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2009 Oregon Harvest Roundup

Oregon Wine Board

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2009 Oregon Harvest Roundup

Harvest delivers plentiful yields in Willamette Valley with near normal crop loads throughout rest of state; expectations for high quality wine abound

November 6, 2009 – The fruit is off the vine, and in wineries throughout the state, wines are quietly fermenting and will soon make their way into tanks or barrels. After an early and sometimes furious harvest, winemakers – now caught up on sleep – are reflecting on the 2009 harvest and reporting plentiful yields in some areas and the potential for a high quality vintage.

Harvest continued into the third week of October for the Willamette Valley and Eastern Oregon; and through the end of the month in Southern Oregon.

A forecasted warm and dry harvest period gave way to cooler than expected conditions in late September and early October, but fortunately the majority of the fruit statewide was at or near its ripening plateau, according to Dr. Greg Jones, a climatologist at Southern Oregon University in Ashland, Oregon who monitors conditions throughout the state's winegrowing regions.

Even with a cooler end to the season, the 2009 vintage cumulative growing degree day (GrDD) values for Roseburg (2,985), Medford (3,384), and Milton-Freewater (3,402) reveal a 4 to 14 percent increase over 2008, similar to the warm 2004 and 2006 vintages. For McMinnville (2,161), there was a 7 percent increase in heat accumulation over 2008, with values near the 2005 vintage; however units were slightly below the seven-year average (Charts 1 and 2).

The weather signature for 2009 is one of high week-to-week temperature variability with wide swings between both record high and record low maximum temperatures, Jones said, but with little to no effect on resulting fruit quality.

Rain events that occurred over the Labor Day and Columbus Day weekends did not negatively affect grape quality. Botrytis pressure was apparent but relatively low, and according to growers, easily sorted on the crushpad. A final heat spike at harvest dehydrated many clusters, reducing yields and concentrating flavors. Extended hang time was reported throughout the state, as growers and winemakers waited for optimal flavor development and ripeness to counter slightly elevated sugar levels.

“The barometer needle stayed in the dry zone well into October, with the long growing season enabling full flavor development.” said Ted Farthing, executive director of the Oregon Wine Board. “Another classic vintage, by a whisker.”

Regional Overviews

Willamette Valley

We had almost record long hang time this year. The fruit was deeply ripe and, because of a three day late September heat spike, sugars got quite high. The wines seem in balance though. The lush, ripe wines will probably be received quite enthusiastically if the past is any guide. – **Dick Shea, Shea Vineyard/ Shea Wine Cellars**

There is a personality to each vintage, a pedigree made of weather and terroir that is both intellectually and hedonistically interesting. This vintage is similar to 2002, with good weather during harvest and lots of fruit, therefore satisfying both winemakers and accountants. Flavors are mineral accented, with no real overripe characters. Whites are typically white flower, spices and stone fruit in character, again with no overripeness showing. In general, Pinot noirs will be flashy and spectacular this year, with good heat for phenolic

ripeness, cool final ripening conditions the last 3-4 weeks to retain acidity, and yields that, although not excessive with appropriate crop thinning, give great wines in good quantity. Some early season heat in warmer sites contributed to a little botrytis and desiccation, so we justify sorting conveyors and even a pass of vineyard sorting, made easy to take with lots of clusters hanging. With site differences, we brought in fruit bright and acid driven, but also rich and broad-palated fruit from warm or lower-yielding sites. – **Harry Peterson-Nedry, Chehalem**

Three weeks prior to harvest, we had one inch of rain over a weekend, followed by several warm days near 90 with drying winds. Concerns of the effects of desiccation/shriveling have given way to fresh fruit aromatics with an emphasis on the high notes. Wines appear very balanced in their alcohol and acidity levels. Color is in a normal range, neither light nor intensely dark. – **Ken Wright, Ken Wright Cellars**

We ended up with that rare combination of excellent quality and quantity. Hang time was long, sugars were high, especially toward the end. But I'm convinced that there will be a lot of excellent wine made -- probably much like 2006. Here at Bethel Heights Vineyard we left soft fruit hang for longer than I can remember in 30 + vintages, and that has to be a good thing. – **Ted Casteel, Bethel Heights**

