



Harvest Report — Uruguay 2021

English — Spanish

Gabi Zimmer

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by Gabi Zimmer

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*“All art is but imitation
of nature.”*

Séneca

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► Tannat
harvest at
Bodega Cerro
del Toro,
Piriápolis,
Maldonado.
11th of March
of 2021.



A harvest full of decisions

The 2021 harvest of white grapes began in Uruguay during the first days of February when it rained non-stop. The rains occurred with different frequencies and intensities in all wine regions of the country. In some zones, this rainy panorama was totally different, with very isolated and scarce rainfall. Wine producers agree that it was a year in which decisions had to be made at the right time. Uruguayan winegrowers are not alarmed by the rains, thanks to their years of experience growing vines in Uruguay, they managed to sharpen their senses and intuition, in addition, of course, to the increasingly precise technological tools that provide them with the necessary information to solve uncertainties.

After those rainy days at the start of the harvest, the water stopped, and with the beginning of the red grape harvest the days became typical of summer, with pleasant temperatures, and low and isolated rains.

Another harvest that takes place with the sanitary restrictions proposed by the Uruguayan government in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. With

frontiers closed, the high number of active cases and with the start of vaccination at a steady pace, the winegrowers faced the situation to literally harvest the fruits of their labour.

This report continues my annual study of harvests in Uruguay that began in 2020 and whose main purpose is to provide tools for a thorough comprehension of the wines of each vintage, with information and data that allows to know the characteristics of that particular year. My book on Uruguayan wines, "[Uruguay in Wines: a journey through the history and terroir of Uruguayan wine](#)", has a summary of the main observations of the vintages of the last ten years, as well as information about wine regions, wines and producers.

Important observations about the 2021 vintage

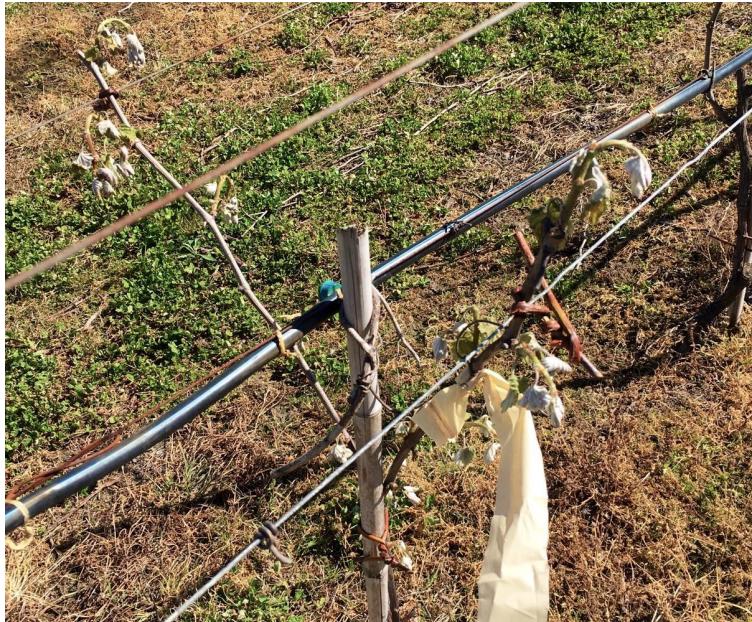
| | |
|---|---|
| 1 | Agrometeorological frosts in September in different wine regions that affected vine shoots. |
| 2 | Important precipitation at the beginning of the harvest mainly in the Oceanic wine region that includes the departments of Maldonado and Rocha. |
| 3 | Normal harvest period. The initial date considered by INAVI was February 17, 2021 up to April 9, 2021, lasting 52 days. |
| 4 | Good sanitary condition of the grapes. |
| 5 | Stable average temperatures. |
| 6 | 5,991 hectares of vineyards in Uruguay in 2021. |
| 7 | 99,574,103 kilos of grapes harvested from 163 producers registered in INAVI. |
| 8 | 74,833,243.79 liters of Uruguayan wine made in the 2021 vintage. |

Budbreak, flowering and fruit setting of the vine

During the budbreak stage in the annual cycle of the vine, small shoots emerge from the buds in spring. In Uruguay this event takes place in September as in the rest of the wine-growing countries of the Southern Hemisphere at similar latitudes. When this phenomenon occurs, it means that the time in which the vine sleeps during the coldest days of the year is over. The first signs of awakening are when the plant begins to drip water from the pruning cuts. Pruning in Uruguay occurs mainly in July. The buds that were left in the winter begin to swell in the weeks before budbreak, this can be seen in the vineyard with the first signs of green on the plants.

Budbreak is more uniform when the weather is cold but without frost in winter. The [INIA](#) (National Institute of Agricultural Research) registered agrometeorological frosts in its five official stations during the months of September and October. The departments affected were: Canelones, Colonia,

► Frosts at
Bodega Casa
Grande,
Canelones.



