

Marlborough Vintage Review 2016

Sophie Preece (Winepress May 2016)

Marlborough's cup did runneth over in Vintage 2016, with big yields leaving little tank space in wineries across the province.

That saw Vinlink send more than two million litres of juice across the Cook Strait to affiliate wineries in Hawke's Bay and Gisborne, says Managing Director Dave Pearce. Dave says the vintage has been a "magnificent" one, with good yields of excellent fruit. However, "the tyranny of big numbers" has meant that yields 10% above expectation could, for example, add 30,000 tonnes to a 300,000 tonne harvest. "That's a very, very big winery that people don't have sitting in a field somewhere."

Vinlink is owned by LINKS winery in Hawke's Bay and GisVin in Gisborne, so when space runs low at the Riverlands facility it is "natural" for them to send juice north. "We have a second and a third cup", he says of the overflow. "It's one of the offerings we've got that makes it easier for our clients." He says larger than expected yields were seen across the board this year. "In that last decent rain, berry weights went up by about 10%. So, if you're planning on bringing in 10,000 tonnes, you can be embarrassed by 1000 tonnes." The partnering North Island wineries had progressed far enough through their vintage that they were able to make space as the Marlborough vintage hit its peak

Despite the increased numbers, Dave says it has been one of the best vintages of the past decade. “The crops are there, there’s no doubt about that. But the grapes are absolutely beautiful.” TIL Freight Blenheim Branch Manager Dennis McKinley says there’s been a big call for the company’s bulk tanker fleet to move stable juice to Hawke’s Bay and Canterbury. “I believe that’s probably been a pretty big logistical nightmare this year. Certainly the calls for tanker fleet have been far greater than previous years.”

Contract winemaking facility Spring Creek Vintners has also been at full capacity for vintage and has turned down a number of spot requests for tank space. Managing Director Ian Wiffin said space was very tight, and towards the end of harvest they took advantage of good weather to slow the harvest down, so the winemaking team had time to ensure tanks were as full as possible. “We are definitely going to be very full, but we only contract the amount that we can handle ...and it’s going really well.”

The numbers made it vital that people didn’t go over their limits during harvest. Logistics are made easier by the fact the facility is so dominated by Sauvignon Blanc, with only 5% in other varieties. Ian says the harvest won’t be as big as 2014, but many growers, including their own, left fruit behind because they had reached their cap. “Certainly we have had people asking if we have more space, but we’re full.” Last year’s low yields have been something of a saving grace this year, he says. “Going in to this year we had the least amount of carry-over wine we have ever had. That’s been a big help.”