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Heat and drought cut Tuscany’s 2026 grape harvest

Florence agronomists said repeated heat spikes shrank grape clusters, hastened Sangiovese ripening, left wineries with a smaller but high-quality crop

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Tuscany’s 2026 grape harvest delivered strong quality but lower volumes after a long period of heat and drought pushed vines, especially Sangiovese, through an unusually difficult growing season, according to the head of Florence’s order of agronomists.

In remarks published on Tuesday, November 17, Michele Pelagatti, president of the Order of Agronomists of Florence, said producers across the region faced a smaller harvest and a picking schedule that severely tested Tuscany’s most important varieties. He said Sangiovese, the region’s main grape, completed its vegetative cycle much earlier than in recent years as repeated heat spikes arrived sooner and lasted longer than they once did.

Pelagatti described Tuscany’s wine sector as being in a complex production phase. He said the region’s long-established suitability for viticulture is being challenged by sharp temperature increases that have marked summer seasons for several years. In the past, he said, heat stress for vines was largely limited to a few weeks in July and August. More recently, that stress had started moving into June, and in 2026 extreme temperatures followed one another almost continuously.

He said the heat was compounded by muggy nights that did not allow vines to recover properly. That pattern, combined with a lack of rain that lasted until early September, significantly reduced the average weight of grape clusters. The lower cluster weight cut output, he said, even as it helped preserve the health of the fruit.

Pelagatti said 2026 should not be considered the worst harvest of recent years, but he called it one of the clearest examples of the strain placed on vines during the delicate stages of aromatic and phenolic ripening. He said wineries had to pay very close attention in the cellar because the fruit’s technical parameters required careful management.

The season was not negative in every respect. Pelagatti said high temperatures made it easier to contain many of the pests that had affected recent wine campaigns, leaving 2026 as one of the healthiest years from a phytosanitary standpoint. He also said rainfall patterns required precise vineyard management. After a rainy start to spring in April, the following months brought infrequent but heavy downpours. Those intense events still allowed timely intervention in vineyards that had been managed with foresight, helping limit soil erosion and compaction.

The difficult conditions were especially evident in early harvests, he said. Mid-September rains then brought unexpected relief and allowed grapes still on the vine to regain better balance and improve noticeably. Pelagatti said the pattern extended beyond Sangiovese and the region’s historic appellations. Other red varieties and white grapes in Tuscany also faced the effects of climate shifts, though each responded differently depending on its physiology and winemaking goals.

He said digital tools are already helping producers adapt. Decision-support systems used to monitor disease pressure have supported more targeted plant protection, he said, and have also reduced costs for growers.

Pelagatti credited Tuscan winegrowers and their consulting agronomists for managing another climatically difficult year. He said the quality outlook for 2026 Tuscan wines is very good, even with the smaller crop.

For the beverage industry, the harvest points to a broader issue that could extend beyond one season. Lower yields and earlier ripening in a major wine region may force producers to adjust vineyard practices, harvest timing and supply planning, particularly for Sangiovese-based wines, if heat and drought patterns continue. Pelagatti also said the wine market now needs to regain balance so that producers are adequately paid for the effort required to manage such conditions.