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2014 Oregon Harvest Report

Oregon Wine Board

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2014 Oregon Harvest Report

Vintage delivers exceptional quality grapes at higher than normal yields

The 2014 vintage in Oregon may be remembered as the vintage of a lifetime. From bud break through harvest, growers and winemakers throughout the state experienced an almost ideal growing season that delivered a record amount of exceptional, balanced fruit.

The vintage's milestones averaged two weeks early from bud break through harvest, with some sites and varieties maturing as much as three weeks early. Growing conditions were mostly dry and warmer than normal throughout the spring providing a great environment for flowering and fruit set. The result was large clusters that ripened evenly over the course of the warm, dry summer. The 2014 vintage broke the previous record for heat accumulation during the growing season, set in 2006. This record was broken not by the daytime highs but rather the overnight lows being higher than normal for most of the year. This allowed the grapes to continue ripening through véraison without putting heat stress on the vines.

Harvest began around Sept. 12, roughly two weeks earlier than normal, although some of the warmer sites began during the first week of September. Conditions remained mostly dry through September with some rain at the end of the month. However, the rains this year were viewed as more of a nuisance than an actual problem or challenge, and ultimately helped to reduce pH levels and lower the rapidly rising sugar accumulation. Growers were able to harvest fruit in almost pristine conditions with no signs of disease and minimal fear of pest or bird effects. Most wineries are reporting higher than normal yields that resulted from larger than normal clusters. However, a freeze in December 2013 impacted some regions and sites, resulting in some bud and vine damage.

Regional Overviews:

Willamette Valley

This is one of those rare vintages when you have high quality and high quantity simultaneously. From the standpoint of weighing quantity against quality, it was one of the best perhaps as wines are very good and range from refreshing and vibrant to rich and ripe. The Pinot noirs are deeper in color and range from the low 13's to lower 14's in alcohol percent. I believe the consumer will love these wines as they will be similar to the 2009 vintage. – **Joe Dobbes, Dobbes Family Estate**

This year has been very unique – starting with a slightly early bud break, warm and dry conditions during the early spring growing season and on into a warm and dry summer gave us a perfect situation for an early harvest. The wines are darkly fruited and quite concentrated. We have some wines that have big tannins but the core of fruit is so sweet that they are balanced with moderate alcohol. – **Lynn Penner-Ash, Penner-Ash Wine Cellars**

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Vine fruitfulness and set were extraordinary this year, yielding a very large potential crop. We thinned most of our 100 acres at lag phase as usual, but we thinned more moderately than usual, and in some blocks we did not thin at all. Our thinking was that more draconian crop removal would result in high sugars and green flavors, given the unusually warm weather from the beginning of the season. At harvest the crop was (not unexpectedly) abundant, with average yields across our acres at about 2.75 tons per acre. One thing I can say for sure, 2014 will set a new record for tons harvested. Around the industry there is a common lament "there is no room at the inn." – **Ted Casteel with input from Ben Casteel and Mimi Casteel, Bethel Heights Vineyard**

Even though we spent considerable time and money thinning fruit in July and August, our overall estate crop load was 40 percent larger than 2013. It was as if Mother Nature just heaved grapes out of the bosom of the Earth! Never seen the likes of it in 25 years. The good news is that the wines are by and large lovely, ripe, rich, deeply concentrated and aromatic. Once we get past the shock of the investment required to bottle and package all this wine – and deal with the exigencies of where and how to sell it all – I'm sure we'll look back at 2014 as a rare gift. Unlike so many Oregon vintages, it offered everything a winemaker could want... and, in some instances, almost too much so. – **Doug Tunnell, Brick House Wine Company**

Southern Oregon

The quality of the fruit is excellent. With sugars coming early we chose to wait on some varieties because the flavors weren't there yet. This proved to be the right decision. The fruit we pulled had great balance and flavors. The yields were low for us due to winter damage experienced by most east side vineyards. We anticipate a good recovery for next year from good retraining and plants coming back. – **Ruth Garvin, Cliff Creek Cellars**

