

# 2017 HARVEST REPORT



**F**or as long as anyone can remember, there has never been a year as perplexing as 2017, with drastic weather patterns that greatly affected the growing season.

Extreme temperatures in both directions of the thermometer significantly impacted quantity and quality, having left winemakers helpless in the face of Mother Nature. An unusual and unexpected frost in late April killed buds that were just forming, greatly reducing yields for many, while a heatwave in July caused drought and extreme dryness, burning leaves and grapes alike and dehydrating the soils to desert-like conditions.

But all is not lost: while quantity is down, quality is absolutely not.

## QUANTITY

Assolenologi estimates a 25% reduction in production due to weather phenomena, coming in at about 41 million hectoliters.

## QUALITY

Quality will vary from region to region, and vineyard to vineyard with many, many points of excellence from the top to the bottom of the boot.

## LOMBARDIA

The growth cycle began early due to high April temperatures that were halted by uncharacteristic frost in late April. Spring was mild and summer hot, but excellent day/night temperature swings kept things in balance. Ripening was slow, leading to excellent maturation and there were no problems with disease or pests.

Ferghettina's Laura Gatti best

summarizes what happened for most in Franciacorta: "Harvest 2017 is marked by great damage caused by overnight frost conditions 19-21 April. The temperatures those three nights dropped significantly below zero compromising the development of buds and clusters. Quantity is down about 50%. However, in vineyards unaffected by the frost, grapes matured wonderfully. In fact, the rest of the season was perfect and the wines currently in the cellar are high level. So what do you usually say in these cases? Quality not quantity, and excellent quality at that!"

We also spoke to Giulia Gatti of Enrico Gatti who gave a technical outlook of how their vineyards were affected. "Compared to other years, the growth cycle began about a month early. But in mid-April, Franciacorta was affected by unforeseen frost. At the time, the buds were about 15 centimeters long

and the vineyards most affected were those half way up the hill. Fortunately, the plants did not die, but the buds were completely desiccated. Usually plants have three buds, the main one and the second and tertiary buds and one of those two could continue the cycle, but there is no guarantee it will produce grapes. In fact, after about three weeks, the growth cycle began once again but unfortunately, grapes were not produced. In the few cases where grapes grew, the quantity was scarce. However, the vineyards high on the hill, which are dedicated to our millesimati were unaffected. Unfortunately, it hailed in the first week of June, damaging the vineyards with a 25-40% loss. The weather was normal until the end of July when the heat wave came. We harvested 11-16 August. In other words, this vintage has proven to be quite complicated. We tried to extract the best possible quality, which is what we always strive for and are able to attain, also thanks to the right position and composition of the vines.”

In general, Lombardia is down 25%.

## PIEDMONT

Piedmont won't soon forget the spring frost, drought and heat of 2017. It was the tenth warmest winter in 60 years. They did get about 104 millimeters of rain, but it is still about 40% less than normal. Spring was the third warmest in 60 years. It was a long, hot summer with temperatures as high as 104 °F and harvest began early for most of the varieties.

Manuel Marchetti explains what happened at Marcarini: “Harvest 2017 took place much earlier than normal, perhaps it was even a record. The ripening of many varieties overlapped making the decisions and the work in the cellar very difficult. Hail and frost in the beginning of the season in some

areas also made things challenging. For example, our Moscato grapes got hit in March. Fortunately, we didn't have any more hail, but we did have a long period of drought, which has continued through to today. These conditions have benefited the health of the grapes and the concentration as well, but it has reduced the yield. All in all, the results are optimal and we have wonderful wines. I am sure this prediction will be confirmed in the future.”

We talked to Giuseppe Marengo of Ca' Rome' who said, “The 2017 vintage is considered a good one; the wines have high alcohol, good acidity and low yields, due to the hot and dry weather. Our wines will be more ready to drink with riper tannins. We started out with a mild winter with very little snow. But we'll always remember this year for its drastically low springtime temps that caused damage in many areas of Le Langhe. We were really lucky that we weren't affected by the April frost, having vineyards in higher Serralunga and different Barbaresco locations. September was hot and dry, but fortunately, we also had some rain and low temperatures, bringing necessary diurnal temperature changes. These factors – crucial to these grapes – greatly helped polyphenolic maturation of our Barbera and Nebbiolo grapes.”

## TRENTINO ALTO ADIGE

Winter was mild, but very dry, causing the vines to die in the lower valleys. The growth cycle began without any problems, but frost arrived, killing off large amounts of vineyards in certain areas, especially those growing Marzemino and Pinot Grigio. There were also a few hailstorms that caused damage. Temperatures in May and June were higher than normal and summer was hot and dry, but the grapes were able to mature well and

quality is expected to be very high.

