

Loire 2010 preliminary harvest report

27 Oct 2010 by Charles Sydney

Charles and Philippa Sydney, boundlessly enthusiastic and highly successful courtiers (brokers) for Loire wines, based in Chinon, have sent us their preliminary, pre-fermentation report on the Loire 2010 harvest, as well as the photos at the end of the article.

Picking started in Muscadet almost four weeks ago, on more or less the same date as last year. One month later, with the exception of a handful of the more committed red producers, the vast majority of the grapes throughout the Loire Valley are now in, although we are of course waiting for the final *tris* [passages through the vineyard] of Coteaux du Layon.

After a perfectly normal summer and despite our annual scare with rain, things are looking good. In fact, as the harvest has gone on, we've been getting happier and happier... Muscadets from the better domaines are at least as good as last year, maybe even better, with young Pierre Sauvion's comment of 'ravi content' summing it up nicely. That said, the situation in Muscadet is pretty catastrophic, and those growers who simply couldn't afford to treat the vines in the summer had a lot of problems with rot, resulting in strange eau de vie aromas in the juice.

Any comments about the greed of growers asking too high prices are misplaced - 60 growers have gone bankrupt in the Pays Nantais since the harvest.

In the Touraine and up in Sancerre and Pouilly, picking started up to a week later than last year. Rain around 24 September put the frighteners on some growers but gave wonderful proof of the advantage of grassing through the vines.

The Sauvignons look lovely (see above, photographed in Sancerre) – nice degrees, nicely balanced acidity and loads of fresh fruit - and there should be plenty of really attractive wines to enjoy. The Gamays are less exciting, as too few people deleaf, debud and grass through the vineyards, but stick with the best growers (Marteau, Marionnet...) and you'll be fine.

In Chinon, Bourgueil and Saumur-Champigny, picking in general started earlier than last year (another couple of days of rain set off some rot and panicked growers) but better growers waited (again), and benefited from an extra two weeks of bright sunny weather and cooling winds, achieving a level of ripeness that seems clearly on a par with – or superior to – to last year. It's even tempting to compare it with 2005, but I guess we need to wait till fermentations are over before promising too much!

For the Chenins, once more, and despite some problems in Vouvray, the good guys have come up trumps, with some huge grins in Saumur and the Layon and more than one grower saying he was 'aux anges' ... For my money, and even before the final pickings, I'd bet heavily on 2010 being way better than 2009.

Harvest chez Jackie Blot in Bourgueil:

Cabernet Franc chez Joguet (La Dioterie) in Chinon:

Ch de Targé Chenin grapes concentrating nicely:

Dom de la Fruitière's Melon de Bourgogne in Muscadet:

