Germany 2009 - great but small

12 Nov 2009 by Julia Harding MW

Michael Schmidt will be giving us his detailed report on the 2009 vintage tomorrow, and we have had some early comments from Klaus Peter Keller (end Sep - when this photo of some of his Pinot Noir grapes was taken), but here's a brief 'official' overview (as at 5 Nov) from Wines of Germany, who describe 2009 as 'truly great'. Generic bodies are inclined to hyperbole but I am certainly looking forward to tasting this vintage in Germany. Following the Wines from Germany summary is a view from the Rheingau, produced by Leitz.

After a year of nearly perfect weather, the main 2009 grape harvest in Germany has now finished, with the overall yield estimated at 8.8 million hl, some 10-15% less than last year and the past five-year average.

In some regions, such as the Rheingau, Mittelrhein or Nahe, the deficit is estimated to be more than 20%. The size of the crop in Franken was normal and in the Pfalz, only relatively smaller than usual (-6%). The lower yields are attributed to uneven blossoming as well as the sunny, but dry, late summer weather.

Winegrowers in all 13 German wine-growing regions are extremely pleased with the quality of the 2009 crop. 'This year will go down in history as a truly great vintage', predicted Norbert Weber, president of the German Winegrowers' Association/Bonn. 'Seldom have we been able to harvest such aromatic, healthy and fully ripe grapes as this year.' Many estates harvested grapes with must weights of well over 150 degrees Oechsle, the ripeness level necessary to produce the rarities Beerenauslese and Trockenbeerenauslese.

It remains to be seen whether vintage 2009 will be crowned with the rarity that is Eiswein, but the excellent condition of the grapes still on the vine bodes well.

Grape must harvest in Germany in 2009: preliminary estimates

Wine-growing region	Estimated yields 2009	2008/2009 change in %
Ahr	36.000 hl	-16
Baden	1.200.000 hl	-13
Hessische Bergstraße	32.000 hl	-13
Franken	460.000 hl	+/-0
Mittelrhein	25.000 hl	-32
Mosel	780.000 hl	-13
Nahe	300.000 hl	-21

Pfalz	2.250.000 hl	-6
Rheingau	215.000 hl	-22
Rheinhessen	2.500.000 hl	-13
Saale-Unstrut	23.000 hl	-58
Sachsen	14.000 hl	-49
Württemberg	1.000.000 hl	-12
Total	**8.835.000 hl**	**-12**

RHEINGAU

For a more personal and localised view, here is the Leitz report on their 2009 harvest in the Rheingau (as at 23 Oct 2009).

The year started with exceptionally cold weather and then we had extreme growth in the spring followed by a warm summer, with an Indian summer in September and a cold but sunny harvest in October.

Last winter was the coldest since 1996/97 with minus degrees down to -15°C.
February was an average month but March was extremely cold again with frost and snow around 25 March.

April was the second warmest since records began (1884) and the sunny weather led to an explosive growth (shoots that normally grow in 3-4 weeks grew in 5-7days!) and early budburst around 14 April.

From end of April to end of May it got colder and there were steady fluctuations in temperature which led to a long flowering lasting more than 2 weeks.

At the beginning of June the temperatures dropped and slowed the growth. Combined with lots of rain, treatments turned out to be a real challenge. If they were not done in time there would be have serious problems with Peronospora [downy mildew] and Oidium [powdery mildew] later in the year, leading to 20% loss and not so nice grapes. Around Hattenheim and Erbach there was also hail and late frost that reduced the yields.

In July the temperatures rose again slightly, and were above average, maturation continued steadily. Only the dryness was a limiting factor.

After a very dry and warm September, there was some rainfall at the beginning of October; this combined with warm temperatures created some nervousness amongst the winemakers, as they remembered the 2006 vintage (extremely quick spread of rot and acetic acidity, high loss of yields). Luckily the weather turned cold after the 12th and there was no longer the threat of early rot and crop loss. Where the canopy was still healthy and active, the Oechsle went up steadily over 95-107° in completely healthy grapes!

To sum up the vintage 2009 at Leitz, we are extremely happy with very balanced mature grapes full of expressive fruit flavours and at the same time very good quantities. We still haven't finished harvest and are looking forward to some very late harvest.