

2015 Harvest Update

The image at right is part of our Southwind Estate 2015 red claret blend fermenting in an oak upright at the Cadaretta winery in Walla Walla, Washington.



Southwind Vineyard, Walla Walla Valley, and Columbia Valley
September 30, 2015 ... winemaker Kendall Mix

Cadaretta will finish up receiving fruit in Walla Walla on Saturday, October 3.

Buried Cane is about 75% through, waiting for some cooler site Cabernet Sauvignon vineyards ... they might take another couple of weeks, so Buried Cane will finish up sometime in mid-October.

We've harvested close to our tonnage estimates, except for one Chardonnay vineyard and a couple of Cabernet Sauvignon sites that are coming in light. Our most significant shortfall is in Semillon. Our light Semillon crop will result in a lower percentage of Semillon (and a higher percentage of Sauvignon Blanc) in the Cadaretta SBS 2015.

Grape quality has been really good, despite this growing season being warmer than the past couple of vintages. But the timing of the heat (coming early) may have allowed the vines to adjust on their own. In 2013 and 2014 we had to wait longer for mature fruit flavors to develop. In 2015, any green-vegetal qualities were resolved early, leaving good ripe fruit character.

Color is really good this year. pH levels are a little high, probably due to the early heat of the growing season. Sugars are a bit high, and there's some dehydration. Better water managers (those who started early) had few problems. Those who began irrigating late, after the heat started, couldn't always catch up (this is what happened to our Semillon, resulting in a light crop).

The fermenting wines from our Southwind Estate vineyard are looking really nice. Interestingly, our rootstock blocks ripened earlier than our own-rooted blocks, which seems counter-intuitive. But the quality of both is great. We are happy to have brought in fruit from three new-producing blocks in 2015. These blocks, north of the Glasshouse, mean more estate-grown Cabernet Sauvignon and Malbec to work with.

Overall, 2015 looks like a very good vintage in the Walla Walla Valley and Columbia Valley. And we should be pretty close to our desired case production totals.

Red Cedar Vineyard, Paso Robles
September 30, 2015 ... winemaker Blake Kuhn

The most challenging vintages often produce some of the best wines. We're counting on that holding true for Paso Robles in 2015!

We are now about half-way through harvest. Yields are extremely low for the year, which should result in good quality wine, but not as much of it. The first few wines completing fermentation seem to suggest that this may be the case for key varieties.

We are tracking about 30-40% below average crop levels due to the drought and difficult weather conditions during set, especially for Syrah and Cabernet. We had several short-burst heat waves in September followed by very large cooling swings that seem to have caused vines to slow their usual ripening process.

While brix levels are high in some varieties, that higher sugar isn't necessarily associated with physiological ripening (and ripe fruit flavors). Fortunately, our Clayhouse-favorite Petite Sirah seems to have muscled through this vintage in good shape, a testament to its durability in dry conditions. A little more patience with some key varietals should produce the physiological ripeness we desire.

Because the crop is smaller than normal, we are picking some blocks earlier than normal (less fruit on the vine means faster ripening). Consequently, this harvest will end earlier than usual. Labor for hand-picking is scarce, probably due to the small crop (easier for workers to move elsewhere to less drought-impacted crops, and better income potential).

Fewer pickers means later-in-the-day (warmer condition) deliveries to the winery, so cooling Fall weather will be a blessing for the grapes and us. Years like this require A LOT of winemaking attention and skill. We're employing all available and appropriate winemaking tools and techniques, and are confident we will produce another high quality vintage.