

## Grape harvest is 'outstanding' - Distell

The quality of this year's SA wine grape harvest is outstanding, Erhard Wolf, head of Distell's grape and wine buying team, said on Monday, 6 April 2009.



This is despite a picking season that was shorter than average by more than a month, placing enormous pressure on harvesters and cellar resources.

"Although this has been a tough vintage in terms of logistical challenges, both red and white varieties have come into the cellars in top condition, showing excellent concentration of flavour.

"Alcohol levels have also been well managed with fruit ripeness generally occurring at lower sugar levels than in recent years," Wolf said.

Wolf said crops were on average about 5% down on last year but that this did not hold for all varieties, with the intake of Chardonnay and Merlot, for example, slightly higher than average.

Across the board, grape prices paid by Distell to its suppliers were 10% higher than last year.

The company sources its grapes from all the Cape's major wine-producing regions.

A cold, fairly dry winter had been followed by late September rains which had helped to build up good moisture reserves in the soil, said Distell's chief viticulturist, Dirk Bosman.

Cooler than average spring and early summer temperatures had slowed down ripening, which was good for flavour accumulation.

"Berry size tended to be smaller than average to give an excellent fruit to skin ratio, making for outstanding intensity of colour in the reds.

"This year's Cabernet Sauvignon, Shiraz, Pinotage and Merlot are exceptional."

Lesser-known reds such as Grenache, Tempranillo, Carignan, Malbec and Tannat had also performed extremely well.

Wolf said the harvest had started two weeks later than normal, as a result of the cooler ripening season, but was accelerated by a series of heat waves during February and March.

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