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Champagne Growers Face Severe Spring Frost Damage

Bud losses near 40% could shrink the 2026 harvest and tighten supplies in the sparkling wine region

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Champagne growers are facing one of the worst spring frost episodes in recent memory, with the Comité Champagne saying that about 38% of buds had been affected by frost as of April 8 and that the figure had since moved closer to 40% as damage assessments continued. The losses, spread across several freeze events in March and early April, could reduce the size of the 2026 harvest and tighten supplies in a region

that plays a central role in the global sparkling wine market.

The damage came after three cold snaps on March 15, March 26 and April 2. In some vineyards, temperatures fell to between -4.5°C and -5°C during radiative frost nights, when clear skies allowed heat to escape from the ground. The March 25-26 episode was worse in parts of the region because a radiative frost was followed by an advective freeze, when a mass of cold air moved in with wind and hit both hillsides and lower ground. Rain had fallen the day before in some areas, leaving buds wet and more vulnerable. In places, thermometers dropped to -6°C or -7°C.

The frost arrived at a difficult moment for growers because the vines were running far ahead of normal. Bud break in some Chardonnay parcels was seen as early as March 8 and 9, roughly 15 to 20 days earlier than usual. That early growth left young shoots exposed when freezing weather returned. Sébastien Debuisson, director of technical services at the Comité Champagne, said some buds “froze solid.”

The losses have not been even across the appellation. The Aisne sector has been among the hardest hit, with reported losses of 65% to 85%. Other badly affected areas include the Ardre Valley at 65%, Côte des Bar at 55% to 65%, and the Marne Valley at about 50%. The Massif de Saint-Thierry has seen losses near 40%, while Petit Morin, Perthois and Trépail have been hit by about 20% to 30%. Other zones have reported damage ranging from 5% to 15%.

The age of the vineyards is also expected to limit recovery. Champagne vines now average about 36 years old, older than they were during earlier frost years, which means they are less likely to produce strong secondary buds after primary buds are killed. That matters because Pinot Noir and Pinot Meunier can sometimes recover through fruitful secondary buds, while Chardonnay generally cannot. As a result, Chardonnay-heavy parcels may suffer more even where some regrowth is possible.

The region’s reserve system will be under pressure as well. Champagne growers are required to set aside wine each year as a buffer against poor harvests, but those stocks are unevenly distributed. The average reserve stands at about 7,200 kg per hectare, yet half of growers in Aube hold less than 5,000 kg per hectare. After a difficult 2024 season and a 2025 harvest that did not fully rebuild inventories, the industry had hoped

for a stronger crop this year to restore its safety net.

Growers still face another risk window before spring ends. In France, many watch closely until the Saints de Glace on May 11, May 12 and May 13, dates long associated with the last serious frost threat of the season. Updated damage assessments from the Comité Champagne are expected in early May, but another cold snap before mid-May could still add to the losses.

The frost crisis has renewed attention on how climate volatility is reshaping Champagne production. The region has been testing new vine varieties, aspersion systems and heated ventilation devices powered by pellets as it tries to limit future damage. It is also moving away from frost candles because of their carbon emissions. For now, growers are waiting to see how much of this year’s crop survives the rest of spring.