

NEWS LESSON

Why Is France Making Less Wine?

BEFORE YOU READ

1 Warm up

Talk about these questions with a partner.

1. How much can one bad season tell you about the climate?
2. Which foods would you miss if they became much more expensive?
3. Should traditional producers change their methods, or protect them?

2 Key words

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

1	**heterogeneity**	☐	A	larger than you need or expect
2	**generous**	☐	B	the amount of rain that falls in a place
3	**dramatic**	☐	C	plant diseases that grow in wet conditions, like mould
4	**exceptionally**	☐	D	in the most important ways
5	**rainfall**	☐	E	a mix of many different kinds, with big differences between them
6	**fungi**	☐	F	to a much greater degree than usual
7	**pressure**	☐	G	a feeling of having to do something quickly
8	**essentially**	☐	H	sudden and very noticeable

3 Read

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

France expects one of its smallest harvests in decades. The striking thing is not the national total but how differently the regions fared.

1 France expects to produce around 35 million hectolitres of wine this year, according to estimates published by its agriculture ministry in October. That is 2% down on 2025 and 14% below the average of the previous five years. The comparison matters because 2025 was not a generous benchmark either: the International Organisation of Vine and Wine recorded it as France's weakest production since 1957.

2 A series of summer heatwaves is the main explanation, slightly offset by later rain. A second factor is less dramatic but worth noting. The area planted with vines fell by about 1.9% over the year, so part of the decline is a matter of land rather than weather.

3 The national figure hides something more interesting. “It's a level of heterogeneity I've never experienced before,” said Jérôme Despey, who chairs the wine advisory board at the public agency FranceAgriMer and grows vines in the southern Hérault department. The regional estimates bear him out.

4 Champagne had the worst of it. Extreme heat accelerated the build-up of sugar in the grapes, and therefore of natural alcohol, which forced growers to pick exceptionally early. The harvest there wrapped up in September for the first time, with production down by about half on both last year and the five-year average. Burgundy and Beaujolais are projected to come in roughly 30% below their five-year average.

5 Bordeaux went the other way. Despite a 5% reduction in its planted area, production there is expected to rise 10% on last year, though that still leaves it 11% below the recent average. The south-west is up about 12%, essentially a return to its previous four-year level.

6 An early harvest is not simply an inconvenience of the calendar. Picking dates are chosen to balance sugar, acidity and flavour, so when heat pushes sugar up faster than the rest of the grape develops, a grower has to choose which quality to sacrifice. Finishing in September, in a region whose rhythm has always run into October, means that decision was taken under pressure.

7 Despey's explanation for the southern result is adaptation rather than luck. Earlier heat pushed growers there to change their methods, including leaving more foliage on the vine so that the leaves shade the fruit. Rainfall in May helped as well.

8 Quality is a separate question from quantity, and here the news is better. The ministry and the industry both stressed the harvest's “excellent health”, free of the fungi and moisture-related diseases that a wet year brings. Claude Mandois, a Champagne producer who picked three-quarters of an average volume, described his own harvest as exceptional in appearance and in taste.

9 Two cautions are worth keeping. These are forecasts rather than final results. And a single hot summer is weather. What the regional differences describe is an industry that has already started planning for a pattern.

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. Both 2025 and 2026 were weak years for French wine production. T F NG
2. Bordeaux's production fell this year because its planted area was cut. T F NG
3. Southern growers began leaving more foliage on their vines because of a government programme. T F NG
4. Bordeaux's production this year is still below its recent average. T F NG
5. The south-west's production is far above its level of the previous four years. T F NG

5 Vocabulary

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

accelerated **acidity** **adaptation** **heterogeneity** **inconvenience** **offset** **pattern** **sacrifice**

1. Higher prices can partly _____ the loss of income when a harvest is small.
2. Warmer winters have _____ the ripening of the fruit, so growers now pick weeks earlier than their grandparents did.
3. When time is short, a grower may have to _____ flavour to protect the rest of the crop.
4. Rather than hoping for cooler weather, many farms are investing in _____ to hotter conditions.
5. A delayed delivery is a minor _____ , but a failed crop can threaten a whole business.
6. Hot weather lowers the _____ of grapes, which can make the wine taste flat.

6 Verb forms

Write the correct form of the verb in brackets.

1. Before this year, Champagne growers _____ in September. (NEVER FINISH)
2. The final figures _____ later in the year. (PUBLISH)
3. If summers stay this hot, growers _____ their grapes even earlier in future. (HAVE TO PICK)
4. Before the storm arrived, the farmers _____ in the fields since dawn. (WORK)
5. Rainfall in May _____ the southern growers as well. (HELP)

7 Language focus: phrasal verbs

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed. Many phrasal verbs have more than one meaning, so read the whole sentence before you choose. Some also take an object and a preposition, as in 'put off' something.

along	away	back	off	on	out	up

1. Early estimates often turn _____ to be wrong once the final figures arrive.
2. Two bad harvests in a row set the whole region _____ by years.
3. Despite the hot summer, many growers carried _____ as normal.
4. Planting new vines cannot make _____ for a crop that has already been lost.
5. The cost of replanting can put small producers _____ entering the business.

SPEAK

8 Talk about it

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

1. Despey credits adaptation rather than luck. What does that suggest for cooler regions?
2. Quantity fell but quality was praised. Which matters more to a producer?
3. Why do these figures count as estimates rather than results?

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

4 True, false or not given

1 T · 2 F · 3 NG · 4 T · 5 F

5 Vocabulary

1 offset · 2 accelerated · 3 sacrifice · 4 adaptation · 5 inconvenience · 6 acidity

6 Verb forms

1 had never finished · 2 will be published · 3 will have to pick · 4 had been working · 5 helped

7 Language focus

1 out · 2 back · 3 on · 4 up · 5 off

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