

# Vintage report for Spain 2016

---

An unpredictable year featuring one of the driest and longest summers for some time



The weather conditions were both unpredictable and challenging in 2016 keeping everyone on their toes throughout the Spanish wine regions.

Generous spring rains and favourable weather during the early stages of vine development led to initial hopes of a generous crop for most regions with the exceptions of some Atlantic areas and the coastal fringes of Jerez. By the end of July, with a hot, dry summer well under way, the outlook was rosy but the hot summer went on and on, seemingly endlessly, causing vines to shut down. By early September there was still no sign of cooler temperatures or a drop of rain - quite unlike a typical year.

Finally there was a break in the weather with modest rainfall in mid-September, which was particularly beneficial for later-ripening and red varieties. Fine weather continued throughout the autumn allowing the harvest to progress steadily and calmly across the country.

Some regions fared far better than others in 2016. The outcome was more positive for Rioja, Navarra, Ribera del Duero, Toro, Priorat, Montsant, Rueda and Rías Baixas than it was for some of the Catalan DOs where the drought and other unfavourable weather had a serious impact on yields, especially where whites are the focus.

Total 2016 harvest for Spain: 42.5 million hl (Source: OEMV)

This report of Spain's 2016 harvest is divided into the following regional sections:

1. Galicia: Rías Baixas, Monterrei, Ribeiro, Ribeira Sacra and Valdeorras
2. The Duero Valley and the north-west: Ribera del Duero, Toro, Rueda, Bierzo, Cigales, Tierra del Vino de Zamora and Tierra de León
3. The north: Rioja and Navarra
4. Aragón: Campo de Borja, Calatayud, Cariñena and Somontano
5. Vinos de Madrid and Castilla-La Mancha
6. Catalonia, Majorca and Eastern Spain
7. Jerez-Xérès-Sherry

## 1. Galicia

### DO Rías Baixas

Some welcome rain in early September, just ahead of the harvest, resulted in a more generous crop for the Rías Baixas, indeed 2016 is the third largest in the history of the DO. Forecasts had been far more conservative due to unfavourable spring weather close to the critical stages of flowering and an untypically dry and warm summer for the Atlantic region.

Generally favourable weather conditions allowed the harvest to take place steadily and gradually between 6<sup>th</sup> September and 14<sup>th</sup> October. The Consejo's technical director Agustín Lago described very healthy grapes with 'unbeatable' quality allowing wines to have excellent balance between alcohol levels and acidity and very good fruit quality.

Watch this space: Sparkling wine from the region – *Rías Baixas Espumoso* – is a growing trend. The category was authorised by the Consejo in 2012 when five bodegas made 18,617 litres of this wine. By 2016 the number of producers making sparkling wine within the DO had doubled and production reached 68,020 litres. The wines are made predominantly from Albariño with other local grapes also featuring in blends (the same as those authorised for still DO wines) and are produced according to the traditional method.

2016: 33.4 million kg; 4.6% more than 2015

### DO Monterrei

Monterrei's harvest was slightly down on last year, however there had been a significant rise in production for the region in 2015, notably for indigenous white varieties.

The weather was very mixed over the growing season with high rainfall causing some issues – notably mildew – but mostly for minor varieties. A dry, hot summer favoured fruit quality but unusually warm autumn conditions resulted in lower acidity levels this year. Alcohol levels are around 13° according to Luis Miguel López Núñez, technical director at the Consejo.

Godello is by far the dominant grape for the region's 24 bodegas - this year the variety represented 71% of the crop. Treixadura is also fairly prominent in white blends while Mencía is the leading red variety.

2016: 4.5 million kg; 4.7 million kg in 2015

## DO Ribeiro

The harvest started a little later than in 2015 in Ribeiro and took place steadily over six weeks. Quality is described as ‘very good’ while volumes are down by 18% largely due to heavy spring rains and outbreaks of mildew in April and May. According to the region’s Consejo, the adverse weather had a greater impact on non-indigenous grapes than it did for local grapes such as Treixadura and Loureira.