Florida, Lavalleja, Maldonado, Montevideo, Paysandú and San José.

INIA's weather stations are designed for livestock, which is one of the main industries in the country, that is why they are located in strategic areas for this activity and not for viticulture, which represents a minority percentage of the Uruguayan economy. Some wineries with more technological resources have their own meteorological stations and use this information to make internal decisions. Therefore, I would like to point out that although the

information used is from meteorological stations which are not very close to the vineyards (except Las Brujas and Salto), my scientific basis indicates that it is correct to be guided by truthful and statistical data accompanying the testimonies of the winegrowers. The first we can analyze and evaluate objectively, the second provides a layer of realism and subjective vision that is always important to understand the global scenario.

In mid-September late frosts burned many of the shoots that were developing in good condition. Late spring frosts are especially damaging to the vine because they affect the buds that have already emerged from the plant.



► Frosts at
Juan De Maio's
vineyard in
Canelones.

This unpredictable and natural agrometeorological phenomenon affects winegrowers who had to re-plan the conditions in which they guided the plants to obtain the results they were looking for the harvest. The [INAVI](#) (National Institute of Viticulture) reported that there were 1,489 hectares of vineyards affected with partial losses.

Regarding the sanitary conditions, the low rainfall during the budbreak, flowering and fruit setting periods, facilitated the good development of the grapes without problems of diseases that can arise during this stage.

► Budbreak at Bodega Cerro del Toro, Maldonado, flowering at Sierra Oriental, Maldonado, and fruit setting at Becasina, Rocha.



► Figure 1.
 Data from INIA stations in the period September to December.

| Station | Average temperature (°C) | Maximum temperature (°C) | Minimum temperature (°C) | Accumulated precipitation (mm) |
|----------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Las Brujas | 16,8 | 23,2 | 10,8 | 246,4 |
| La Estanzuela | 17,3 | 23,3 | 12,4 | 249,4 |
| Salto Grande | 20,5 | 27,3 | 12,7 | 381,6 |
| Tacuarembó | 19,1 | 24,5 | 13,1 | 362,2 |
| Treinta y Tres | 17,3 | 28,8 | 16,8 | 356,6 |

► Tannat
harvest at
Bodega
Cerro del
Toro,
Piriápolis,
Maldonado.
11th of
March of
2021.



Véraison and harvest

With the increase of temperatures when summer arrives, the berries of the vine go through veraison which is the moment when they begin to ripen and change their color. The temperatures in Uruguay during the veraison of this cycle were favourable for the correct ripening of the grapes.

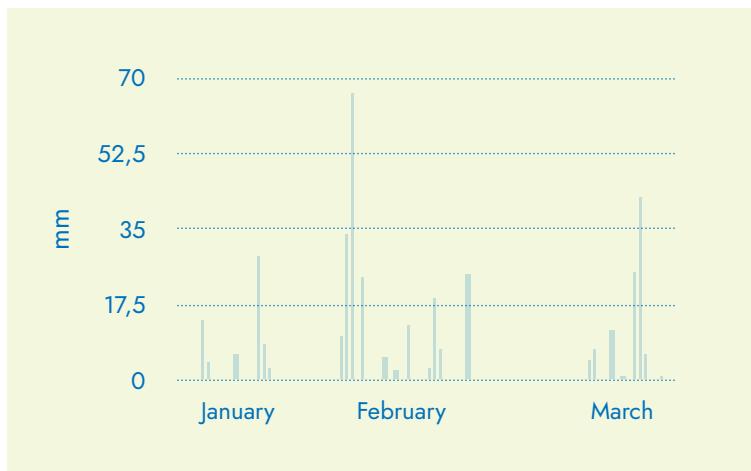
In January 2021, there was significant rainfall throughout the country, especially in the Oceanic wine region that includes the departments of Maldonado and Rocha. Humidity favours the agents that cause bunch rot (Botrytis and Acid Rot). INAVI inspected vineyards in different areas of the country, finding occasional sources of rot of low severity.

The initial date considered by INAVI for the start of the harvest was February 17, 2021 up to April 9, 2021, lasting 52 days. Regarding the sanitary conditions during the harvest, it was good in general. Also the probable alcoholic strength was normal.

► Figure 2.
Data from
INIA stations
in the period
January to
March.

| Station | Average temperature (°C) | Maximum temperature (°C) | Minimum temperature (°C) | Accumulated precipitation (mm) |
|----------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Las Brujas | 21,7 | 27,5 | 16,4 | 372,7 |
| La Estanzuela | 21,7 | 27,0 | 17,4 | 399,2 |
| Salto Grande | 24,3 | 30,4 | 16,9 | 270,0 |
| Tacuarembó | 22,5 | 28,2 | 16,8 | 493,1 |
| Treinta y Tres | 21,9 | 28,2 | 16,8 | 544,6 |

► Figure 3.
Accumulated
precipitation
from January
to March.
Data from the
INIA station
in Las Brujas.