In fact, Andi Punter of Franz Haas explains, “It was a difficult year, with the frost in April and hail in May, and an even stronger hailstorm on 9 August. Even during harvest the weather was instable, especially in the first three weeks. We began picking around 11 September. In any case, we are very happy with the quality of the grapes, but we are suffering a bit for the quantity. We finished harvesting last week with the Pinot Nero grapes grown at high altitudes.”

Quantity in the region will be down 10%.

## FRIULI VENEZIA GIULIA

Winter started out warm but then the cold finally arrived. It was also quite dry creating drought right away and about 2,000 hectares were affected by the April frost. There were also a few episodes of hail and as a result, winemakers lost about 15%. Summer was long, hot and dry, but thanks to winds in August, temps reduced and much needed day/night temperature swings helped the grapes ripen perfectly.

Overall quality is expected to be very good.

## VENETO

The growth cycle began about 10 days early and things were going well until the April frost hit, which wiped out a lot of vineyards at lower elevations. Things smoothed out in the region and vines affected by frost were able to produce fruit through the secondary buds. Summer was hot, and there were a few hailstorms and whirlwinds that further damaged the area.

The quality, however, is still looking as if it will be better than good, but quantity will be down about 15%.

Davide Del Cero, vineyard manager for Corte Giacobbe tells us about their experience: “The 2017 vintage will be remembered as one of the hottest and driest of the last century. We had a very unusual spring with frost that compromised the lower vineyards (luckily Tenuta Corte Giacobbe is on the hill so there was no damage). Because our vineyards are located above an inactive volcano, they need heat to ripen. The grapes were beautiful this year and they weren’t affected by the lack of water. Our wines will be structured but will have great acidity that will help them age well. We did make a bit less than usual but the quality will absolutely be better than average.”

## TUSCANY

Tuscany will be down a whopping 30% this vintage.

The April frost irregularly affected the region. In Montalcino for example, the cold winds responsible for the frost literally “jumped” over the mountain, hence wineries, leaving some with 70% losses and others with only 30% reductions. The summer season was scorching for everyone, but again with varying results.

Andrea Costanti of Costanti confirms that “In spite of summer being hot and dry, we picked exceptional grapes. This year truly highlighted the different areas of Montalcino and our area, being higher up and cooler, was absolutely privileged. Furthermore, we began harvest around 18 September, about 10 days earlier than usual for us and in any case, we were one of the last to pick in Montalcino. There will be a slight reduction in quantity due to the lack of water.”

Jacopo Morganti of Il Molino di Grace tells us what happened in Panzano: “We finished harvest last week, a bit earlier than usual; after the April frost

and the long dry summer, we were very surprised by the perfect quality of the grapes, how well they ripened and their health. However we are very upset about the low production. But that is all part of the game. With the arrival of rain in early September things substantially changed for the better. The grapes are perfect with alcohol around 14%, with excellent structure and color and very high quality. From an agronomist point of view, it was an easy year with no disease or rot, but a difficult one because of the frost and heat wave. Then again Sangiovese loves heat more than rain and this year it is truly perfect, crisp and spicy on the palate.”

## MARCHE

Marche is also looking at a large reduction this year. Spring was mild, with very little rain, and frost hit this area too. Temperatures were higher than average and because there was not much in the way of water reserves, this June and July were difficult months. July reached never-before highs for the third year in a row. Veraison and ripening took place at least three weeks early and harvest was also early.

In spite of problems and the 25% reduction in quantity, quality still looks good with many areas of excellence.

## UMBRIA

Winter was very cold and rainy, even snowy at times, but spring was mostly mild. The April frost caused massive damage and production is down 40%, even up to 80% in places where the buds were already well developed. Summer was long and dry with very few day/night temperature swings, giving grapes little time to recuperate. Still, quality looks good for Umbria.

Peter Heilbron of Tenuta Bellafonte

gives us his take. “This vintage was dry, also because of the spring freeze that especially affected the lower vineyards. Ours are hilly with good elevation, so they were not distressed by the cold, and during the hot, dry summer, they benefited from relatively cool nights. The fact that the soil was well worked and that we don’t use herbicides allowed the roots to seek humidity deep down, making sure they suffered less the lack of rain. The result is an earlier harvest with extremely healthy grapes but lower production than last year. They are more concentrated yielding less wine. Even though production is limited, we are sure we will have excellent quality wines.”

