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# 2005 Oregon Harvest Report

Oregon Wine Board

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## **COOLER TEMPERATURES AND LOWER ALCOHOL LEVELS MARK A RETURN TO A MORE CLASSIC OREGON VINTAGE**

*Later harvest and fall rains presented challenges, but wineries throughout the state report potential for excellent quality for 2005 vintage*

NOVEMBER 10, 2005 – After recent vintages that brought warmer weather, early ripeness and higher alcohol, this year’s Oregon wine harvest occurred later than most expected, resulting in cooler temperatures that many winemakers throughout the state say will lead to lower alcohol levels, structured acidity and ideal flavor development.

“This has been an interesting year, with one of the driest winters and wettest springs on record,” said Dr. Greg Jones, a climatologist at Southern Oregon University in Ashland, OR.

Those who were willing to wait out the fall rains and pick during the dry windows were rewarded with optimal fruit ripeness and flavor profiles. With sugar levels down and higher natural acidity than in past years, this year’s vintage will showcase classic Oregon viticulture and winemaking, many industry members suggest.

“This will be one very delicious, balanced and nuanced vintage,” said Scott Shull, winemaker and general manager of Raptor Ridge Winery in Scholls.

Yields vary around the state, but slight overall increase from 2004

Throughout Southern Oregon, yields ranged from 20 percent below forecast to 10 percent above forecast, Jones said. On average, yields were five percent below.

In the Walla Walla Valley, the freeze of 2004 wiped out production for Cecil Zerba, owner of Zerba Cellars, so this year’s yields are naturally up from the past year.

“Everyone here, including me, is scrambling for barrels so that’s a good sign,” Zerba said.

Sam Tannahill, winemaker and vineyard manager for A to Z Wineworks and Francis Tannahill, reported that yields were lower than average across the state, but up slightly from 2004. Tannahill works with winegrowers from Hood River to Medford to source fruit for his various two labels.

The one exception? Pinot gris, which Tannahill said was heavier than expected. Jim Thomas, owner of Eola Springs Vineyards in Salem, experienced a similar yield for Pinot gris. Thomas, who grows fruit for five wineries throughout the state, harvested his Pinot gris and most of his Pinot noir on October 10th and 11th, after the rains. He experienced a slightly higher yield than in the past year for both varieties.

“Tonnage is up 20 percent from last year,” Thomas said. “We had a very good Pinot gris yield but saw smaller clusters and berries.”

But for Jim Bernau, founder and president of Willamette Valley Vineyards in Salem, his Pinot gris was hit the hardest by rain that occurred during bloom. Despite the lower yields, Bernau reports “wonderful fruit flavors with our whites, including Pinot gris.”

Yields were lower in 2004 for Wooldridge Creek Winery in the Applegate Valley.

“We consciously chose to drop fruit early because we knew our vines would be stressed and couldn’t carry and ripen the fruit,” said Kara Olmo of Wooldridge Creek.

For Iris Hill Winery near Eugene, yields were higher than 2004 and are typical of a more average year, said Sales Director Keith Tabor.

Bernard LaCroute, owner of Willakenzie Estate, reports that his Pinot noir yield is significantly higher than last year – 2.05 tons to the acre vs. 1.38 in 2004.

***Lower Alcohol, Good Acidity and Flavor Development Result in Excellent Quality***

In the Willamette Valley, Raptor Ridge’s Shull reported that wines arrived at ripeness unusually late, so most of the grapes are still fermenting and being pressed.

“Within the next few days we will have everything in barrel,” Shull said. “We are seeing excellent and balanced flavors.”

Increased acidity in many of the grapes will likely result in more food-friendly and ageable wines.

“With a lack of fiery temperatures during the growing season and the coolness of the later season, the acids retained better than in recent vintages, resulting in food-friendly wines with great aging potential,” said Harry Peterson-Nedry of Chehalem. “We are just now seeing final ferments of Pinot noir and what we see is deeply saturated color and healthy fruit rich wines going to barrel, which reconfirms our decisions to wait for flavor development and pick around the rain instead of flinching in fear of the rain.”

Pinot noir producers in the Willamette Valley say this vintage will be a return to finesse and elegance, which has long characterized classic Oregon Pinot noir.

“This is a vintage of above average quality,” said Kevin Chambers, owner of Resonance Vineyard in Carlton. “I expect the wines from this vintage to be lower in alcohol than the past four years, with excellent color, acid levels, flavors and aroma. The wines will be more ‘finesse-ful’ than powerful. Our Pinot noirs are darkly colored with bright, lively aromatics and firm tannins. This vintage will be more classically styled. Whites will be brightly aromatic with well-balanced fruit-to-acid ratios and refreshingly normal alcohol levels.”

“We’re getting back to a classic Willamette Valley style of Pinot noir,” Bernau said. “We pressed all of our Pinot noir last week and we are seeing great flavor, aroma and color – better than our last two vintages.”