The 2021 vintage in numbers

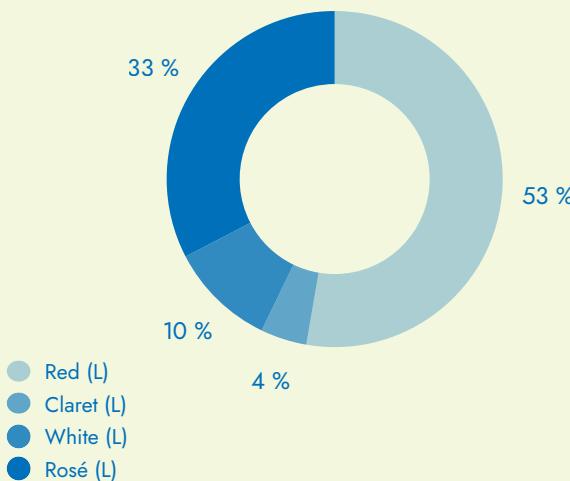
The 2021 harvest resulted in 99,574,103 kilos of grapes harvested from 163 producers registered in [INAVI](#). Regarding the style of wines made in the 2021 vintage and the liters of wine produced from the harvest, differentiated by winemaking styles, we can see that Uruguay is a red wine producing country. It is followed by the production of rosé wines, although it must be taken into account that the production of table wines and fine wines is not reported separately.

Clarete (a Spanish term) is produced from a mixture of white and red grapes or their musts. Fermentation takes place in the presence of the red skins and in a partial way, which is why a low degree of alcohol is obtained. Also the maceration is short and that results in a pale colour, similar to a rosé. In Uruguay, INAVI regulations do not allow the use of the term “Clarete” for VCP wines (Vino de Calidad Preferente) denomination used in Uruguay for fine wines.

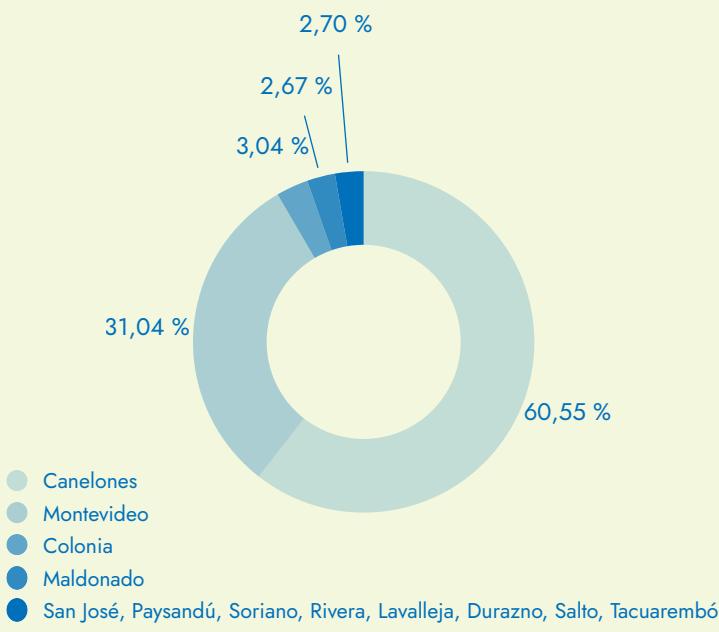
► Figure 4.
Styles and
liters of wine
produced by
department.
INAVI data.

| Department | Red (L) | Claret (L) | White (L) | Rosé (L) | Total (L) |
|---------------------|-------------|---------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|
| Canelones | 24438348 | 2713364,00 | 4528498,78 | 13630036,58 | 45310247,36 |
| Montevideo | 10899177,00 | 418230,00 | 2186174,31 | 9726709,65 | 23230290,96 |
| Colonia | 1614459,00 | 86100,00 | 149158,2 | 428555,00 | 2278272,2 |
| Maldonado | 1169433,62 | 0,00 | 597863,93 | 227900,72 | 1995198,27 |
| Rest of the country | 1322017,00 | 108970,00 | 189277,4 | 398970,00 | 2019234,4 |
| Total | 39443434,62 | 3326664 | 7650972,62 | 24412171,95 | 74833243,19 |

► Figure 5.
Styles of wines
made in
Uruguay and
impact on the
total
production.
INAVI data.



