NEWS LESSON

What a Bad Harvest Actually Tells You



BEFORE YOU READ

1 Warm up

Talk about these questions with a partner.

1. When does a series of unusual years stop being weather and become a pattern?
2. Who should pay for an industry to adapt to a changing climate?
3. Can a tradition survive if the conditions that created it disappear?

2 Key words

These words are in the article. Write the letter of the meaning (A to H) in each box.

1	**preceding**	☐	A	amounts or quantities of something
2	**projected**	☐	B	dug or pulled up out of the ground
3	**headline**	☐	C	in a way that anyone can see
4	**volumes**	☐	D	expected to happen, based on a calculation
5	**accounting**	☐	E	the careful counting of final totals
6	**grubbed**	☐	F	coming before something
7	**fungal**	☐	G	caused by a fungus, such as mould
8	**visibly**	☐	H	the main point, as shown in a news title

3 Read

Read the article and underline the key words from task 2. The paragraphs are numbered.

France's smallest harvest in decades is being read as a verdict on the climate. The more useful information sits in the gap between its regions.

1 France's 2026 wine harvest is estimated at about 35 million hectolitres: 2% below 2025, and 14% below the average of the five preceding years. Since the International Organisation of Vine and Wine logged 2025 as the country's weakest production since 1957, this is a poor year measured against a poor year. The headline is easy to write and not especially informative.

2 The more revealing number is the spread. Champagne, where extreme heat accelerated the accumulation of sugar and therefore of natural alcohol, harvested exceptionally early and finished in September for the first time, with volumes down roughly half on both last year and the five-year average. Burgundy and Beaujolais are projected around 30% below their five-year average. Bordeaux, meanwhile, expects a 10% increase on 2025 despite a 5% cut in planted area, and the south-west is up some 12%. Jérôme Despey, who chairs FranceAgriMer's wine advisory board and farms in the Hérault, called it a degree of variation he had never encountered.

3 That spread resists the simplest telling of the story. If heat alone explained everything, the hottest regions would have suffered most, and the south did not. Despey's account is that southern growers have been through this before and changed their practice, including leaving more canopy on the vine so the leaves shade the fruit rather than exposing it. Add useful rainfall in May, and the result is a region that absorbed a bad summer better than cooler ones with less reason to prepare.

4 Three distinctions are worth holding on to here. The first is between a forecast and a result: these are ministry estimates, and the final accounting arrives later. The second is between weather and climate. One summer of heatwaves is an event, whereas an industry visibly rebuilding its vineyard management around recurring heat is closer to evidence of a trend, which is why the adaptation is the more significant detail. The third is between volume and quality, which do not move together. The ministry and the industry both emphasised the harvest's excellent health, free of the fungal and moisture-related damage a wet year inflicts. Claude Mandois, a Champagne producer who brought in three-quarters of a normal crop, described what he did pick as exceptional to look at and to taste, which is a statement about his own vineyard rather than a forecast for the vintage.

5 There is also a quieter fact underneath the weather. The planted area fell about 1.9% in a year, and Bordeaux's by 5%. Some of the shortfall is therefore not grapes that failed but vines that are no longer in the ground. The report does not say why those hectares went, and the absence is itself worth noticing. A harvest figure measures the sky, but it also measures decisions growers made long before the summer began, and a vineyard that has been grubbed up does not come back the following year because the weather improves.

Sources: The Guardian, French wine industry facing historic low harvest after extreme summer heat. Picture: .

4 True, false or not given

Circle **T** (true), **F** (false) or **NG** (the article does not say).

1. Bordeaux's production rose even though it had less land under vines. T F NG
2. The writer treats the south's result as proof that heat explains the whole pattern. T F NG
3. The writer expects the ministry's estimates to prove too low. T F NG
4. The writer implies that Mandois's comments are a poor guide to the whole vintage. T F NG
5. The report explains why the planted area fell. T F NG

5 Vocabulary

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed.

absorbed **accumulation** **dwindled** **encountered** **exposing** **inflicts** **shortfall** **undermines**

1. A large, well-funded estate has _____ losses that would have ruined a small family plot.
2. A single hailstorm _____ damage in minutes that takes years to repair.
3. To cover the _____ , the cooperative bought grapes from neighbouring estates.
4. The slow _____ of debt over several poor harvests pushed the estate towards sale.
5. Removing too many leaves risks _____ the fruit to sunburn.
6. Few of the growers had ever _____ conditions as severe as these.

6 Word forms

Use the word in brackets to make a word that fits the gap.

1. Heat alone is an _____ explanation for a pattern that varies so much between regions. (ADEQUATE)
2. A forecast can only be as sound as the _____ on which it rests. (ASSUME)
3. The cooperative's _____ to share its figures delayed the report. (WILLING)
4. Some regions have shown remarkable _____ in the face of heat. (RESILIENT)
5. Ripening dates have become increasingly _____ from one year to the next. (PREDICT)

7 Language focus: phrasal verbs

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed. At this level many phrasal verbs are fixed with a certain kind of object or a following preposition: bear out a claim, stem from a cause, tide someone over. Learn them in these frames.

along **aside** **down** **from** **out** **over** **up**

1. The ministry's caution is borne _____ by how far final results often differ from the early forecasts.
2. Some analysts put the unusually early picking _____ to warmer winters rather than to the summer.
3. Part of any fall in output stems _____ decisions taken years earlier.
4. A little spring rain helped to tide growers _____ until the autumn.
5. Early estimates may not hold _____ once the final figures are in.

SPEAK

8 Talk about it

Discuss in pairs or small groups. Give reasons for your answers.

1. The south coped better than the cooler north. What does that reverse tell us?
2. The report does not explain why vines were pulled out. What might account for it?
3. Is it honest to report a harvest estimate as news before the results exist?

9 Role-play: a price rise for house wine

Work in pairs. Read your card, then have the conversation. Swap roles and do it again.

Student A · the restaurant owner

Your wine supplier says the price of your house wine will go up by 10%. You don't want to pass the cost on to customers. Ask why the price is rising and ask for a better deal.

Student B · the wine supplier

Hot summers have made wine harvests smaller, so your costs are higher. Explain why the price must rise. You can offer a small discount if the restaurant orders more.

Useful phrases

Why is the price going up?

I'm afraid the harvest was smaller than usual.

We can't pass that cost on to our customers.

Could you give us a discount if we order more?

I'd be happy to meet you halfway.

That's the best price I can offer.

Afterwards, tell the class: did you agree a price, and was it fair for both sides?

ANSWER KEY

2 Key words

1 F · 2 D · 3 H · 4 A · 5 E · 6 B · 7 G · 8 C

4 True, false or not given

1 T · 2 F · 3 NG · 4 T · 5 F

5 Vocabulary

1 absorbed · 2 inflicts · 3 shortfall · 4 accumulation · 5 exposing · 6 encountered

6 Word forms

1 inadequate · 2 assumptions · 3 unwillingness · 4 resilience · 5 unpredictable

7 Language focus

1 out · 2 down · 3 from · 4 over · 5 up

This lesson is free. If it saved you time, you can support johnplusnews at **ko-fi.com/johnplusenglish**