New Zealand 2011 - vintage report

20 Jun 2011 by Richard Hemming

According to New Zealand Winegrowers, arguably not the most impartial source, the 2011 harvest is both large and high quality. Approximately 328,000 tonnes of grapes were vinified, an increase of 23% on 2010, in response to increased sales.

However, the bumper crops of 2007 and 2008 were not so widely welcomed, since the price of grapes crashed in their wake. This is acknowledged by Philip Gregan, the CEO of the industry body, who said, ‘profitability levels remain an on-going concern and recovery of winery and grower incomes should be a focus for all industry participants in the year ahead'.

Nonetheless, the overall mood is optimistic, with increased sales of 11% in the past year and forecast growth of 7% to the end of 2012. Gregan added that ‘at the end of May, 80% of 2010 Sauvignon Blanc had been exported. When the domestic market is added in, over 90% of 2010 Sauvignon Blanc had been shipped from wineries, and there are effectively no stocks of earlier vintages. This is the reason many wineries have brought forward release dates of 2011 SB – they have run out.’

As for the quality, a winemaker in Waipara has told me they had especially good Pinot Noir with great concentration and balance. Meanwhile, their whites are displaying good natural acidity, ‘which is strange because it was a warm year. Maybe it was because flowering was fast and even and we actually harvested most of the grapes earlier than usual.’

Warmth and ripeness are the keywords of the vintage across New Zealand, so those tropical Sauvignon Blancs may be more supercharged than ever in 2011. No doubt we will be able to judge for ourselves when they arrive in stores around the world over the next few months.