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Alsace growers deliver a better-than-feared 2026 wine harvest

Volumes are estimated at 804,000 hectoliters, down 4.4% from 2025, with Riesling suffering the steepest losses.

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CÀ DEL BOSCO

Wine growers in Alsace are finishing the 2026 harvest with better results than many had feared after a summer of drought, early picking, and localized hail, according to assessments published Monday by Vitisphere based on information from the Alsace Chamber of Agriculture and growers in the Bas-Rhin.

The last parcels are expected to be harvested around Oct. 1. By late September, the main message from producers was relief. Léa Meyer, an oenologist at the Alsace Chamber of Agriculture, told Vitisphere that volumes were “acceptable” even though the trade had expected drought to cause far heavier damage.

The chamber’s estimate from late August put the 2026 crop at 804,000 hectoliters, down from 840,681 hectoliters in 2025, a decline of about 4.4%. That would mark a third straight annual drop for the region. France’s agriculture ministry, in a Sept. 7 forecast cited by local farm media, projected a 6% year-over-year decline for Alsace, suggesting that late rain came too late to rebuild berry size in many vineyards.

Even with that decline, Alsace appears to have held up better than several other French regions in a difficult year for wine production. Nationally, the 2026 harvest is expected to be the smallest since 1957, according to the ministry forecast cited in the regional reporting. Burgundy has spoken of a crop down about 30%.

The picture inside Alsace is uneven, with clear differences by grape variety. Riesling, the region’s emblematic white grape, suffered the most from the dry summer. In some areas, yields were down by as much as 40%, and some parcels were not harvested at all. Signs of stress in Riesling had already been reported by the end of July as heat and drought intensified.

By contrast, Pinot Blanc and Auxerrois performed better than expected. Meyer said those varieties delivered good surprises, a notable development in a region where they often receive less attention than Riesling or Gewurztraminer. Because Pinot Blanc and Auxerrois are also widely used in Crémant d’Alsace, the stronger showing may help support supplies for sparkling wine producers and for the broader beverage trade, including restaurants and export buyers that depend on steady volumes of Alsatian whites.

Gewurztraminer results were more mixed. Some lots were reported to show less finesse, with very ripe exotic fruit notes that growers described as a sign of a hot year in which sugar levels rose quickly.

Quality, however, has generally been judged strong. According to the chamber's assessment reported by Vitisphere, the musts are very expressive and acidity held up better than expected despite the heat. That is important in a year when grapes were picked unusually early and often in warm conditions, which can raise concerns about oxidation and balance in white wines. Meyer said some small imbalances seen in the wines should be manageable in the cellar, including through aging on fine lees.

The 2026 vintage is also being defined by timing. The first grapes for Crémant d'Alsace were cut on Aug. 12, a date described in regional reports as unprecedented for the area. Growers told French broadcasters earlier in the season that, three decades ago, harvest typically started in late September or early October. This year, crémant grapes and grand cru sites entered harvest on the same day in what local reporting described as a first for the region.

Drought was not the only threat. On July 16, a hailstorm struck the northern Bas-Rhin around Rott. Emmanuel Kreiss, a grower in the area, said 8 of his 10 hectares were hit, with losses in some sectors reaching 90%. Even so, he estimated that his total yield would end up no more than 15% below normal, and he said fruit quality remained good.

The season has reinforced concerns about climate pressure on one of France's driest vineyard regions. Alsace vineyards, sheltered by the Vosges mountains, are especially exposed when rainfall remains low for long periods. Growers and trade groups say repeated dry years are forcing changes in vineyard management. Gilles Ehrhart, president of the Association of Alsace Winegrowers, told local media earlier this month that climate disruption is requiring the region to adapt. Producers have returned to some soil-working methods that had been set aside in previous years, and research programs are testing grape varieties from other regions as a possible way to prepare for future conditions.

The year’s results also matter for availability in the market. A smaller Riesling crop, especially among smaller estates hit hardest by drought, could tighten supply of 2026 Alsace Riesling for wine shops, importers, and hospitality buyers. At the same time, the stronger performance of Pinot Blanc, Auxerrois, and in some cases Pinot Gris could shift attention within the region’s white wine lineup and influence buying plans for retailers and on-premise accounts looking for volume and value.

For now, growers in Alsace are ending the season with a result that is weaker than last year but far from the disaster many expected in midsummer. The region’s harvest remains below recent levels, yet the combination of acceptable volumes and solid fruit quality has eased some of the concern that followed months of drought and a harvest that began in the middle of August.