



Harvest Report — Uruguay 2020

by Gabi Zimmer

English — Spanish

gabizimmer.com

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"You can make bad wine with good grapes, but you can't make good wine with bad grapes."

Popular saying

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► Vintage
Festival at
Bodega
Garzón



An exceptional vintage

Wine experts in Uruguay agree that it has been one of the best vintages in the history of Uruguayan viticulture. Some even think that it was the best. The memory of 2020 will be written, in addition, by another reality, the COVID-19 pandemic that keeps the world in a state of alert and uncertainty. Despite this, the conditions in which the 2020 vintage took place indicate that in the coming times it will be possible to enjoy the excellent quality of the Uruguayan wines from this vintage.

Despite the important changes in Uruguayan viticulture in recent years, where there have been enormous investments in new technology, in the winery and in the vineyard, in training, and more, the climate continues to be the determinant of the quality and quantity of the grapes. This report includes the main climatic characteristics of the 2020 vintage, from the beginning of the burburst, in September 2019, to the end of the harvest of the majority of winegrowers at the end of March 2020. Also, you will find in this report, an analysis of the impact of these climatic characteristics on the yields

and quality of the grapes in this leap year compared to other years in Uruguay.

This report inaugurates my annual study of harvests in Uruguay that aims to provide tools to better understand the wines of each vintage, with information and figures that allow us to know the characteristics of that particular period. My book on Uruguayan wines, which will be published when a new cycle of the vine in Uruguay begins in 2020, will feature a summary of the main observations of the previous vintages.

Important observations on the 2020 vintage

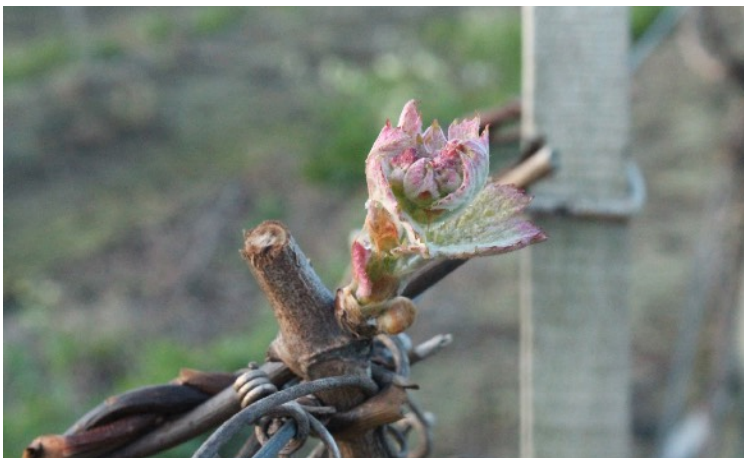
1	Very dry with practically zero rainfall throughout the period.
2	Harvest period longer than usual. The harvest began at the end of January and ended on mid April.
3	Perfect sanitary conditions of the grapes.
4	Average temperatures without sudden variations.
5	Hot days and cool nights. Daily average temperature range in February and March of 12°C.
6	92,924,166 kilos of grapes harvested from 160 production companies registered with INAVI (National Institute of Viticulture).
7	6,002 hectares of vineyard in Uruguay in 2020.
8	68% of this total fruit harvested corresponds to 88 companies located in the department of Canelones, the main production area of the country

The growing season

During the month of September, in the Southern Hemisphere, the budburst occurs. While this process occurs the buds swell, open and begin to emerge. It is critical for the correct maturation of the grapes to have a growing season with enough heat during the day and without frost that can attack the shoots, causing their detachment from the plant. At this stage the vineyard needs an average air temperature, and also a soil temperature, above 10 °C.

It is important that the temperature increases progressively so that the plants can also grow gradually. This directly affects the final result of the harvest where it is sought that the berries of the same vine, especially from the same plot, reach the desired level of ripeness at the same time. These characteristics vary according to the different grape varieties and also due to human factors such as the time of pruning in winter, which the winegrowers carry out taking into account the particularities of their cultivation. “In the winter of 2019 it took a little more time than necessary to start the spring officially, and that is why the cycle seemed to begin

► Burdburst at
Bodega Casa
Grande,
Canelones,
30th of
September
2019

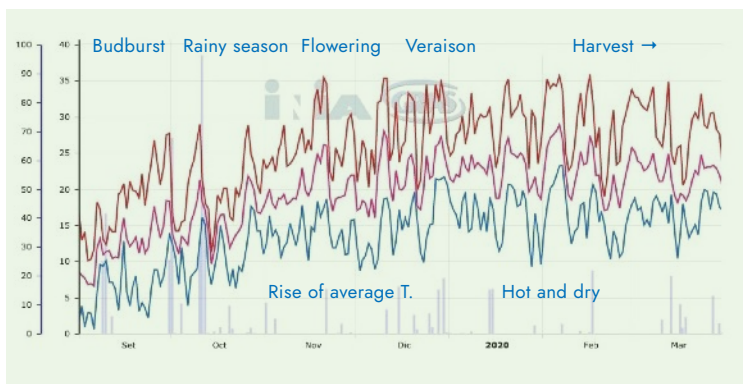


with some delay due to the cold in late August and early September” explains Martín Viggiano, winemaker at [Bodega Cerro del Toro](#).

