

## Wine grape quality still good amid drought , says Distell

The quality of this year's wine grape crop is "surprisingly good" considering the drought, according to Distell, which produces almost a third of SA's wine.

By [Bekezela Phakathi](#) 11 Apr 2016



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SA is in the middle of its worst drought in decades and many parts of the country, including the Western Cape - the main wine producing province - still lack sufficient rainfall. SA produces about 3% of the world's wine from nearly 100,000ha of vineyards.

The Western Cape's wine and fruit industries face an R1.2bn loss this year because of the drought, according to the provincial government. The province produces 55%-60% of SA's agricultural exports.

The provincial government said at the weekend that its disaster management centre had recommended that water restrictions be implemented in the province during the rainy winter until dam levels increased to acceptable levels.

### Surprisingly good

Erhard Wolf, responsible for Distell's grape and wine supply, said this year's wine grape harvest had been one of "the hottest, driest and most difficult to plan, but surprisingly good in terms of quality, judging by the season's young wines, with alcohols at very acceptable levels".

Wolf said yields were significantly down on average as a result of the drought preceding the harvest, although not all areas had been equally affected.

"In our experience, the coastal region yields were down about 20% although there were some instances of volumes being lower by as much as 70%, particularly for dry-farmed vines."

"The later-ripening aromatic whites are showing extremely well in the cellar, and the reds have delivered excellent colour and concentration of flavour. We are also very happy with alcohol levels at around 13% for our red wines."

## **Alternative sources**

Wolf said Distell's substantial footprint across the wine-growing areas of the Western Cape and along the Orange River in the Northern Cape, with ready access to grape supplies, had helped to offset the drop in yields.

"We have a very flexible sourcing policy, with the manoeuvrability to respond to a variety of climatic outcomes. We were also able to find alternative sources of organically cultivated fruit to make up for the shortfall. These grapes were all from relatively dry climate areas, but with access to water and where conditions are not generally conducive to fungal disease."

Western Cape local government, environmental affairs and development planning MEC Anton Bredell said rainfall predictions for the winter rainy season were "not ideal. If the drought persists, the availability of water in the next summer is of some concern."

*Source: Business Day*

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