

Press Release

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- Marlborough Vintage Gets Underway
- Unseasonable February Weather Keeps Viticulturists Busy

The hand picking of Marlborough's first grapes has begun, albeit in a small way. Wither Hills is one of the first company's in the region to start handpicking Pinot Noir for their Daniel Le Brun sparkling label, with Pernod Ricard following close behind.

Wither Hills winemaker Ben Glover says he is impressed with the fruit, describing it as looking "pretty smart."

Despite a wetter and cooler February than normal, he says the crops are holding up well.

"There was some weather pressure last week, but dry and windy conditions over the weekend have helped to alleviate that. The forecast for the next six to seven days is for those conditions to continue, which is perfect for us."

Winemaker Matt Thomson agrees, saying the botrytis that had appeared because of the damp February conditions has been held back by the recent warm and windy weather.

"We were pretty nervous when the rain was forecast for late last week, but it didn't arrive. Instead with the winds we have experienced and the warm weather arriving, those first few berries we saw with botrytis have since dried up."

Villa Maria's Marlborough Viticulturist Mike Croad said the berry weights are slightly lower this year when compared with last, while bunch weights are up. The amount of crop thinning that has taken place since January is certainly paying off, he says, with strong flavours shining through.

Mr Glover says the cooler temperatures throughout February have ensured the flavours Marlborough wines are renowned for, haven't been burnt off.

"They are looking really good across the board."

However the impact of February's unseasonal weather is delaying the harvest for the majority of crops. Brian Bicknell from Mahi Wines says they are up to 10 days behind what they were last year. That is echoed throughout the region, with all winemakers saying they don't expect the harvesting of any significant volume of fruit to begin until around the 20th of March. The first variety to come in will be Pinot Noir, followed by Chardonnay and then Sauvignon Blanc.

Last year Marlborough harvested 190,000 tonnes of fruit. This year that figure is expected to drop, despite the increase in productive land in the region, with growers and wine companies decreasing yields to concentrate on quality.

For further information contact;

Marcus Pickens

Wine Marlborough Marketing Manager

Ph: +64 357 79299

Mob: +64 21 831 820

Email: marcus@wine-marlborough.co.nz