I think they will be magnificently intriguing wines- comely, gregarious, and very intriguing. Overall quality should be superb. There was some Botrytis pressure out in the Valley, but by the time the fruit crossed our sorting table, I only saw a few clusters here and there that were affected. – **Jesse Lange, Lange Estate Winery**

This year is characterized by big berries, which means that patient vintners will be rewarded by long soaks and time coaxing flavors and pigment out of the fruit. 2009 will make good to excellent wine depending on skill and patience of the vintner. It is a year of the winemaker, not vineyard. Sugars got up there while we all waited for flavor, so alcohols will be higher but the flavor is there for those who know how to get it. – **Steve Girard, Benton-Lane Winery**

I believe it's still too early to assess ultimate flavor profiles, but see a big, ripe, showy vintage with some fabulous, intensely fruited character wines. – **Kevin Chambers, Resonance Vineyard, Oregon Vineyard Supply/Results Partners**

The fruit just kept rolling in and we never had to work all that hard. The wine is pretty forward with rounder tannin. Great color, higher alcohol, better acid and more freshness than 2006, but similar. – **Sam Tannahill, A to Z Wineworks**

As we approached harvest we had cooler, more normal temperatures. The result was that we saw brix levels higher than normal but we had plenty of hang time to reach full maturity without excessive alcohol in most varieties. Later ripening varieties like Riesling ripened more slowly in the cool weather of mid and late October, so alcohol levels were normal but acid and pH levels were perfect. This vintage will give us big wines with plenty of ripe fruit character but not at the expense of good acid balance. The Pinot Noir has very dark color and more body than usual for us. The early whites (Pinot Gris) will be ripe and mouth filling with more tropical notes but the late varieties like Riesling will be more typical of a cooler vintage. – **Rudy Marchesi, Montinore Estate**

Columbia Gorge & Eastern Oregon

The mid season heat wave really accelerated sugar development, while flavor and grape maturity needed additional time on the vine. We picked our earliest ever, beginning in the last few days of September. The harvest was relatively compact, with most fruit in by October 10th. I see the flavors of 2009 being complex and immensely pleasurable. Expect big, crowd-pleasing wines. – **Bob Morus, Phelps Creek Vineyards (Columbia Gorge)**

A hot summer made for early harvest. We finished picking Seven Hills on Oct. 9 and saw 20 degrees on Oct. 10 so our timing gears were either very good or we were very lucky (or both). Quality seems very good, everything ripened at one time and we were held up while wineries tried to get fermenter space to take the second and third round. Sugars were well ahead of flavor; but even after waiting for flavor to catch up, harvest finished about 10 days ahead of normal. – **Norm McKibben, Pepper Bridge Vineyards, Seven Hills Vineyards, SeVein Vineyards (Walla Walla Valley)**

Weather was very dry, moderately warm with no rain in September. The Walla Walla Valley received about an inch in early October, with minimal effects on quality. Picking was near 75% done, when a severe frost event stopped further ripening on October 11th at most sites. Fortunately, this was a very ripe year already. Only very late varieties on very late sites will see quality affected. Yields were near normal for most vineyards. Tonnage will be slightly up for the valley over last year due to new acreage coming on line. I would say this is a ripe year, alcohols will be above average, with great structure and color. Nice forward fruit flavors and aromas. – **Casey McClellan, Seven Hills Winery (Walla Walla Valley)**

Southern Oregon

2009 tonnage was down 20 to 30 percent, but exceeded our expectations in quality. We started slow, but were able to take advantage of the warmer than normal weather in the late summer. We ended up harvesting, at full ripeness, one to two weeks earlier than normal. – **Kara Olmo, Wooldridge Creek Winery (Applegate Valley)**

It was an unusual harvest and did not follow my predictions of an early harvest. We started 10 days after our expected first pick and were in a picking frenzy. The sudden warmth during flowering had accelerated phenology on early, middle and late varieties, such that fruit maturity also occurred at the same time thus the need to pick everything at once. Excellent [flavor profiles], with Tempranillo, Syrah and Albarino perfect. – **Earl Jones, Abacela (Umpqua Valley)**