According to data from the [INIA](#) (National Institute for Agricultural Research), the average temperature of four areas in the first fortnight of September was 13.4 °C and no more meteorological frosts were registered than one on the 4th of September in the agrometeorological stations of Las Brujas (South Central region) and the same day in Tacuarembó (North Central region).

Figure 1 shows the different stages of the growing season and the harvest and their corresponding average, minimum and maximum temperatures,

and also the daily rainfall. Slow growth is believed to promote good and uniform grape ripening. In moderate and warm climates, the concern is that the accumulation of sugar will overtake other processes and that it results in a lower quality wine. In Uruguay the climate is warm with maritime influence (according to Köppen' s classification and the growing season temperature GST model) and during the growing season in this harvest, as can be seen in Figure 1, all the conditions were in place for the grapes to ripen in optimal environment, without significant weather frosts and with significant rains during October.



► Figure 1.
Max T °C (red),
average T °C
(pink), Min T °C
(dark green),
and daily
rainfall in mm
(blue), during
growing season
and harvest.

The veraison is the beginning of the ripening of the berries of the vine, which in Uruguay occurs

► Veraison in
a Tannat
vineyard at
Bodega Cerro
Chapeu,
Rivera, 17th of
January 2020.



from the middle of December. At this stage there is a loss of chlorophyll and a change in coloration. In the white varieties the green color fades and the yellow tones appear. In red varieties, the polyphenols called anthocyanins begin to accumulate in the skin of the berries. We can visually perceive this in the violet colors that the grapes acquire. The progressive increase in mean temperature as the harvest months approached in Uruguay and the constant temperature during the ripening period ensured the most advantageous scene for the grapes to mature as expected during veraison.

The harvest

The first grapes of the 2020 vintage, for white and sparkling wines, were harvested at the end of January, while the last grapes that arrived to the wineries during the month of April were those corresponding to the fruit to make late-harvest wines. Almost all the harvesting of the red varieties took place during the month of March. It was an extensive vintage compared to other years and that was because decisions were not influenced by the urgency to harvest before inclement weather occurred. Winegrowers were able to make reasonable choices without the pressure of time.

According to some experts, the size of the berries is decisive in the quality of the wine and they assure that the small size, depending on the variety, results in the concentration of the desirable characteristics. In years where rains are abundant, grapes absorb water, aromatic compounds and sugars are diluted and berries grow in volume, the skins become thinner, and the fruit turns more perceptible to split and therefore to diseases. The three main vine diseases caused by fungi are Powdery mildew

► Sauvignon
Blanc harvest,
Bodega
Bresesti,
Montevideo,
15th of
February 2020.



(Oidium), Downy mildew (Peronospora) and Botrytis (Grey rot). The last two thrive in humid environments caused by excessive rainfall, conditions that Uruguayan winegrowers know very well.

The lack of rainfall during the harvest period in Uruguay achieved “perfect health in all grape varieties” , according to Daniel Pisano of [Pisano Family](#). In addition, it was possible to reach the desired maturity levels in all the varieties since the average temperatures did not have abrupt variations and the days were hot and the nights cool, with a daily average of diurnal range during the months of February and March of 12°C. Alcohol levels are high

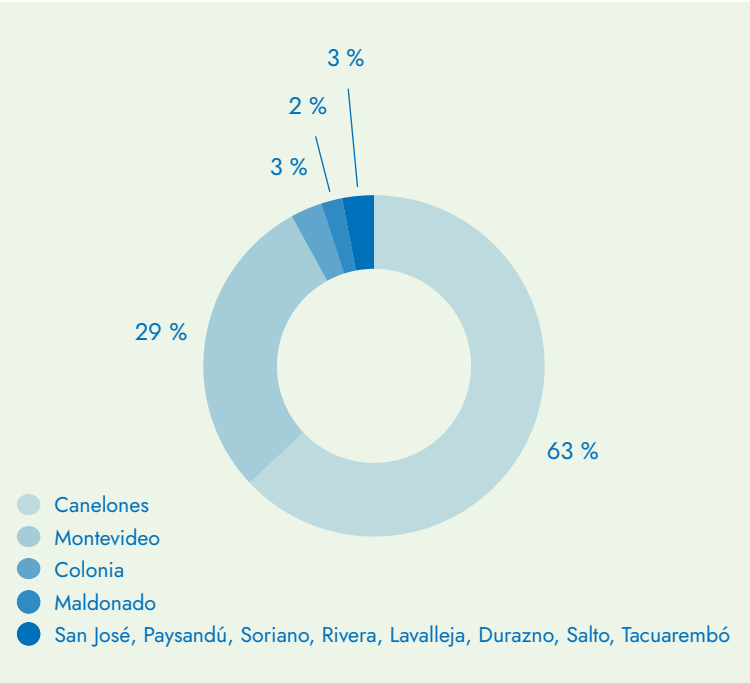
and in line with a dry and warm year. Also, the prediction, in the case of reds, are wines with an important concentration of colour and with good structure, characteristics that also depend on the styles of wines and the choices of the winemaker at the time of vinification.

