

PRESS RELEASE

April 13, 2010

MARLBOROUGH VINTAGE HALF WAY POINT – LOWER YIELDS, HIGHER FLAVOURS

Vintage in Marlborough may be slightly behind the long term average in terms of ripening, but that's not concerning growers and winemakers in the region.

At the halfway point of vintage 2010, the general consensus from winemakers and growers in Marlborough is that the fruit flavours are superb, the vine balance excellent and the yields below average.

Chris Simmonds a grower in the Southern Valley sub region of Marlborough says some of the fruit flavours are the best he has ever seen.

"The fruit is excellent, clean and particularly in the Chardonnay and Riesling there are some wonderful flavours."

Fromm Winery's winemaker William Hoare says the cool weather in December means crops are lighter than average, but it also means growers haven't had to intervene as extensively as in 2009 to remove excess fruit from their vineyards leading into harvest.

"The vine/fruit is in perfect natural balance and we are getting riper flavours with lower alcohol."

Nick Lane, winemaker at Cloudy Bay agrees saying the fruit has benefited from the very hot March temperatures, resulting in "nice flavour ripeness, without excessive sugar levels."

"Yields are down on previous years, particularly in the earlier ripening varieties of Chardonnay and Pinot Noir. But there is some real phenolic ripeness in the Pinot and the Sauvignon Blanc has the classic flavours it has become world famous for."

Grower Peter Morice who grows in the Wairau Valley sub region says his Sauvignon Blanc crop is down between 25 and 30 percent, but a lot of that has to do with pruning back to three canes in June last year, rather than four. This set his vines up for lower yields and is just one of the steps many of the regions vineyard owners have implemented to reduce their output and also input costs.

"I would say the 2010 crops are lighter than first thought," he says. "So far it has been a great season weather wise. In early January we were thinking the fruit wouldn't ripen, because we were running a long way behind. But that hasn't happened, thanks to the drawn out Indian summer."

Dr Mike Trought from Plant and Food Research says the weather has been "very kind. Basically it has been a dream run for wineries."

Marlborough is renowned for its high sunshine hours and cool night time temperatures that help lock in the zesty flavours and give the signature crisp and fruity structure to the wines. The vintage so far reflects this perfectly.

While some smaller wineries have almost completed harvesting their fruit, the majority are still waiting for specialised parcels of Sauvignon Blanc to come in. Much of the regions fruit is being strategically harvested so the profile of flavour is just right allowing the expert winemakers to develop on and extend the world famous Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc profile.

Marcus Pickens, Marketing Manager for Wine Marlborough suggests that this is a timely extension for the region:

"When Marlborough has vintages such as this one, where the conditions allow harvesting under limited weather pressure, there is scope to develop more diversity into the wine signature. We are seeing a bit of that this year and it is perfect timing to enable our loyal customers the chance to seek out more diversity within our famous Sauvignon Blanc. It also attracts new customers as they latch on to further complexities and uniqueness within the wines and individual brands of the region.

The vast majority of the harvest is expected to be complete before Anzac Day on April 25th.

Last year Marlborough processed 192,000 tonnes of fruit. Even with more land coming on stream for the first time this year, predictions are the eventual yield will be below that figure in 2010.

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