Overall a very good year. There seem to be two standout points to this harvest – some very long hang times and very spicy fruit. I was worried heading into September that the sugars were getting ahead of the acid, pH, and flavor development in many of the vineyards where we buy fruit, but lo and behold, Mother Nature stepped in with some cooler weather and a touch of rain at the perfect time. As a result, we were able to hang out and wait. And wait. And then wait some more, pushing some of our post-ripening hang times out to as much as 80 days, producing what I think are some extremely high quality grapes. – **Pat Spangler, Spangler Vineyards (Umpqua Valley)**

The upside of the late, cool weather was that many varieties were given long hang times, allowing for full flavor maturation without excessive sugar accumulation. We think that the quality will be very good overall, and excellent in many cases. Alcohol levels will be relatively low (<14%), with pHs consistently in the 3.0 – 3.6 range for reds, and in the 3.0 – 3.5 range for whites. Color is excellent as usual in the cooler Applegate. Fruit development is mostly excellent. In particular, we are excited by Viognier, which is showing great body and complexity, aided probably by the low yields. Most Syrah sites were picked quite late, and the early wines show great color, nice acids and aroma profiles, and a certain finesse. – **Chris Martin, Troon Vineyard (Applegate Valley)**

This is a very good quality year, characterized by the word "balance". Alcohols are slightly on the high side but balanced with wine structure. Acid balance was very easy to achieve in the wines, as the total acidity/pH relationship was in balance. Color and flavor development were very good across the board. Grapes were fully ripe and exhibited very good varietal characteristics. – **John Quinones, RoxyAnn Winery (Rogue Valley)**

*Appendix Charts 1-3, provided by Dr. Greg Jones, Southern Oregon University
Data presented as of November 5, 2009*

Chart 1: Heat accumulation for the 2009 vintage was 4 to 14% above 2008, and tracked either near or above the averages of the last seven vintages, until the start of October where cool conditions stopped any further heat accumulation.

