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Italy’s 2026 wine output is expected to fall 7.22% to 41.1 million hectoliters

Drought and producer-led cuts in vineyard yields reflect inventories that exceed the coming harvest.

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Italy is expected to produce less wine in 2026 as drought and deliberate cuts in vineyard yields reduce output in the latest harvest, according to European Commission data reported Thursday by Fondazione Qualivita and Il Sole 24 Ore.

The forecast puts Italian wine production at 41.1 million hectoliters, down 7.22% from a year earlier. The decline reflects dry conditions in parts of the country and a separate effort by producer protection consortia to limit supply after a buildup of unsold inventories. Wine stocks in Italy stand at 42.6 million hectoliters, a level that has added pressure on producers to avoid putting even more product onto a weak market.

The combination of weather stress and lower yields marks a significant adjustment for Europe’s largest wine producer. Even with the decline, Italy is still expected to remain the top producer in the European Union in 2026, ahead of Spain at 37.6 million hectoliters and France at 33.9 million hectoliters.

The European Commission’s figures show that the broader EU harvest is also expected to shrink, though only modestly. Total 2026 wine production across the bloc is forecast at 137.4 million hectoliters, down 1.2% from last year. That suggests Italy’s drop is steeper than the regional average and may carry added weight in the European wine market because of the country’s size and export role.

The Italian outlook comes after an unusual change in how harvest estimates were handled this year. Normally, preliminary projections are released in early September. That did not happen in 2026. According to the report, this was the first time those early estimates were withheld because climate change has increased the risk that initial forecasts could differ sharply from final results. Officials and market participants have faced growing uncertainty in recent years as heat, drought, and other extreme weather events have made grape yields and quality harder to predict.

In France, production is expected to fall 2.1%. The report said that decline is tied in part to a large vineyard removal program carried out in recent years, as the French industry tries to adapt to lower demand in some segments and structural imbalances in supply. Spain, by contrast, is projected to post a strong rebound, with output rising 13.4%. That increase would narrow the gap with Italy and could shift some competitive pressure within the European export market if the forecast holds through the end of the harvest cycle.

Other projected producers in the EU remain well behind the top three. Germany is forecast at 8 million hectoliters, Portugal at 6.6 million, Romania at 4.4 million, Slovenia at 1.8 million, and Austria at 1.7 million.

For Italy, the decision by consortia to support lower yields shows that the country's wine sector is dealing with more than weather. Producers are also responding to a supply-demand imbalance. High inventories of unsold wine can weigh on prices, tie up storage capacity, and slow cash flow for wineries and cooperatives. Cutting output may help stabilize the market, but it also means less volume available for sale if demand improves faster than expected.

That matters beyond vineyards and cellars. Italy's role as the EU's largest wine producer means any sizable shift in its harvest can influence availability, pricing, and competition across the broader beverage sector, especially for importers, distributors, restaurants, and retailers that depend on steady wine supply. A smaller Italian harvest, if confirmed in final figures, could reduce some downward pressure on wine prices created by excess stock, while Spain's stronger crop could intensify competition in export channels. The effect will depend on how quickly inventories are worked down and how consumer demand develops in key markets.

The 42.6 million hectoliters of inventories are especially notable because they exceed the volume expected from the 2026 harvest itself. That comparison underscores why producers have been willing to accept lower yields even as drought cuts into production. In practical terms, the sector is trying to prevent a fresh harvest from deepening an existing stock overhang.

The European figures also point to a more fragmented market across major producing countries. Italy and France are both expected to decline, though for different reasons, while Spain is recovering strongly. That divergence could affect trade flows within Europe and abroad, particularly if Spanish producers use higher volumes to pursue market share in categories where Italian and French wines have recently faced slower demand.

For now, the data offer an early official picture of a smaller Italian harvest in a year shaped by both climate pressure and market discipline. Final results may still change, but the current forecast suggests that Italy’s wine industry is entering the 2026 marketing season with tighter new production, large existing stocks, and continued pressure to balance output with demand.