



WINE-SEARCHER.COM – 10 OTTOBRE 2019

### Italy's Harvest Dodges Weather Bullet



© Tom Hyland/Wine-Searcher | Harvesting Nebbiolo in La Morra, in the Barolo production zone.

Hail caused some damage in the north but, overall, producers are happy with the quality of the grapes.

By Tom Hyland

As vintners throughout Italy wrap up harvest for 2019, almost everyone is overjoyed about the notable quality this vintage will bring. Yet many of these same producers are surely breathing a sigh of relief, as they realize that they dodged a rather large bullet, weatherwise.

That bullet was extreme heat, something that occurs more often than not in this era of climate change. At [Albino Rocca](#) winery in [Barbaresco](#), Daniela Rocca remembers "in February we had quite warm temperatures for the period". Leopardo Felici, winemaker at Andrea Felici, an outstanding producer of [Verdicchio dei Castelli di Jesi](#) in the Marche region, recalls "three hot waves, one for each summer month".

Other producers from [Piedmont](#) and [Tuscany](#) report the same brutal heat in June, and at that point, many individuals had to be thinking of the tropical conditions only a few years earlier in 2017, which saw many records being broken in terms of early harvests.

Thankfully, rains entered the picture in summer, as Felici notes. "There were a few important showers at the end of July that arrived before any possible stress would have begun," he remarks. "Some rains at the end of August let everybody think that the harvest would have been late, but the summer extended its long arms until September."

There were some instances where the heat did create problems, as in [Campania](#), as Antonio Capaldo of [Feudi di San Gregorio](#) notes. "Our only concern [for the harvest] is quantity, in particular for [Greco](#) as the summer heat reduced significantly the quantity of grape per plant. But the quality will be outstanding."

At [Illuminati](#) in [Abruzzo](#), Stefano Illuminati also notes the reduced quantity. "Abruzzo is down about 20 percent in quantity, which is similar to the national statistics." In all, the vintner reports that his harvest in general is about a week late; for his riserva offerings of Montepulciano d'Abruzzo, Illuminati believes the picking will begin around October 23.

# ODDERO

At [Podere Oddero](#) in Santa Maria, a *frazione* of La Morra in Piemonte's Langhe district, Cristina Oddero works with several varietals, most notably [Nebbiolo](#) for several offerings of Barolo, but also Barbera, Moscato, Dolcetto and even Riesling. "All harvests are proceeding well, with the right calm," she comments. "We are enjoying sunny days, with good temperatures around 24-25°C [76-78°F] during the day with great freshness at night." Many producers I spoke with in Piedmont and Tuscany reported similar weather during the final two weeks of September, as they emphasized how beneficial the cool evenings, balanced with the warm, but not torrid, days were for ideal ripening.

While long spells of oppressive heat were avoided this year, one factor that again reared its ugly head was the problem of hail. While this can be a hindrance to vintners in many regions of Italy, it is more prevalent in the north, and sections of Piedmont are seemingly a target every year. Hail can wipe out a notable percentage of a vineyard – sometimes the entire plot – and what is most frustrating that it can happen at any time and any place.

Perhaps the most dramatic occurrence of hail in Piedmont this year took place on September 5. Following a violent thunderstorm that poured down 30-100mm (1.2-3.9 inches) of rain in a matter of just a few hours, a considerable hailstorm followed. As with most of these storms, the effects were scattered, with some vineyards receiving damage, while other plots, just a few meters away, did not. The ruin of this hailstorm could be viewed from particular vantage points in the [Barolo](#) zone, as one could see a small strip of brown among the affected vineyards, primarily in Serralunga d'Alba, Grinzane Cavour and Diano d'Alba in the eastern part of the Barolo zone, along with a small section of La Morra to the west. In particular, the vineyard in front of the [Fontanafredda](#) winery in Serralunga (the one seen driving past the entrance to the winery) was almost completely damaged.

At Madonna di Como near San Rocco Seno d'Elvio (northeast of the Barolo zone) where Barbaresco is among the wines produced, Tino Colla of [Podere Colla](#), reports losing 30 percent of that area's crop. Yet at one vineyard in San Rocco, only a mile or so away, there was no damage, a testament to the freakish nature of these storms. This reminds one of the long-time saying of many farmers who grow grapes for the production of wine: "The great thing about our work is that we deal with Mother Nature. The bad thing about our job is that we deal with Mother Nature."

Again, most producers I visited and spoke with are quite positive about the 2019 growing season in their territory. "Quality looks very good," notes Illuminati. Capaldo remarks that "grapes are maturing slowly and very well. We are enjoying a perfect climate and this vintage will be remarkable, in particular for [Aglanico](#), after two difficult vintages with a big disparity in quality from area to area. This year, all Aglianico grapes look wonderful."

Oddero also notes good news. "The grapes of Nebbiolo are in good health, and the polyphenolic contents are arriving to have the perfect ripening. We had a very good Riesling and Moscato harvest and Dolcetto too." For Rocca "the grapes look great and it seems to be a good harvest. I checked the previous vintages, for harvest periods, and for this year, it's sort of between harvest dates for 2013 and 2016."

As these were two recent outstanding vintages for Nebbiolo, she has high hopes for the 2019 vintage. "Fingers crossed!"