2016: 11.6 million kg; 93% white, 7% red

## DO Ribeira Sacra

There is general satisfaction with the harvest in Ribeira Sacra thanks to favourable harvest conditions and very little rain over a period of 42 days of picking which started on 22<sup>nd</sup> September. The size of the harvest was typical for the region which focuses on red wines; the most widely planted variety is Mencía (4.7 million kg in 2016) flanked by Sousón and Merenzao among others.

2016: 5.6 million kg; red, 5.2 million kg, white 375,900 kg

## DO Valdeorras

The growing season was particularly challenging for Valdeorras in 2016: there were ‘aggressive’ outbreaks of mildew at flowering in some vineyards plus a barrage of hail in July. There was also concern over the lack of water as the harvest approached but early September rains allowed fruit to ripen fully. Production is down by 29% compared to 2015 and the style of the wines is likely to be quite different: expect fresher, crisper acidity and tamer alcohol levels of around 13° for the 2016 vintage.

2016: 4.6 million kg, mostly Godello (2.5 million kg)

## 2. The Duero Valley

### DO Ribera del Duero

There is general satisfaction in Ribera del Duero after the region brought in a far more generous crop than last year and the character of the year looks far more typical for this northern region after an atypically hot vintage in 2015. Agustín Alonso, technical director at the Consejo said: “The 2016 wines will be fresher and more Atlantic in style, on the whole not unlike those of the late 80s and 90s.”

Grape quality was described as 'exceptional' at Bodegas O.Fournier where the vintage is expected to offer wines with great ageing potential. Juan Ramón García, enologist for Miguel Torres, shares the same view after a long vintage and very careful selection of each parcel. He said: "Grapes showed excellent ripeness and good balance between phenolic ripeness and sugar...the wines of 2016 are showing great colour and fine, seductive tannins."

2016: 133 million kg (88 million kg in 2015)

#### DO Toro

Toro, home to the Tinta de Toro grape, brought in its largest vintage to date with volumes at a similar level to the 2014 crop. The fruit quality was described as excellent at the time of harvest and at the early stages of vinification wines showed high colour content and modest levels of alcohol making prospects good for their ageing potential.

2016: 23 million kg, 30% more than 2015

#### DO Rueda

The mood was upbeat in Rueda following the harvest which was both generous and high in quality. Harvest started 10 days later than last year in the third week of September after growers waited for cooler temperatures and for fruit to reach the right balance between acidity and potential alcohol. The Consejo's technical director Jesús Díez expects the 2016 wines to be more structured on the whole and in the case of Verdejo, the region's leading grape, the wines are likely to be fresher, longer and with stronger varietal character compared to the previous vintage.

Rueda's vineyards extended over 13,517.5 hectares for the 2016 vintage, up 443 hectares on 2015. Verdejo currently accounts for 11,259 hectares.

2016: 109 million kg

#### DO Bierzo

There was significantly more rain than usual in Bierzo over the winter and spring and spring temperatures were particularly fresh causing a delay of around two weeks for the vines to reach the period of bud-break. Rain in May and June, together with low temperatures caused outbreaks of mildew, but notably for minor varieties such as Garnacha Tintorera and Jerez. The same unfavourable weather during the flowering period resulted in uneven flowering for some areas (*coulure*) which did not bode well for generous yields at the point of harvest.

In contrast, very dry weather from mid-June to the end of August caused some vine stress. Much-needed rain finally came in mid-September and, with the fruit reaching optimum ripeness, the harvest got into full swing shortly afterwards. Overall volumes are down this year – leading grape Mencía is down by 12% compared to 2016 - but fine weather allowed for a gradual harvest favouring fruit quality. High quality wines are expected with strong varietal character, complexity and ageing potential.

