

March 2008

Bottling it up for a vine year

A long dry summer looks to have paved the way for the largest Marlborough vintage to date as the harvest gets underway this week.

With 2008 set to be the 30th vintage of the region's signature Sauvignon Blanc, winemakers say a warm, dry season promises it will be one to remember.

"Marlborough has had good flowering and fruitset, and along with this, the region largely escaped frost damage, so things are looking very positive for not just a large harvest but one of fantastic quality" says Jeff Clarke, Pernod Ricard New Zealand's chief winemaker.

This year Pernod Ricard New Zealand, formerly Montana, New Zealand's premier winemaker, will kick off its Marlborough harvest with its early season varieties, including Chardonnay and Pinot Noir for the ever-growing sparkling wine export market.

With new vineyards coming on-stream all the time, Marlborough was the strongest growing wine region in 2007 and is the driving force behind the forecast increase in New Zealand wine production. The region last year produced about 59% of the national harvest, totalling 120,888 tonnes.

While the area boasts growing yields of a variety of grapes, including Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, Pinot Gris and Reising, it is of course Sauvignon Blanc with which Marlborough is synonymous.

The region's signature grape was first commercially planted in Marlborough by Montana in 1975, with the first vintage produced in 1979.

What was seen at the time as a gamble has paid off for the region, and Marlborough's Sauvignon Blanc has won admirers, and awards, the world over – even outshining those wines from the variety's Loire Valley homeland.

With Sauvignon Blanc making up almost 75% of New Zealand's wine exports last year, the harvest is one which draws interest from around the globe. And for those who love the crisp, zesty flavours unique to Marlborough the news is that a good harvest is expected.

"We have seen warmer temperatures than last year and everyone knows it has been very dry. Put together, these two factors should make for a high quality harvest, and I'm sure everyone will be looking forward to tasting the 2008 vintage," says Jeff Clarke.

"While the harvesting won't reach full steam for a couple of weeks, we have been busy on the vineyards actively crop-thinning a number of our key varieties, including Pinot Noir, to ensure the quality is as high as

possible.”

Pernod Ricard’s Marlborough harvest will get underway this week with hand harvesting fruit for the company’s flagship bubbly, Deutz Marlborough Cuveé, closely followed by Pinot Noir.

The Sauvignon Blanc harvest is expected to start in the final week of March. Last year Marlborough produced 89% of New Zealand’s Sauvignon Blanc, totalling 90,775 tonnes.

High resolution images available on request.

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