



Stellar Winery 2016 Harvest Report

It is difficult to compare the 2015 and 2016 harvests, but 2016 was definitely the most challenging season that we have experienced to date. It was the driest season for years and also the warmest. Producers received only 50% of their usual annual water allowance.

The exceptionally warm and windy conditions during October and November of last year led to a drop in yield in some vineyards, but others yielded in abundance later in the harvest, so our overall yield has remained steady. South Africa has been in the grip of a severe drought: the 2015 winter in the Western Cape was exceptionally dry and the 2015/2016 summer delivered a series of prolonged heatwaves which severely tested grape producers.

Optimum temperatures during harvest for quality production by the vines are 24-28 degrees Celsius. The average daily temperature from 11am-4pm was over 30 degrees.

The philosophy of our viticulturist Wilhelm Steenkamp is: wait. Wait until the harvest is finished- only then is it possible to assess what we have to deal with. Our cool weather began earlier this year, in the middle of February, with the result that the grapes could be harvested at the correct sugar concentrations. The best things are worth waiting for!

Grape quality is good, with the Sauvignon Blanc likely to exhibit more tropical flavours. The red berries are smaller than last year, but with a higher concentration of sugar and deeper colour.

The purchase of a Pellenc 755 Optimum Multifunction Grape Harvester from France has helped us to optimize quality. We made the decision to invest in this high tech machine after intensive research, and seeing it in action in France last year.

The new harvester comes with many game-changing features. The design of the harvester allows us to plant in narrower rows, increasing our quality. The harvester also has a built in grape sorter that cleans and de-stems the grapes as it moves along the vine rows. The stems and MOG (matter other than grapes') are left in the fields and become part of the natural compost in the vineyards.

The harvester has made an enormous difference to the quality of the grapes going into the cellar. The grapes from a harvested block emerge 99% clean and of outstanding quality, thereby limiting wastage and helping to improve yields. What we lost to the weather, we gained on improved methods of harvesting.

Klaas Coetzee
Wilhelm Steenkamp
April 2016