2009 Growing Season Cumulative Degree-Days

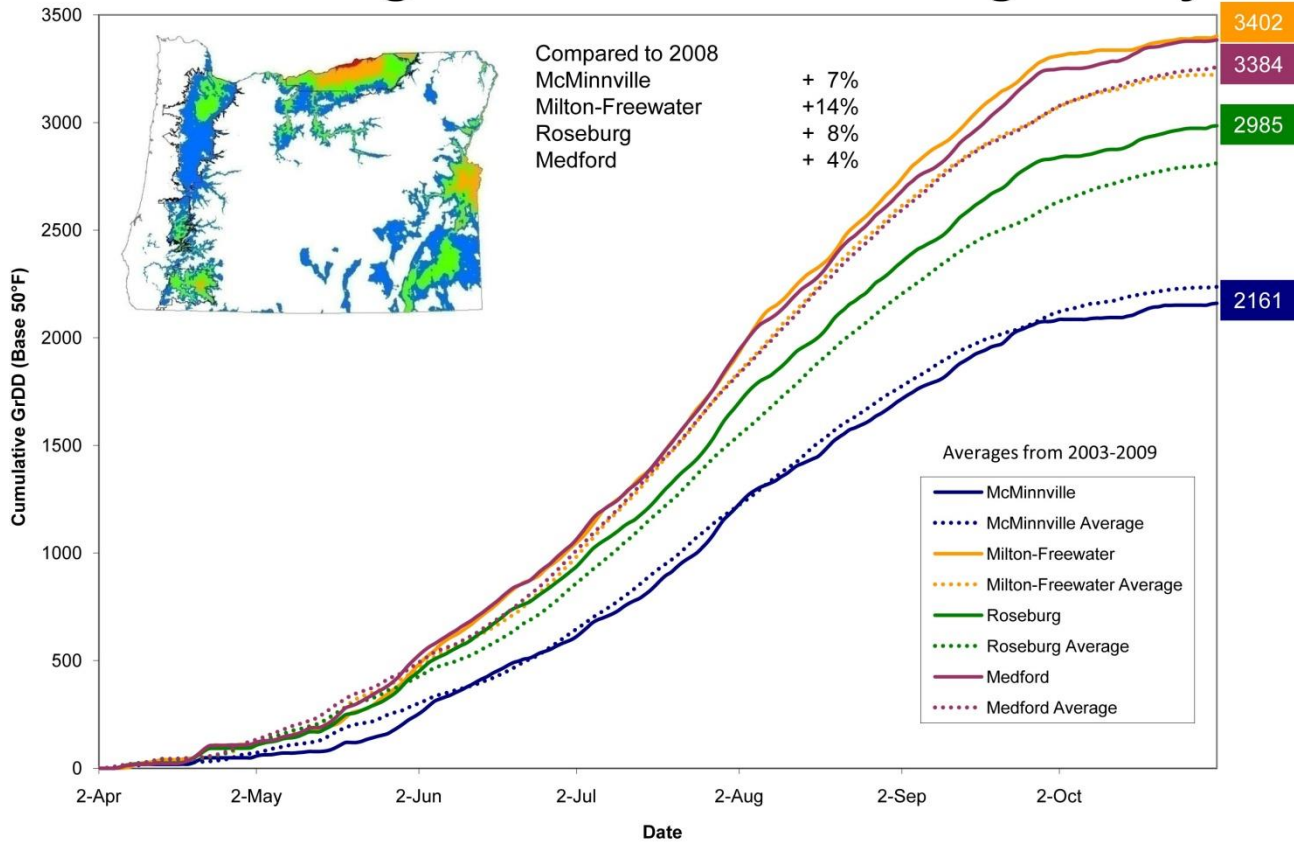


Chart 2: Four region 2003-2009 growing degree-day comparison – The 2009 vintage ended up being warmer than the seven year average for all locations (4-6%) except McMinnville, which ended up -3% lower than the seven year average.