The 2014 vintage was hot and dry. Roseburg's average daily temps were the highest ever, which calculates to a record 3,500 Growing Degree Days (GDDs). True, it was a hot year, but the absolute maximum temperatures of 2014 were considerably lower than normal. During the cooler 2003 thru 2012 interval, Roseburg's average annual absolute T-max was 107.5° F and typically we had several, multi-day heat waves. In contrast, Abacela experienced only two triple digit days in 2014 and the maximum temperature recorded was 103° F. We saw a record number of days (49) with maximum temperatures between 90 and 99° F, which combined with warmer nights (up 5° F in August), are what raised the average temperature and the GDDs. The vines tolerated almost daily 90 degree temps in the absence of heat waves very well and we actually used less irrigation than in previous cooler years. Coupling this with warmer nights (and shortened diurnal temperature range) had a profoundly positive physiological effect on our vines. The results; perfectly ripe, flavorful fruit and virtually no disease or predation certainly made 2014 a great vintage. – **Earl Jones, Abacela**

The 2014 growing season has been incredibly beautiful, with perfect temperatures throughout harvest. It was a wonderful not to have to pick in the rain or rush to beat the weather. We did have some frost damage from December 2013 on the lower level of the vineyard, and well need to be replaced this next year. However, the big reds on the hill resulted in yields above average. – **Jolee Wallace, Del Rio Vineyards**

Columbia Gorge

We had an unusual winter freeze event in December of 2013. The freeze was very specific to vineyards located in lower elevation areas or on the valley floor. I find it surprising that the yields were so high this year after that winter freeze event. It was not unusual in the 2014

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growing season to see yields 10 – 25 percent higher than normal with great quality intact. I'm sure 2014 will be considered one of the best vintages of the decade! – **Lonnie Wright, The Pines 1852**

Bud break came early in the western side of the Gorge, just about two weeks earlier than a typical year. Fruit set was on the heavy side, but we normally drop a little less than half of the fruit to enhance quality. This vintage we reduced less than standard in an effort to stretch the season. The final, increased yield was largely due to efforts to balance the vines to the early and prolonged heat of the vintage. Harvest weather was ideal. We were able to pick at a relaxed rate. Each block came off the vine at its optimum moment. – **Robert Morus, Phelps Creek Vineyard**

We worried about a very dry, cold winter and then March was very wet and eased our drought concerns. The vintage started with warm degree days at bud break, near record breaking numbers. The weather remained nice and warm and dry and the degree days kept accumulating at a very rapid rate. The beginning of July had higher than normal, but not unprecedented degree day numbers, but by Aug. 1 we were well ahead of every year back to when I started recording in 2001 and that trend continues still today. We were in this same place in 2013 however, and when the rain came and didn't stop, we asked ourselves if this would be a repeat but somehow it just felt different. Mother Nature was on our side. Disease pressure was low, yield was high and quality was amazing. – **Leigh Bartholomew, Dominio IV**

Eastern Oregon

I think the vintage's ripe, flavorful wines will be very enticing for the consumer. The conditions made it relatively easy to make good wines, with no worries about achieving ripeness, and the lack of frost risk allowed us to keep grapes on the vine as long as we wished. – **Casey McClellan, Seven Hills Winery**

This vintage was warm and dry from bud break to harvest. Growing conditions were stable and pest and disease pressure was low. From start until finish, all major growing stages were 7 -10 days ahead of the average. Winter was dry, but pre-bud break we had a significant amount of moisture that helped the vines get a healthy start. We saw perfect bloom weather that created fantastic fruit set. The crop looked phenomenal and I have received a lot of positive feedback from winemakers already. Even though sugars are high this year, we saw really great acid and pH levels in almost all of our varieties to balance the high sugars. – **Sadie Drury, Seven Hills Vineyard /SeVein**

The 2014 vintage was a scorcher. From Apr. 1 – Oct. 26 the Walla Walla Valley had 3312 Growing Degree Days and no cold weather events that caused frost damage. To put that in perspective, our average is 2741 GDD and in 2013, which was another early and warm year, we only hit 3050 GGDs. All of the major milestone indicators came earlier than average and a week ahead of the 2013 vintage. Weather through bloom and set was perfect, which is evident in the yields. If our early indicators are any measure of quality, 2014 is another excellent vintage for the Walla Walla Valley. – **Chad Johnson, Dusted Valley**

About OWB:

The Oregon Wine Board (OWB) is a semi-independent Oregon state agency managing marketing, research and education initiatives that support and advance the Oregon wine and wine grape industry. The Board works on behalf of all Oregon wineries and independent growers throughout the state's diverse winegrowing regions.

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