

Press Release

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Marlborough Winegrowers Celebrate a Successful 2009 Vintage

- **Early weather fears unfounded as Marlborough experiences one of the best ever harvest seasons**
- **Hard work undertaken in the vineyards pays off**

Winemakers in Marlborough are describing vintage conditions this year as heaven sent, following some nervous times earlier in the season.

Periods of cool and damp weather in February, followed by a spell of rain in March had the industry on edge. Early signs of botrytis were quickly stymied though when the warm weather returned in mid March. From that period on, a long drawn out Indian summer provided consistently warm days and cooler nights – particular to Marlborough and perfect for fruit maturation.

Following a near perfect bud burst and fruit set, Marlborough's vineyards were on track for larger than average crops. However the combined efforts of growers and viticulturists have seen those crops carefully managed in an effort to concentrate on quality not quantity.

Jason Tripe, manager of one of the larger viticultural companies in the region says there was a "huge amount" of work undertaken in the vineyards this year.

"The input has been higher than ever before, due to the industry's desire to produce a high quality vintage. With the bad weather in February, it was starting to look like that hard work might have been for nothing. But the weather during vintage was incredible and made the efforts all worthwhile. The result is we have some sensational fruit."

He says the call from the industry this year was to restrict crops crop loads and growers had undertaken extensive shoot thinning and crop thinning right up until harvest, to ensure only quality fruit made it to the winery.

"And given the season was running later than in past years, those lower yields in combination with the great weather, meant we had a superb harvest."

Jeff Clarke, Chief Winemaker for Pernod Ricard agrees saying the efforts undertaken in the vineyards have paid off, with the harvested fruit delivering "intense flavours with typical cool climate pungency."

Highfield winemaker Al Soper says he would struggle to remember an April as good as this year's. "It was the vintage from heaven, hot and dry, perfect for ripening. It also allowed us to pick where and when we wanted without having to race against any rain. We are stoked with the fruit we have."

Damian Martin from Winegrowers of Ara believes that 2009 could well be a "classic Marlborough vintage."

Yields of Pinot Noir are down across the board, with the berry size being described as much smaller than in previous years. The upside of that though is an increase in colour and riper flavours.

Other varieties such as Chardonnay, Riesling and Pinot Gris have also been described by winemakers as being of an exceptionally high standard.

There is also a great deal of excitement about the range of botrytised and late harvest wines that will be made this year. The perfect conditions during April have played into the hands of winemakers

wishing to produce a dessert wine, with small tracts of fruit still hanging on the vines waiting to produce the intense, sweet flavours.

With all but the botrytised fruit already in the tanks, winemakers are now looking forward to watching the wines develop. All say they will remember vintage 2009 for the right reasons, believing it to be one of the best in years.

Last year Marlborough produced 195,000 tonnes of fruit, 61% more than in 2007. Despite an increase in productive land coming on stream for the first time in 2009, the region does not expect to surpass last year's figures. Reported grape intakes to date are lower than in 2008. The final production figures will be released in June at an industry review.

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