Burgundy 2012 - 'horrifically low crop'?

15 Aug 2012 by Mark Haisma

Burgundy winemaker Mark Haisma writes: 2012 is turning out to be a troubled vintage; it seems everything is getting thrown at us. A wet, cold, long winter was followed by a promising start to spring. However, the following growing season has had most types of weather and growing stress thrown into it: cold, rain, major heat spikes, high disease pressure in the vineyards, and poor flowering and set which have led lots of people to talk about horrifically low crops.

The harvest will be small but we are getting used to it as this will be the third in a row. As I have said before, bad growing conditions do not make for bad wine. We will continue to invest heavily in our fruit sorting programme. We have at least 10 to 12 people stationed around a big sorting table. We will sort berry by berry to make sure what goes into the ferments is disease-free and fully ripe. This is a big, expensive exercise, but if we are going to produce great wines in the more difficult years this is the way to do it: very strict fruit control. I invite you all to visit and see this process for yourselves - it's a sight to see.

We will continue to pick into small 6kg picking trays as this is perfect to protect the quality of the fruit; nothing gets crushed on the way to the winery. Again this is expensive and not many people do it, but at the end of the day we need to do all the little things to make the difference.

All the growers I source from have been working hard in the vineyards to keep them clean of disease. We can't do much about fruit set and harvest times, but nowadays we are able to do lots of great work in the vineyards. With careful spray programmes and stripping the leaves from the fruiting zone we are able to protect the remaining fruit. Careful timings of cultivation enable the vigneron to keep the grasses and weeds under control. Cultivation itself causes a lot of moisture to be released from the soil. If this is timed badly you will only be adding to your problems.

To watch these guys work and see the results they get, even in years like this, is a tribute to their skill and dedication. It personally drives me harder to find vineyards of my own to take control of. As a winemaker, I will not feel complete again until I am back in the vines. At Yarra Yering in Australia, this was the core of our business: grow great fruit and make it into great wine.

I have been working hard to source some great new little vineyards which have done wonders to the volume of wine I produce; in 2012 I should make around 38 barrels of wine.

All in all it's just another year. I am just as excited about this year as any other. The excitement of seeing the first fruit come in is building in me already. I can't wait. Through the dedication of the growers and some careful, strict work in the cellar I am confident we will have another beautiful set of wines to talk about.

Harvest this year will commence between 15 and 20 September if all things go to plan. I am continuing my goal to pick fruit at the fresher end of ripeness, trying very hard to avoid the fat or rich styles of burgundy that I am seeing more and more of.