The work of the producers continues after all the grapes have arrived to the winery, alone during this year, maintaining the corresponding precautions for social distancing due to the pandemic. Many expectations are being generated regarding the wines of this vintage, not only for their quality, but also for the advances that wine producers have made on their novelties, in a year in which the conditions were ideal for innovation.

The 2020 vintage in numbers

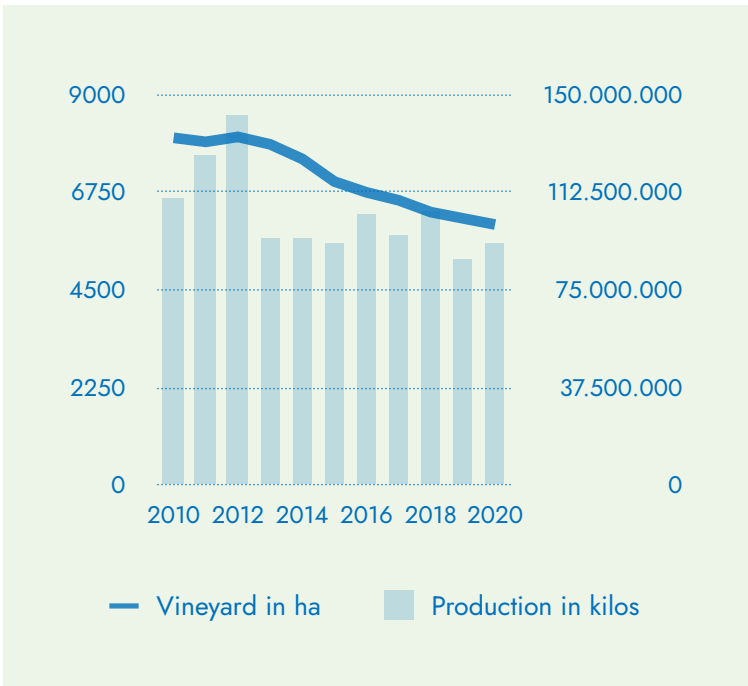
The 2020 harvest resulted in 92,924,166 kilos of grapes harvested from 160 producers registered with [INAVI](#). 63% of this total fruit corresponds to the registry of 88 companies located in the department of Canelones, the main production area of the country. Montevideo follows with 29% of the total grape. In 2019 the data was for less fruit with a total of 86,229,241 kilos from national companies.

► Figure 2.
Uruguayan
production of
grapes in kilos
by department.



Grape production and vineyard area in the last 10 years

The vineyard area in Uruguay continues to decrease year after year. While in 2019 the data for registered vineyards was 6144 hectares, in 2020 the figures are 6002 hectares throughout Uruguay. This is because old plants with small yields and poor grape quality are being replaced by vineyards with bigger productivity and better quality. There is no differentiation between hectares destined to the



► Figure 3.
Uruguayan
production of
grapes in kilos
and vineyard
area in
hectares in the
last 10 years.

production of fine wines (VCP Vino de Calidad Preferente in Uruguay) and those corresponding to table wines, so that a more precise analysis of these data would be unfounded.

In recent years, thanks to the work of [INAVI](#) technicians, better control of the registered vineyard has been carried out and the figures are close to rigorous values.

Conclusions

“The 2020 vintage will undoubtedly go down in history as one of the most memorable harvests in the recent history of Uruguayan winemaking” , says Germán Bruzzone, winemaker at [Bodega Garzón](#). Meanwhile, in the South West region of the country, Daniel Cis, winemaker at [Bodega Campotinto](#), comments: “The 2020 vintage gave us excellent wines, with good yields in the vineyard and with grapes of exceptional quality” .

We expect white wines with pronounced aromas and flavours of ripe fruit and freshness with natural acidity, as it is usual in Uruguay. As mentioned, reds are expected to have pronounced concentration of ripe fruit aromas and flavours, deep colours and high level of alcohol, all in accordance, with the winemaking techniques selected by the producers. Wines will demonstrate their characteristics and potential when they are ready to be appreciated. The conditions, as exposed in this report, have been ideal for obtaining wines of exceptional quality.

Bibliography

- Data from the INIA (National Institute for Agricultural Research) inia.uy The INIA data belongs to the Las Brujas meteorological station, Canelones, where most of the country's wineries are located. The data of each of the wine regions can vary among themselves, especially rainfall. I decided to use only the information from this station to not exceed the complexity of the analysis.
- INAVI (National Institute of Viticulture) data inavi.com.uy
- The Oxford Companion to Wine, Jancis Robinson, Oxford University Press.
- Terroir and Other Myths of Winegrowing, Mark. A. Matthews, University of California Press.

Acknowledgments

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► Vintage
Festival at
Bodega
Garzón



About me: Gabi Zimmer



I help wine producers create awareness about Uruguayan viticulture, its history and its wines to generate reliable commercial contacts with buyers that know and appreciate the quality of Uruguayan wine.

To read more about me and my work go to my website: gabizimmer.com

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