## ABRUZZO

This eastern Italian region will forever remember 2017 for record-breaking temperatures and out-of-the-ordinary weather events. The winter snowstorm the area experienced was the biggest seen in the last hundred years. It was followed by the freeze experienced in all of Italy and one of the driest summers on record. Oddly, the winter snowstorm actually saved later-ripening varieties from the frost as the growth cycle was delayed about two weeks. The summer was long and hot with a few hailstorms. Production is down about 30% over last year.

Il Feuduccio’s enologist Romano D’Amario explains what this means for them: “In regards to white grapes, there was very little rain during June, July and August and this guaranteed the health of the grapes while irrigation was needed for the more sensitive varieties. The must appears more harmonious than last year and the wine should be more complex on the nose and “full” on the palate. For red grapes, this harvest will be remembered for its low yield due to the persistent

high daytime temperatures and the substantial drought in September and early October. On the flip side, there were drastic drops in overnight temperatures. These weather patterns left us with a must with high sugar and low acidity, assuring wines with high alcohol and phenols. These wines will be very suitable to aging, even for long periods.”

## CAMPANIA

Interesting about Campania is that temperatures were quite low over winter, even lower than average. Snowcapped mountains also helped replenish water reserves and spring was mild, seeing very little rain. The April frost did lower temperature and some early-ripening varieties were affected, but quite sporadically in the region. After the frost, things went back to normal and the growth cycle continued normally until summer, which was one of the hottest it has been in 15 years with record-breaking highs throughout the season.

Harvest began early and quality is expected to be quite good and even quantity will be 5% higher than last year.

## PUGLIA

The winter season had an enormous influence over the growth cycle in this region. Winter was colder than average and spring was mild with little rain. A warm April favored early budding, which was interrupted by the same frost, greatly reducing production potential. The hot summer caused water stress and harvest began about ten days early.

The region is expecting a reduction of about 30% in quantity. White varieties will be higher in alcohol, but will seemingly preserve their fine quality. Reds will have excellent structure,

concentration and mature tannins.

## SICILY

Cool winters and a dry spring led to an even drier summer for the island. It seemed to have rained once in spring and then once again in early October. Sicily has never seen such fiery, relentless heat, with summer temperatures reached as high as 115 °F even touching 122 °F inland! As a result, extensive damage was done to farming.

On average, harvest took place much earlier with a 35% reduction in quantity. Things went better on Etna for the mere reason that it is high above the sea.

Michele Faro of Pietradolce gives us an explanation: “2017 was hot and dry and lasted a very long time. Our first rainfall after five months was last week! We are currently picking; we just finished whites and are working on the reds. On Etna, we were lucky that the scorching heat we had was balanced by the high altitude (3,000 feet above sea level) so the wines will absolutely have structure and body and will maintain the elegance and freshness typical of this area.”

## SARDINIA

The island was so varied, with high highs and low lows across the entire island. It is difficult to generalize because of such drastic differences so we went directly to our producers.

Raffaele Cani of Santadi explains that the weather for 2017 was “unusual even for Sardinia, with the almost total absence of rain and torrid heat that lasted for months. In Sulcis, in southwestern Sardinia where we are, the sandy, clayey soil (which maintains humidity), emergency irrigation, and [good] management of the quantity produced per plant, allowed us to

come out in the end with an almost normal harvest. Though we will be down about 15% in quantity. At the moment our wines are not done, but from our early tests, they are rich in aromas with excellent body and structure. We needed to watch our whites closer, for pH and acidity, but the results are wines with interesting aromatics, supported by their typical minerality, good acidity and balanced alcohol. The Tre Torri Rosato has a brilliant clear rose color. The Carignano is typically ample on the nose with intense mineral notes and wonderful freshness.”

Renato Spanu of Jankara explains, “This harvest was a struggle; the 2017 vintage will see 50% or less in production compared to previous vintages. The frost in mid-April burnt about 70% of the buds and the extreme heat and drought during the summer months guaranteed smaller production. However, the little amount of wine that is produced will be great quality and quite big in structure.”

**T**he big takeaway for the 2017 vintage – aside from the great quality – is that things varied in Italy, from region to region, and zone to zone. It will be important this year to follow the words of individual winemakers and not general vintage reports. All in all, it seems that while most of the wineries in Empson’s portfolio suffered some loss in terms of quantity, quality has hung on quite strong. Of course it means Mother Nature was kinder to them, but it is also due to the great skill and foresight of our outstanding winemakers in managing what was handed to them.