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Piedmont winemakers cut Barbera output after Italy's wine stocks rose to 5.6 billion bottles

The region reported high volumes and strong quality from the 2026 harvest, prompting tighter supply controls rather than bigger sales.

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Wine producers in Italy’s Piedmont region are reporting one of their strongest harvests in years, even after an unusually hot summer, but many are also cutting output and slowing releases to market because too much wine is already in storage and demand

has weakened.

In the hills around Agliano Terme, where Barbera vines cover much of the landscape, growers have been gathering the last grapes of the 2026 harvest under conditions that many say delivered both high volumes and strong quality. Filippo Mobrici, head of the Barbera d’Asti Consortium, said the harvest began at the end of July, much earlier than usual, and called this year’s crop a “five-star harvest.”

The early start came after the hottest summer on record in this northern region between the Alps and the Po Valley. Average temperatures reached 21.6 degrees Celsius, with highs near 40 degrees Celsius around Agliano Terme. Even so, producers say the vines held up well because the winter and early spring brought enough rain to build water reserves in the soil before the peak heat arrived.

Mobrici said those reserves helped the grapes ripen in good conditions despite the extreme temperatures in recent months. Growers also adjusted vineyard practices to protect the fruit, leaving more foliage on the vines than usual to shield grapes from direct sun.

The strong harvest, however, comes at a difficult commercial moment. Like other Italian wine regions, Piedmont has been dealing with oversupply after several years of large production. Growers are also trying to sell into markets unsettled by wars, U.S. tariffs, and changing habits among younger consumers, who are drinking less than previous generations.

Because of that pressure, producers of Barbera d’Asti decided to reduce the volume collected this year from nine tonnes to 8.5 tonnes per hectare. Some estates are also releasing less wine for sale. The move reflects a broader effort in Italy’s wine industry to match production more closely to demand instead of allowing inventories to keep rising.

Official figures show why that concern has grown. In July, wine stocks in Italy, the world’s largest wine-producing country, were up 6.9% from a year earlier. The volume in storage was equal to more than 5.6 billion bottles, close to a full year of production.

That stock build matters beyond vineyards in Piedmont. Large inventories can put pressure on wine prices, shape decisions on how much product reaches distributors and retailers, and weigh on the wider European drinks trade, especially in bulk wine exports. If oversupply persists, producers across the beverage sector may face tighter margins and more cautious commercial planning.

Some growers in Piedmont have already taken unusual steps to deal with the imbalance. In certain areas, part of this year’s production is being diverted into vinegar rather than bottled as wine. Industry leaders are also debating longer-term measures.

Italy’s Wine Union, known as UIV, has called for production to be planned according to market conditions and has urged that no new vineyard plantings be approved. UIV president Lamberto Frescobaldi said earlier this year that the industry should even consider removing old or unviable vines, arguing that producers must be ready to make difficult decisions.

Not everyone agrees. In Agliano Terme, Mobrici rejected the idea of uprooting vineyards. He said vines are not only a tool of production but also part of local culture and of the way the land is shaped and preserved.

A few kilometers south in San Marzano Oliveto, winemaker Luca Garberoglio said he was also satisfied with the quality of the harvest and argued that stocks remain manageable within the relatively small Barbera d’Asti area. Garberoglio, 41, is part of a family that runs the Carussin estate, which has moved further upmarket by producing organic wines sold especially in Scandinavian export markets.

His comments point to another shift underway in Italian wine, one tied less to inventories than to the climate itself. According to Garberoglio, the flavor profile of Barbera d’Asti is changing as warmer growing conditions alter ripening patterns. He said a wine traditionally marked by cherry and plum notes is increasingly showing more concentrated aromas of blackberry and blackcurrant.