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Burgundy's Winemakers Confront a Decade's Worst Harvest

Disease Pressure and Reduced Yields Threaten Burgundy Vintage

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Burgundy vineyard

The Burgundy wine region is facing one of its most challenging vintages in recent decades after a growing season marked by difficult weather conditions, leading to smaller grape clusters and increased disease pressure from issues like downy mildew. The Bureau Interprofessionnel des Vins de Bourgogne (BIVB) has reported that climate conditions since April have significantly reduced yields, with some areas in Burgundy

and Beaujolais potentially seeing up to 25% lower production, according to official reports. However, the organization noted that "it is difficult to estimate at this time depending on the sector," and in some villages, this figure could be a conservative estimate, making meticulous harvesting essential to preserve the promising quality of the vintage.

During the growing season, the region experienced unusual weather patterns, with rainfall levels up to 50% higher than average, along with localized but intense frost and hailstorms. This scenario has led to high disease pressure, forcing winegrowers to carry out additional vineyard work throughout the season to protect the vines. Measures taken to mitigate these effects included increased pruning to improve airflow and reduce the risk of disease spreading among the plants.

Despite the difficulties, the BIVB remains optimistic about the quality of the grapes due to the warm and relatively dry conditions recorded in August, which helped clusters ripen. However, the onset of more autumnal weather at the start of the harvest has complicated the planning for picking at the optimal time. Florent Latour, managing director of Maison Louis Latour, told The Robb Report that it has been "the most complicated season he has seen in almost 50 years."

The BIVB emphasized that only a careful assessment will determine the ideal harvest date to ensure the best possible quality. According to the organization, extreme care is required this year both in the vineyard and in the cellar, with strict grape selection being an indispensable factor. Nevertheless, there are positive signs supporting these expectations: monitoring from the BIVB Vintage Observatory has revealed a promising balance of sugars and acidity in the grapes, and the dry conditions starting September 12 have allowed further fruit maturation.

The harvest of the Pinot Noir and Chardonnay varieties destined for Crémant de Bourgogne began on September 2, followed by the picking of Pinot Noir for still wines in the second week of September. Winegrowers are carefully adjusting the timing of harvest to achieve the optimal ripeness and ensure that the typical characteristics of the region are reflected in the wines of this vintage. Although the season has demanded additional effort in the vineyards, the potential for quality is still present, as

long as meticulous management continues during the coming weeks of harvest and subsequent vinification.

Adverse weather conditions, such as excessive rain and fluctuating temperatures, have been the main challenge during the growing cycle. Spring frosts caused significant damage in some areas, limiting early plant growth. Later, summer hailstorms worsened the situation in specific sectors, causing the loss of part of the crop and further weakening the vines. In addition, high humidity created a favorable environment for the spread of fungi like downy mildew and powdery mildew, requiring constant intervention to protect the integrity of the crop.

In contrast, the shift to drier weather in the weeks leading up to the harvest has been a positive note in a year marked by uncertainty. Producers have had to adapt quickly to changing conditions, using specific agronomic techniques to promote cluster aeration and minimize infection risk. This adaptation has included leaf thinning and adjustments in vineyard load, aiming to maximize sun exposure and promote balanced ripening.

The challenges of the season are compounded by a broader context of climate change that has affected viticulture in Burgundy over the past decade. The region has been experiencing an increase in the frequency of extreme weather events, forcing producers to rethink management practices and seek new adaptation strategies. The responsiveness of winegrowers and their expertise in vineyard management have been crucial in maintaining quality in an increasingly uncertain environment.

Despite the difficulties, Burgundy's reputation as a producer of high-quality wines does not appear to be at risk, as producers remain committed to maintaining the enological standards that characterize the region. Although the reduction in yields presents an economic challenge, many hope that the harvest will reflect the resilience and effort of the local wine community. Final results will depend on the decisions made in the coming days, as well as the ability to carefully select grapes and manage the winemaking process to preserve the vintage's characteristics.