2016: 12.6 million kg (Mencía, 9.9 million kg); 17.8% lower than the average of the last five vintages

#### DO Cigales

Harvest started in Cigales in the third week of September initially with grapes for white and rosé wines followed by Tempranillo grapes for red wine making. Some rain in the middle of harvest was welcome to allow fruit to ripen fully. There are high hopes for the region's 2016 wines.

2016: 8.5 million kg, 12% more than in 2015

#### DO Tierra del Vino de Zamora

Harvest yields were higher than expected for Tierra del Vino de Zamora indeed the region brought in its largest harvest since gaining DO status. The main grape variety for the DO is Tempranillo, followed by white Malvasía. Summer temperatures were higher than usual and conditions were extremely dry from late spring onwards which slowed vine development but kept vineyards disease-free. There was a pause in the harvest when rain finally fell over two days in mid-September and resumed in fine weather. At the time of harvest berries were slightly smaller than usual due to the dry weather but there were generous amounts of them on each bunch and quality was excellent.

2016: 1.16 million kg (red 68%, white 32%); 888,000 million kg in 2015

#### DO Tierra de León

The Consejo's vintage report for Tierra de León describes the 2016 harvest as 'different and difficult' for the region which is home to the red variety, Prieto Picudo. Growers battled against vineyard diseases in the spring followed by 'excessive' heat over the summer and early autumn.

Wines are expected to be very different in style to the two previous vintages; whites and rosé wines are likely to be lighter and fresher while most bodegas are likely to opt for young reds and shorter barrel ageing for reds.

2016: 4.3 million kg (80% Prieto Picudo), 5% down on 2015

### 3. The north

#### DOCa Rioja

This harvest was more typical in terms of length, indeed it was particularly long taking place steadily over two months. An extremely dry and hot summer was followed by unusually warm and fine weather over the harvest period which allowed growers to wait for the growing cycle to continue and for grapes to ripen according to variety and vineyard.

Long-awaited rains, which finally arrived in mid-September were “the deciding factor when it came to quality”, according to Julián Chivite (Grupo Chivite) and were particularly well timed for Rioja, especially for the cooler, more Atlantic areas.

Julio Sáenz, winemaker for La Rioja Alta, described a difficult but very rewarding harvest which required a great deal of patience. “After the intense heat of early September it was difficult to imagine that we could be bringing in a great harvest,” he said. The harvest was very slow as his team waited for each parcel to ripen and then selected the best bunches for what could be one of the best vintages of recent years in his view.

The outcome was very positive for Rioja in terms of volume – a more generous crop than last year – and quality. Rioja’s vineyard area was also slightly larger this year – up by 759 hectares to reach 62,641. The additional vineyard area is largely accounted for by whites, 620 hectares, while a further 143 hectares has been incorporated for red varieties.

2016: 442.4 million kg approved for production (90% red, 10% white); 426.7 million kg in 2015

#### DO Navarra

The crop was a little lower than the previous year for Navarra but the quality was described as ‘excellent’ by the region’s Consejo. The region experienced a mild spring and a hot summer. Much needed rain finally arrived in mid-September benefitting the later ripening red varieties, especially in the north of the region. (Some vineyards make use of irrigation in extremely dry weather).

Over the harvest period, fresh nights and milder daytime weather together with a fine weather favoured gradual ripening. There are high expectations for Navarra's white, rosé and red wines from 2016.

Adriana Ochoa of Bodegas Ochoa describes the 2016 harvest as "atypical". "The use of irrigation in our vineyards helped to maintain the canopy and allow the ripening process to continue steadily," she said. She was particularly upbeat about "very fine" Tempranillo and Merlot which were "fresher and more balanced" this year thanks to slower and later ripening, particularly for Merlot.

This bodes particularly well for reds and rosé wines – "rosé wines are showing very elegant and complex aromas," she concluded.