Jim Prosser, owner/winemaker for J.K. Carriere, agrees. Prosser specializes exclusively in Pinot noir.

“We were at the margin of cool climate viticulture and we were rewarded with wine that will stand on its own merit,” Prosser said. “It will be a classic year with refined, elegant and ageable wines, as opposed to jammy, higher alcohol wines.”

“Overall, we are pleased with the quality,” Tannahill said. “I’d say this is a good to great vintage. We are seeing bright color and ripe tannins. There is a certain rusticity to the tannins and I think we will have more elegance and concentration.”

In other parts of the state, Chardonnay, Merlot and Syrah will shine. At Wooldridge Creek Winery in the Applegate Valley, Kara Olmo also reports a longer maturation period. Olmo completed harvest on November 2nd.

“Our fruit ripened slower than in the last couple of years,” Olmo said. “What’s interesting is that last year, we finished on almost the same day. The difference was that we started earlier this year, resulting in a longer harvest period. But we are seeing full flavor development and more food-friendly wines.”

“This harvest showed us which grapes do well naturally in our environment – varieties like Syrah which typically ripen easier than Cabernet Sauvignon,” Olmo said. “Syrah and Merlot will be standouts for us.”

Merlot will also shine for Troon Vineyard in the Applegate Valley and Seven Hills Winery in Walla Walla.

“The jury is still out but it looks to be a really nice vintage,” said Chris Martin of Troon Vineyards in the Applegate Valley. “Chemistry is almost ideal. Our Cabernet Sauvignon will be elegant and food friendly. Our Merlot is a consistent performer and we’re excited to see significant acidity and good tannins.”

“This is the best vintage since 1999,” said Casey McClellan, winemaker for Seven Hills Winery. “We see great ripeness, good natural acidity and intense color. We have perfect fruit. Our Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon will be particularly strong.”

Oregon Chardonnay, which has experienced a rebirth in recent years, promises to shine as well throughout the state. In Southern Oregon, Girardet Winery is excited about this year’s crop, as is Viento Wines’ Rich Cushman with his Chardonnay from the Columbia River Gorge.

“We have really intense flavors. I’m really excited about this vintage. It’s another good year for Oregon wines. I think our Chardonnay might be our best ever,” added Marc Girardet, winemaker for Girardet Winery.

“Chardonnay and Pinot noir from the Gorge are spectacular,” Cushman said. “Flavors are bright and focused.”

***Rains tested wills, with varying effects to fruit***

In Southern Oregon, Jones reports that October ended with temperatures slightly above normal, with precipitation slightly below normal.

Marc Girardet was able to bring in all his grapes before the rains hit. Girardet completed harvest on October 24. "We're right in line with about 1 ½ tons per acre."

In the Willamette Valley, rain played a different role in harvest, depending on the vineyard location. In the southern part of the Willamette Valley, some vineyards were able to finish picking before the major rains set in.

"We experienced a great harvest," Tabor said. "We got everything in before any significant rain. The grapes were in good shape and the fruit was clean. The weather seemed to cooperate and we experienced no mildew or rot from the rain."

Nearby at Airlie Winery, owner Mary Olsen was also able to complete picking just in the nick of time. Olsen reported that her crew was picking the final fruit just as it started raining gently, allowing the fruit to remain dry. The result, Olsen said, will be a Riesling that is slightly sweeter than normal.

"The rain and cooler temperatures made it more trying at times, but in the end it was a more traditional harvest for us," Olsen said.

In the northern part of the valley, rain was more of a factor.

"2005 returns us to cool climate viticulture, with cooler ripening temperatures," Peterson-Nedry said. "Picking decisions carried the weight of tradeoffs. To get full flavors at some sites, patience through two inches of rain was required."

For Willakenzie Estate in the northern Willamette Valley, vineyard management was key to controlling the effects of rain, LaCroute said. He experienced no rot or mildew and was able to leave the grapes to hang longer.

"The result is very good maturity with good balance of acidity, tremendous color, good round tannins and good extraction," LaCroute said. "If the wines continue as they are, we will see delicate, aromatic wines with a lot of power but not a lot of alcohol."

Rain was less of a factor in eastern Oregon.

"The hot summer and the recent cooling period allowed for additional hang time late in the season," Zerba said. "We didn't experience a lot of rain out here, and the rain we did get didn't hang on the fruit and we haven't experienced any frost."

In the Columbia Gorge, Rich Cushman completed harvest on October 30th. The weather did comprise hang time in some cases, but overall Cushman is pleased with the resulting quality.

McClellan of Seven Hills Winery reported very little weather pressure.

“You couldn’t have designed a better September and October,” he said.

With weather pressure and wait time for full maturation, patience became a virtue for both Oregon winegrowers and winemakers.

“This was both a winegrower’s and a winemaker’s vintage,” Tannahill said. “Those who were vigilant in both the vineyard and the cellar will be rewarded with great wines.”