

2009 harvest in Spain

Castilla-La Mancha and La Rioja are perhaps the most representative wine-producing regions in Spain. The first one has become renowned as the largest wine-producing region in the world. On the other hand, the wines from La Rioja have been famous for decades beyond the Spanish frontiers. This is a brief account of the 2009 harvests in these two regions of the Iberian Peninsula.

La Mancha: a harvest with highs and lows

The harvest, which finished mid-October, suffered an unexpected drop in productivity. The main reason for this was the strong heat which all of a sudden fell upon the autonomous community towards the end of August. Red grapes have been the most affected. As a result, the size of the harvest has dropped by 25% according to Government figures, and wine production will not be greater than 17 million hectolitres, as opposed to the over 23 million hectolitres produced last year.

However, it is not all bad news. The experts assert that, apart from few exceptions, the grape that has been harvested is, all in all, "healthy" and has a greater alcoholic content, less acidity and a higher pH than in other occasions.

Another encouraging fact: producers and industry have reached an agreement on price, an issue which is often contentious. Representatives of agricultural associations declare that, nowadays, producers are being paid "fair prices which exceed the costs of production" and which set the price of wine between 2 and 2.1 € per hectodegree.

The autonomous community of Castilla-La Mancha includes, amongst others, the Appellations d'Origin of La Mancha, Jumilla, Almansa and Méntrida. This is the largest wine-producing region in the world in terms of geographical extension and represents half of total Spanish production. However, this region does not want to base its strength on quantity, but on quality, and so, its wine-producing industry intends to carry on promoting quality wines, both in the hospitality sector and in the media.

In short, Castilla-La Mancha still has a lot to say...

Quantity and quality in La Rioja

412 million kilogrammes. That is the total amount of grape harvested in La Rioja in 2009. On top of this, the Regulating Council for the Appellation d'Origin Rioja states that this is a harvest of "quality grapes".

The harvest began on August 27th, some ten days earlier than other years, and finished two months later, on October 26th, closing a season that has not been easy.

This year, the summer has been extremely hot, with maximum temperatures between 35°C and 37°C and very little rain. This scenario allowed for rapid alcoholic maturing, which was unmatched by the slower phenolic maturing. Half way through August there was concern that the excessive heat may damage the vines and bring down production.

However, the rainfall half way through September not only compensated the water deficiency suffered by some of the vines, but also contributed to restoring production expectations and,

above all, was a decisive factor ensuring the final quality of the harvest, as it balanced the alcoholic and phenolic maturity of the grapes.

The result has been a plentiful harvest: 412.3 million kilogrammes: 378 million kilogrammes of red grape and 33.53 of white grape, produced by a total of 657 producers. Now it is the wineries that face the challenge, as they must now turn this quality grape into excellent wines.