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Napa Valley's exceptional 2023 Harvest

Extended season leads to remarkable yields

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The 2023 harvest season in Napa Valley has been distinctive and unprecedented in several ways, marking a significant departure from the usual patterns observed in this renowned wine-growing region. This year's grape growing season was unusually extended, with fruit remaining on the vine for two to three weeks longer than typical years. The impact of this extended season was the focus of discussion at the Napa Valley Grapegrowers' 2023 harvest press conference, held online this past Wednesday.

Participants in the conference, including notable figures in vineyard management and operations, provided insights into the unique characteristics of this year's harvest. Among them was Justin Leigon, a partner at Piña Vineyard Management, who farms approximately 1,000 vineyard acres predominantly in Napa Valley. Leigon highlighted the exceptional quality of the berries, noting their excellent skin integrity, retained weight, and balanced acidity. He enthused over the vintage, describing it as "really fantastic."

A significant revelation from the conference was the increase in yields, which were reported to be 15 to 20 percent higher than the average. Daniela Bazán, a partner at Bazán Vineyard Management LLC and Bazán Cellars, echoed the sentiment of a delayed season, with her team beginning preparations in September rather than the usual August.

Bloom timing was a key indicator of the season's unusual progression. According to Leigon, bloom not only started late but was also extended, beginning in early June instead of mid-May. This delay gave a clear indication that the harvest would be pushed back by a few weeks.

Macy Stubstad, the director of vineyard operations at Lawrence Wine Estates, oversees a significant acreage spanning multiple regions within Napa Valley. She reported higher yields than in recent years, attributing it to what she described as a "very healthy crop." A noteworthy aspect of this year's growth season was the substantial rainfall received, a stark contrast to the previous years of drought. This abundance of rain resulted in well-saturated soils, reducing the need for irrigation.

Stubstad also shared insights into vineyard management strategies, such as the cautious approach to leaf removal, a lesson learned from past heat events. The mild and continuous temperatures this season, however, allowed for a gradual and even ripening process, enhancing flavor development, skin softening, and anthocyanin build-up.

The uniqueness of this year's harvest lies in its ability to highlight the distinct characteristics of each vineyard site, as observed by Leigon. He emphasized the vintage's potential to be "very terroir driven," showcasing the specific qualities of each

site.

The extended season also impacted harvest logistics, with Bazañ noting the anticipation and eventual rush once the harvest began. This resulted in a concentrated period of intense activity, with crews working nonstop for weeks. Similarly, Leigon and Stubstad reported a hectic October, a period typically less pressured in previous years.

The perennial issue of labor shortages was also a topic of discussion. Despite these challenges, Leigon remarked on the successful management of the situation this year, stressing the importance of teamwork and collaboration between wineries and growers.

The 2023 harvest in Napa Valley stands out not only for its extended duration and higher yields but also for the exceptional quality of its produce. It underscores the region's adaptability and resilience in the face of changing climatic conditions, ensuring the continued production of world-class wines.