2003-2009 Growing Season Degree-Days

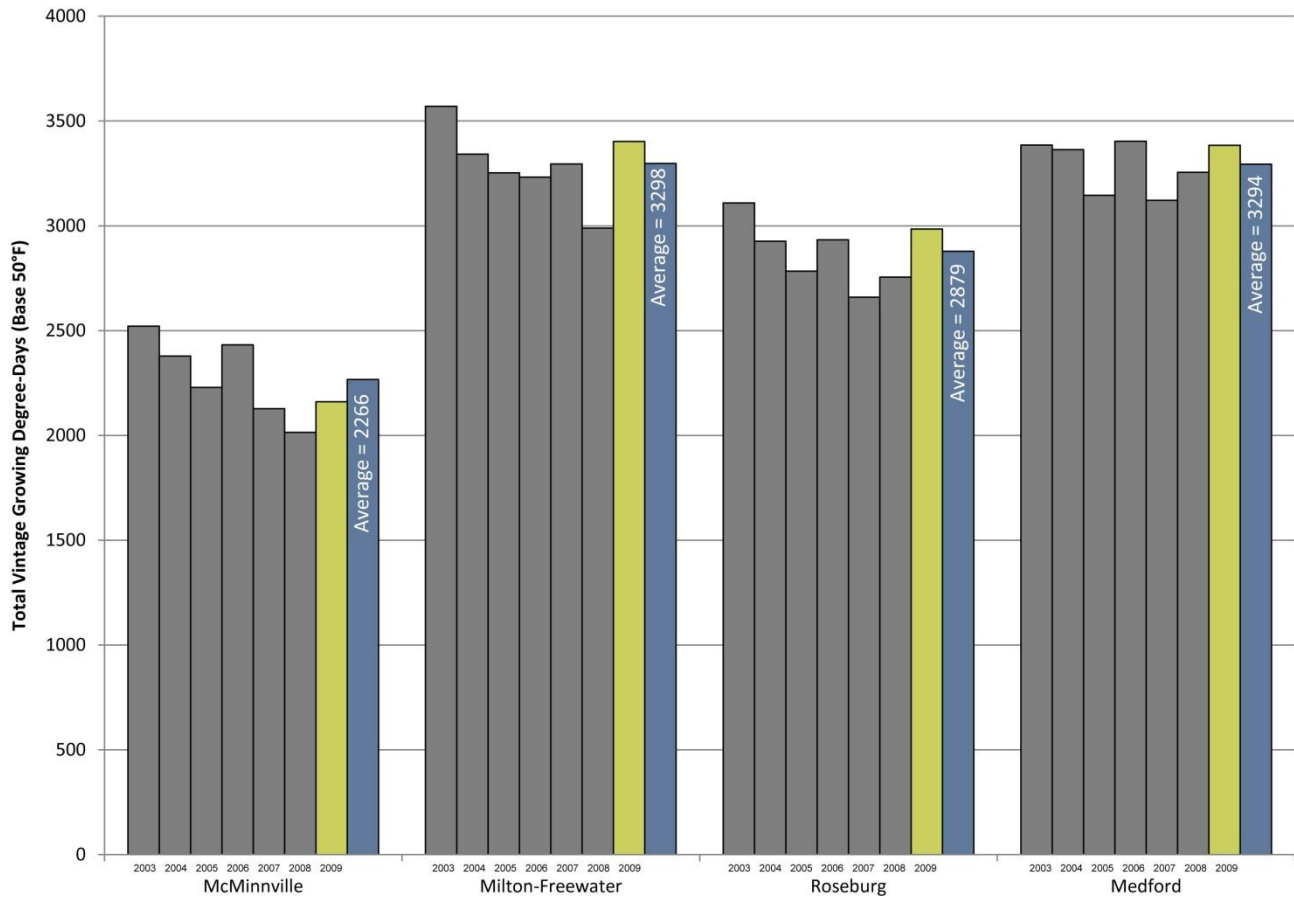
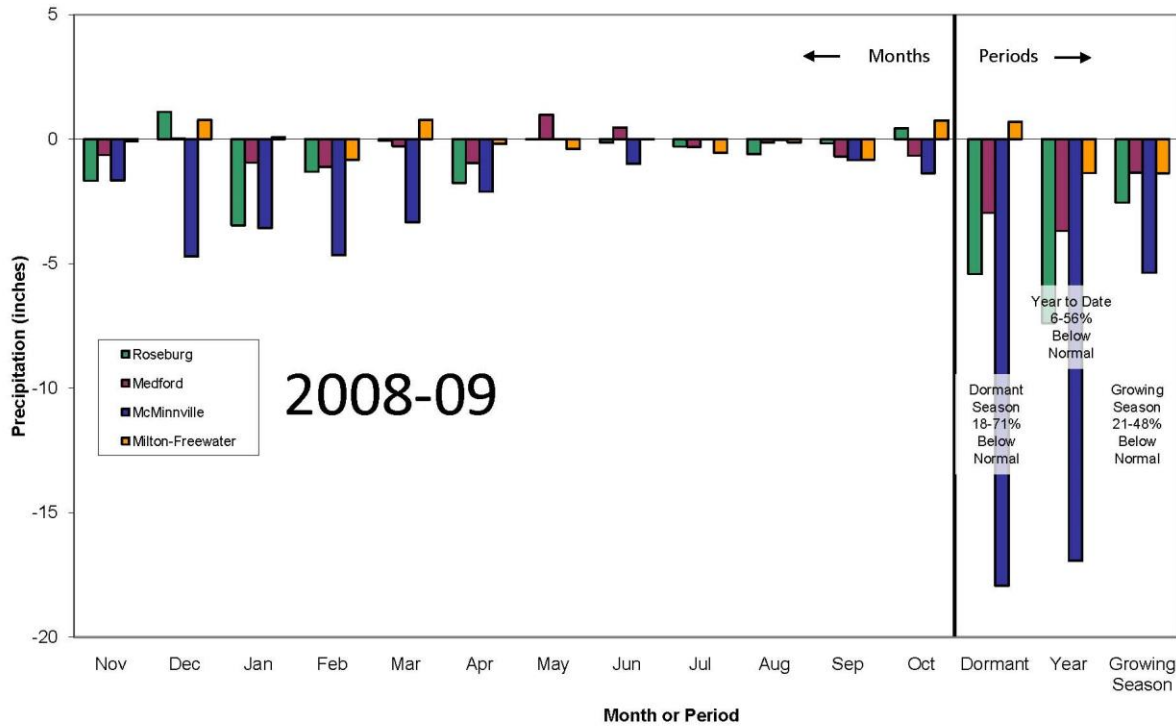


Chart 3: The year to date and growing season rainfall totals have continued below normal statewide.

2008-09 Regional Precipitation Departures from Normal



This chart represents precipitation departures by month, the dormant period (Nov-Mar), the year (Jan-Oct), and the growing season (Apr-Oct) from the NWS stations (www.noaa.gov)

For a list of regional spokespersons or additional insight on the 2009 vintage, please contact Stephany Boettner, Marketing & Communications Director of the Oregon Wine Board, at stephany@oregonwine.org or 503.228.8652.