2016: 83 million kg (89% red, 11% white)

#### 4. Aragón

DO Campo de Borja

The crop was more generous than expected in Campo de Borja thanks to excellent weather during the harvest according to the region's Consejo. Earlier estimates were for around 30 million kg due to a somewhat uneven flowering, especially for Garnacha. Bunches were described as looser and less compact suggesting modest yields. The region experienced a very dry summer with virtually no rain after mid June but thankfully winter rainfall had been generous, allowing for good water reserves. However summer temperatures were not as hot as in 2015. Fruit quality was said to be excellent for the 2016 crop.

2016: 35.5 million kg

DO Calatayud

There were some late spring frosts in Calatayud but the weather had stabilised by flowering which was described as 'spectacular'. The summer was dry but not excessively hot until late August and early September and even then the heat was not excessive. In early October there was some heavy rain which helped the vines to complete their growing cycle.

Harvest dates are traditionally later in this region due to the altitude of the vineyards (650-1,040m); the region's leading grape, Garnacha, also ripens late in the season. Picking commenced with Macabeo in late September, followed by Syrah, Tempranillo and (by early October), Garnacha. Harvest ended in mid-November.

In terms of quantity, the harvest was well up on last year with vines generally having withstood the dry conditions well. Fruit quality was described by the region's Consejo as 'excellent' generally; bunches were loose and berries were quite small due to the dry conditions which also kept them disease-free.

2016: 14.2 million kg, 16.2% up on 2015 (91% red, mostly Garnacha)

#### DO Cariñena

Low rainfall, especially in early summer, was a significant feature for Cariñena in 2016 together with hot, windy weather in July. Vines located in areas where flowering is typically earlier in the season showed better development than those in later areas at fruit-set in the early summer period. Dry conditions are largely responsible for keeping yields modest in 2016 however fresher autumn weather benefited grapes allowing them to gradually reach optimum ripeness.

2016: 98 million kg (estimate), 11% less than 2015

#### DO Somontano

Rainfall was above average in February, March and April for Somontano in 2016 but a very dry summer followed. Yields were very similar to the previous year and higher than earlier predictions suggested.

2016: 18.5 million kg (72% red, 28% white)

### 5. DO Vinos de Madrid and Castilla-La Mancha

#### DO Vinos de Madrid

Winter and spring were colder than usual for DO Vinos de Madrid and spring rainfall was generous. The weather pattern continued to be unusual with higher than average temperatures over the summer and into autumn.

Alcohol levels are a little more restrained compared to an average year and acidity levels are a little lower.

2016: 15 million kg, similar to 2015

## Castilla-La Mancha

In the extensive Castilla-La Mancha area, the crop was down by 16% on 2015 (20.7 million hl) largely due to lower volumes of the white Airén grape. Red varieties and irrigated vineyards fared better. This marks a second low vintage for Castilla-La Mancha with the positive outcome of mitigating over-production and low grape prices.

## 6. Catalonia, Majorca and the Eastern Spain

### DO Cava (Catalonia)

The flowering period was very gradual this year with high levels of fertility in all varieties used for the production of cava, much higher than in recent years.

At harvest the grapes were very healthy, starting with Chardonnay on the 10<sup>th</sup> August and Pinot Noir coming at a similar time followed by Macabeo on August 25<sup>th</sup>.

Yields for Macabeo, the leading grape for Cava production, were down compared to 2015 whereas Trepat and Garnacha volumes were up.

In summary, drought and weather conditions reduced the crop this year but quality is expected to be excellent.

2016: 300.4 million kg, 4% less than 2015

### DO Catalunya

After a relatively dry winter there were early spring rains which helped to get the growing season off to a good start. However, very dry conditions affected the vineyards in most areas of Catalonia which experienced a drop in volumes of around 5%. However the production of DO Catalunya wine, the largest Catalan DO, was up 5% due to more production being destined for this classification as opposed to other regional DO classifications. The average alcohol level of wines is 12.7%, a little higher than usual, with well-balanced acidity according to the Consejo.