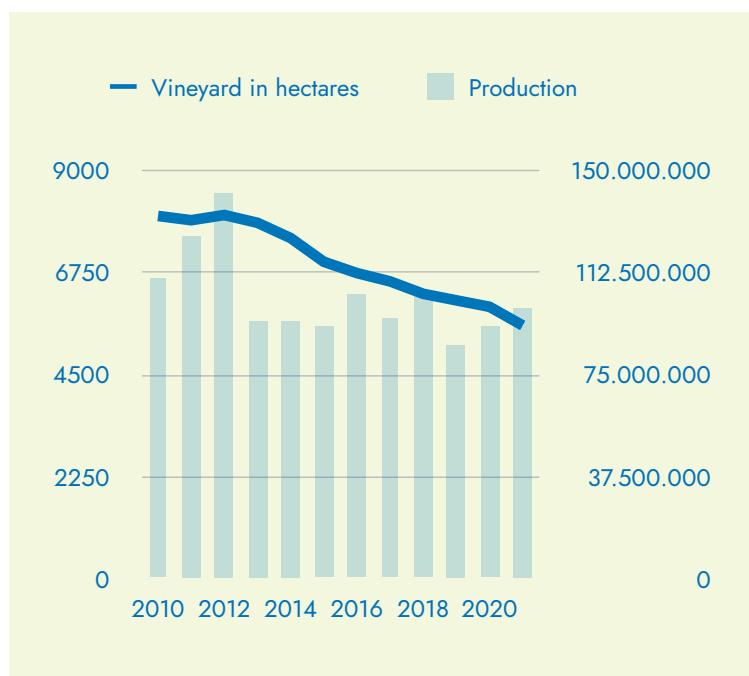
► Figure 6.
Uruguayan wine
production in
liters by
department in
the 2021
vintage.



When observing the figures of wine production in each department, we can see that more than 90% is developed in the Metropolitan region that includes Canelones, Montevideo and San José. This is the Uruguayan wine region with the highest incidence in the total production, where the majority of Uruguayan producers are concentrated and the one with the largest vineyard area. In addition to this, new wine projects are also being developed in other regions, for example in Artigas, Lavalleja, Durazno, Tacuarembó, Rocha and Maldonado. That shows the interest in continuing exploring what Uruguay has to offer regarding wines.

Grape production and vineyard area in the last 11 years

The vineyard area in Uruguay continues decreasing year after year. While in 2020 the registered vineyard area data was 6002 hectares, in 2021 the figures are 5991 hectares throughout Uruguay. Even so, the data indicate that more grapes were harvested, or at least that this grapes had a greater weight compared to last year.



► Figure 7.
Uruguayan
production
of grapes in
kilos (to the
right of the
graph) and
vineyard
area in
hectares (to
the left of
the graph)
in the last 11
years.

► Pinot noir
harvest in
Becasina,
Rocha. 16 of
February of
2021.



Conclusions

Every time it loses more meaning to me that a vintage was good or bad, good for whom? Good for what? Subjectivity invites me to question whether it is worth cataloging something, labeling it, and restricting its interpretation. In addition, I consider that making wine is an art and that imitating what nature grants year after year is part of highlighting those virtues and differences that make us unique.

The real results of the harvests are perceived in the wines and for that we must wait. We can conclude that it has been a harvest of decisions, of testing the quick and conscious response of winegrowers in terms of when to harvest. There has also been vine losses due to the frosts that occurred in September in different wine-growing regions of the country and that represented damage of shoots. During the ripening of the grapes, the winegrowers also had to pay attention to the sanitary conditions of the grapes due to excessive rains at the beginning of the year.

We expect white wines with moderate concentration and natural acidity. The reds are predicted to have an interesting concentration of ripe fruit aromas and flavours, moderate to high alcohol level, depending on the chosen winemaking styles. Once again, the wines will show their characteristics and potential when they are ready to be appreciated. The conditions are set so that the wines of the 2021 vintage stand out due to the knowledge and experience of the producers when working in vintages with characteristics that vary from one year to another.

► Pinot noir
harvest in
Becasina,
Rocha. 16 of
February of
2021.



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- Virtual event “[Directo del Viñedo. Vendimia 2021](#)” of the Associação Brasileira de Enologia. The Uruguayan representatives, President of INAVI Ricardo Cabrera and the Technical Director of Bodega Bouza, Eduardo Boido, made a presentation about the characteristics of the 2021 vintage in Uruguay.

Acknowledgments

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About me: Gabi Zimmer



I spread the word about Uruguayan wine and I help wine producers to tell their story. I am a Professional Sommelière, a candidate for the DipWSET of the WSET Institute in London and an international wine jury. In 2021 I publish my book on Uruguayan wines, "Uruguay in Wines: a journey through the history and terroir of Uruguayan wine".

I also launched Tinta, a marketing agency whose mission is to transform wine companies focusing on the connection between people, nature and wine.

To read more about me and my work you can access my website gabizimmer.com and find me on social media with the user [@gabizimmeruy](https://www.instagram.com/gabizimmeruy)

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