

REPORT:

2016 VINTAGE GROWTH CYCLE

Excellent evolution of Rioja vineyards in 2016 vintage

Rioja vineyards progressed very nicely throughout the 2016 vintage growth cycle. The various stages were on track compared to the average of the last few years, except for a ten day delay in early harvest areas and a little more in later-ripening areas.

According to the report of the Control Board Empowered Overseers Service, which conducts comprehensive monitoring of all stages of the cycle, the weather generally favoured good canopy development and there were no major outbreaks of pests or disease. This allowed the grapes to be in top condition for the harvest.

Budbreak started in the eastern-most parts of the region in the last week in March, slightly behind the previous year. After flowering, fruit-set showed high fertility levels; higher than last year, except for Garnacha grapes in Rioja Baja, where there was a certain amount of coulure. By early summer, the vineyards had developed quite regularly across the wine region. Forecasts pointed to high production figures and clusters were large and well set, particularly in younger vines planted on fertile land, compared to those planted on slopes or poorer soils, which showed greater irregularity.

Although the last stages of vine growth were marked by high temperatures and an absence of rainfall, the canopies did not show symptoms of drought, except on rare occasions. This is because higher-than-average rainfall to date, including the dormant period, had generally resulted in greater vigour.

The Empowered Overseers Service carried out an assessment of vineyards during the last week in August. Grape ripening checks begin at this time and continue until the harvest is fully under way across the region. The assessment pointed to good production volume and quality.

The harvest

The 2016 started in a timely fashion on 29 August with the earliest white varieties and gradually spread to the rest of varieties in the most eastern part of the region in early September. However, unlike what happened on last year, the harvest lasted more than two months, reaching its peak around the second week in October and ending in the first week of November. The slow pace of the 2016 harvest is evident in the fact that only 45 million kilos of grapes were picked the first four weeks, barely 10% of the expected harvest, and less than half of the 630 wineries that make wine were operational.

The growth cycle had started with a high level of fertility, with good flowering and fruit set and large clusters prompting expectations of large production. However, an absence of rain in the summer led to clusters with small berries at the start of the harvest, bringing down initial estimates.

But, once again, the weather that accompanied the final stages of the growing cycle was decisive for the outcome of the vintage. Dry, sunny weather prevailed until late October and moderate rains in the third week of September and early October were highly beneficial to complete ripening while maintaining the grapes in perfect condition. Surprisingly, in Rioja's cooler areas, grape production was much higher than expected at the start of harvest, thanks to the effect of the light rain showers. In the end, the high production forecasts at the beginning of the cycle came true in a part of the region thanks to unusual weather in September and October.