2016: 53.4 million kg, 5% more than 2015

### DO Empordà

The crop was low in Empordà due to a number of reasons. As well as the dry, hot summer conditions the Tramontana wind paid its usual annual visit and damaged a few parcels in the spring. Then there was an unwelcome hail-storm in mid-June at the period of flowering

for some varieties. Finally wild boar munched through grapes in some vineyards which were not protected from this particular predator.

Grapes, though few in quantity, were described as healthy with good flavour concentration, aromas and colour.

2016: 6.8 million kg, 20% less than 2015

#### DO Montsant

The harvest in Montsant was described as “one of the best of recent years” as excellent fruit came in across all varieties. There was moderate winter and spring rainfall and summer temperatures were not excessively hot allowing fruit to ripen steadily favouring the eventual quality. The yields were typical for the region where the main grapes are Garnacha and Mazuela.

2016: 8.6 million kg, mostly red varieties

#### DOCa Priorat

Priorat’s harvest concluded after a steady and continuous harvest in fine weather; a slightly more generous crop was brought in compared to last year. The growing season was marked by low rainfall, especially from February to June, which gave vineyards a very promising start to the growing season. The harvest report from Miguel Torres describes the 2016 harvest as being outstanding for grape quality thanks to the lack of rain, moderate temperatures and dry conditions at key points. Torres reported: “The growing cycle was long in most of our vineyards allowing the skins to reach good phenolic ripeness and a gradual concentration of sugars. As a result we are seeing structured, ripe and concentrated fruit in the wines as well as elegance and good acidity – all boding well for ageing. This has been a great harvest thanks to the weather and excellent grape quality.”

2016: 6.6 million kg

#### DO Binissalem

Harvest started in Binissalem on 13<sup>th</sup> August with white varieties Moscatel and Chardonnay and continued with Manto Negro and Callet followed by the last to be picked – Cabernet Sauvignon and Gorgollassa. It was complete by early October. Here too dry conditions were the most significant feature for the vintage however indigenous varieties Manto Negro and Callet withstood the drought performing with ‘extraordinary’ results. At harvest these varieties had ripened “evenly and completely” and grapes were healthy. The trend for

volume production of both varieties is upwards year-on-year along with Giró Ros and Gorgollassa, both significantly up in this vintage as growers increasingly favour indigenous varieties.

2016: 2 million kg, 3% up on 2015

#### DO Utiel-Requena

Winter was milder and drier than usual but early spring rains were welcomed for the early stages of the growing season by producers who champion the Bobal grape. After a dry summer, harvest got under way on 10<sup>th</sup> September in lower-lying areas – Requena and Venta del Moro – concluding in higher areas in early November. The Consejo’s report described fruit quality as ‘extraordinary’ with grapes showing ripe tannins and slightly higher acidity than 2015 and offering good prospects for various wine styles.

2016: 219 million kg; 15.8% up on 2015 (mostly Bobal)

#### DO Jumilla

Jumilla’s harvest was modest due to very dry weather and yields for vineyards without irrigation were particularly low. The flowering period was good and there were virtually no incidences of disease this year. Fine weather also allowed fruit to be picked at the optimum time with lead grape Monastrell picked last of all in the usual pattern of the vintage. Expect wines to be more concentrated from this vintage with slightly higher alcohol levels.

2016: 64.6 million kg

### 7. Jerez-Xérès-Sherry

#### DO Jerez-Xérès-Sherry

It was a relatively dry growing season for Jerez with lower than average rainfall. There was ‘torrential’ rain in May which caused concern at such a critical point in the growing season; some vineyards close to the coast were seriously affected by mildew. The Levante wind helped to keep vines disease-free over the summer period and the fruit quality was good at the point of harvest.

2016: 57 million kg, 25% less than 2015

*(Patricia Langton, January 2017)*