines of 2007. Yields of 70 hl/ha were considerably below the ten-year average of nearly 80 hl/ha. Due to poor blossoming, Spätburgunder yields were even lower: 60 hl/ha. Despite the small quantity of this year’s harvest, estimated at ca. 214,000 hl, prices are expected to remain stable or increase slightly.

Rheinhessen

Thanks to good weather throughout the entire harvest in Rheinhessen, growers could proceed without haste, and for the most part, finished picking during the second weekend of October. Due to dry weather in September, yields were far lower than originally anticipated. Most growers’ crops were average in size or smaller. The region estimates an overall volume of nearly 2.5 million hl. As such, prices in Germany’s largest wine-growing region could increase somewhat in the weeks to come. With its above-average quality, vintage 2009 is already being described as one of the decade’s top years. The Pinots, in particular, achieved outstanding must weights, and Spätburgunder definitely numbered among this year’s winners. Must weights of

Riesling and members of the Pinot family all reached Prädikat-level ripeness. No less promising are acidity levels, which for the most important varietals, usually ranged between six and nine grams per liter. All in all, vintage 2009 can be compared with 2007: the crop was healthy, fully ripened and aromatic, with moderate levels of acidity.

Saale-Unstrut

The 2009 harvest in Saale-Unstrut was unusually small. Estimated yields of 40 hl/ha are only half as much as in 2008 and one third less than the long-term average. The reason is threefold: frost damage, coulure due to unfavorable weather conditions during blossoming, and hail damage. Particularly Müller-Thurgau, which is quite susceptible to frost damage, will be a rarity in Germany's northernmost wine region in 2009. On the other hand, growers were compensated with a first-class, fully ripe and healthy crop. Must weights were an average of 5 to 10 degrees Oechsle higher than in 2008 and usually reached Spätlese ripeness. The white Pinots, Weissburgunder and Grauburgunder, achieved remarkably high must weights. Acidity levels in early-ripening varietals were below those of 2008; in later-ripening grapes, comparable with those of last year. Growers anticipate particularly full-bodied wines that are rich in extract. Demand is good and prices are expected to be stable when the wines make their market debut in November.

Sachsen

Very good quality and very little quantity – this sums up this year's grape harvest in Sachsen. As in neighboring Saale-Unstrut, the size of the crop suffered from severe winter weather and problems during blossoming that led to coulure. Some 30 hl/ha were harvested, for an estimated regional total of only 14,000 hl, or barely half the size of last year's crop. The weather was warm and dry when the harvest began in September with Goldriesling, a regional specialty, and Müller-Thurgau. Picking continued throughout October. With must weights of 5 to 10 degrees Oechsle higher than in 2008 and correspondingly higher quality, 2009 is regarded as a top vintage. Given the small quantity available, Sachsen's new wines will be marketed as rarities and prices are expected to increase.

Württemberg

Beautiful autumn weather accompanied the harvest in Württemberg, which began in late September with early-ripening varietals, such as Müller-Thurgau, and continued well into October, when late-ripening grapes, such as Trollinger, Lemberger and Riesling, were picked. The crop was particularly healthy. In the course of the harvest, growers could see that the size of the crop was going to be less than anticipated. Total regional volume is estimated at nearly one million hl, or some 15% less than last year. According to the local wine-growers' association, this amount is "in line with market conditions" and "price increases cannot be ruled out." Vintage 2009 is described as the eighth consecutive good year, and a particularly good one. Thanks to the sunny days

of late autumn, almost all must weights reached Prädikat-level ripeness. Red Pinots achieved more than 100 degrees Oechsle. All in all, grapes suitable for every quality category of wine were harvested, and at a level of quality nearly equal to that of the remarkable 2003 vintage. Greater water supplies in the summer influenced the profile of the white wines in 2009: they are more mineral than Mediterranean in character.

**Grape Must Harvest in Germany in 2009:
Preliminary Estimates**

Wine-growing region	Estimated Yields
Ahr	36,000 hl
Baden	1,200,000 hl
Franken	460,000 hl
Hessische	32,000 hl
Mittelrhein	25,000 hl
Mosel	780,000 hl
Nahe	300,000 hl
Pfalz	2,200,000 hl
Rheingau	215,000 hl
Rheinhessen	2,500,000 hl
Saale-Unstrut	23,000 hl
Sachsen	14,000 hl
Württemberg	1,000,000 hl
total	ca.8.8 million hl

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