
SA WINE GRAPE CROP ESTIMATED BELOW AVERAGE

The early estimate for the 2020 wine grape crop currently shows a crop of between 1 244 985 and 1 330 050 million tons. These volumes are similar to the 2019 harvest, but if everything goes well during the remainder of the season, an improvement of up to 6.8% can be realized. Although an improvement on 2019 harvest is a possibility, the estimate still indicates a volume of 2.3% lower than the average wine grape crop yield over the past 5 years. Limits for the possible wine grape crop volumes are indicated, as it is very early in the season and many factors can take effect to bring about significant changes in the realized tonnes.

Good winter rains caused the Western Cape's dam system levels to rise well. During mid-September, just before the start of the 2020 vine growing season, the combined dam levels were 81.7% full, a good improvement on the 70% during 2018 and 37.4% during 2017. Areas that fall outside this system, however, do not appear to be as rosy. Currently, no rain has occurred in the Orange River Region and it is extremely dry. However, there is still plenty of water in the dams of the Orange River system, but it will soon have to rain in the catchment areas. The Little Karoo Region is still in the grip of a ongoing drought; a critical situation in many areas. In the Robertson Region, production units relying on mountain runoff water are under enormous pressure, but most producers, however, get their water from the Brandvlei Dam (currently 51% full) and have sufficient water. Although the Clanwilliam Dam's current level (84.7%) are somewhat lower than 2018, the situation still looks good for the season ahead for Olifants River producers.

In general, spring was characterized by above-average warm, but fluctuating conditions and in certain areas such as the coastal region there was considerable wind. These favorable environmental conditions have caused vines to bud earlier than normal, as well as budding evenly. Limited frost damage was observed in some of the irrigation areas during this period.

October brought good rains to the coastal region with accompanying high pressure on the management of fungal diseases, weeds and vineyard canopy. The number of flower clusters, as well as the effectiveness of the set, are positive in most areas. At the end of October, the Orange River Region was plagued by severe frost damage, mostly in the low lying areas East from Upington. Currently, this damage appears to result in significant crop losses.

A mostly warm, but windy November causes vines to grow at a rapid rate, which drives leaf management to maximum capacity. Disease pressure is generally higher than normal and will need to be well monitored and managed.

If environmental conditions and timely vineyard management practices are integrated, the expected harvest in most regions is equivalent to or slightly better than last season. Exceptions at this stage are the Orange River Region, as well as the Klein Karoo Region where smaller crops are expected, mainly due to widespread frost damage and ongoing drought conditions.
