

# NEWS LETTER



4-2006

## Harvest Preview

The October issue of our Newsletter, in which we traditionally give a preview of the forthcoming harvest – which in some cases may have already begun – is a little late this year. This can be attributed to the fact that unfortunately the 2006 vintage is much riven, depending on the grape variety and region.

Let us begin by summarizing this year's growing season:

At the beginning of 2006 it was very cold and Germany had abundant snowfall, more in fact, than we have experienced for a number of years. This was due to Eastern Europe's strong influence on our weather. Cold air came from the East which resulted in temperatures falling to minus 30°C, particularly in the eastern part of Bavaria and in Sachsen. Here in Wiesbaden temperatures were rarely higher than minus 10°C. This was accompanied by frequent snowfall, which was rather unusual for our region. For the most part of the country the snowfall prevailed until the end of February; in some regions however, it persisted until mid-March.

It did not start to get warmer until the end of March, when daytime temperatures occasionally rose to 15°C. It was still too cold for this time of year, even though in the sunshine the perceived temperature was approximately 20°C. When the snow started melting, many rivers burst their banks. Particularly affected were the areas along the Elbe River.

Spring only came to Germany at the end of April with temperatures regularly reaching 20°C. We had not had such a long winter for a very long time. Thus the vines developed very slowly, which meant that at the beginning of June, vegetation was about two weeks behind the long-term average. This changed very rapidly when the temperatures started to rise to 25°C and more in June, thus enabling the vines to catch up.

July was one of the hottest on record in Germany. Temperatures well above 30°C were more the norm than an exception. This splendid weather was only marred by occasional thunderstorms, which only occurred in isolated areas. However, as the ground was very dry and compact, the rain could not penetrate the soil and therefore did not provide sufficient moisture for the vines. By the end of July the vineyards were already very arid.

At the beginning of August the weather pattern changed again, just in time to relieve the vines of stress caused by the aridity. It began to rain and the temperatures fell concomitantly. Although initially this much desired rainfall was welcome, it persisted throughout the entire month.

The beginning of September saw yet another change, this time for the better. However, it was not of great duration. The second half of September was marked by a lot of rainfall. This wet weather combined with warm temperatures stressed the ripened grapes anew.

Currently, virtually every wine-growing region is under great pressure to harvest the grapes. Increasing rot means that time is running out for all wine-growers. Harvesting has already begun, even in the Mosel region, where the wine-growers traditionally wait until the middle or even end of October before they start harvesting. Positive messages only reached us from Mosel and Franconia. Especially in the Saar valley wine growers seem to be more positive than in other areas. Also in Franconia early ripening grape varieties like Silvaner and Müller-Thurgau achieved good qualities.

Nevertheless, one wine-grower after the other has affirmed that the quality of the crop is very satisfactory. The Oechsle count, acidity levels and PH-values all stand in a positive relation to one another, thus providing a good substance for the wines of this vintage. However, this will probably apply predominantly to the basic segment of the vintage.

So far, the must weights are suitable for the production of all qualities of wine up to „Auslese“. In 2006 noble sweet wines will remain what they should be – a rarity. Nearly all grapes have been befallen by botrytis cinerea, but the weather conditions are such that the wine-growers cannot afford to delay harvesting any longer. In doing so, the grapes would probably be more vinegary than suitable for the production of noble sweet wines. Furthermore, it currently seems unlikely that Eiswein can be produced this year.

Comparisons can be made to the 2000 vintage, where late rainfall and hail also hindered harvesting and resulted in some vineyards emanating a pungent smell of vinegar.

Objectively, we can say that 2006 will not bestow us a vintage of the century. Rigorous selection will be imperative. Those wine-growers who work very carefully will, as always, be able to produce good basic qualities. The best „Prädikat“ wines will only be available in very small quantities. This will also be a vintage with which the wine-growers will have to prove themselves. Clean, dry Kabinett and Spätlese wines with a clear bouquet and free of botrytis cinerea will be evidence of which wine-growers have done the best job this year.

It remains to be a suspenseful situation to see where the best wines will be produced this year. We will keep you updated. In spring we will release a full vintage report. Then we will certainly have clearer look on 2006.

We keep you posted.