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Reaping benefits of “miracle harvest,” Oregon wine industry optimistic about 2011 vintage

PORTLAND, October 27, 2011 -- Oregon wine producers may have a lot to be thankful for in another month as they put the finishing touches on the [2011 harvest](#), which is being referring to as the "miracle harvest." The Oregon wine industry, which saw production decline 22% last year from 2009, is now staring at a potentially record harvest as well as one of the outstanding vintages in recent memory. Last year, Oregon was beset by late rains that disrupted the harvest as well as unusually large crop damage from migrating birds.

"Two weeks ago, we were literally in the bottom of the ninth inning, two runs behind with two out," said Sam Tannahill, chairman of the [Oregon Wine Board](#) and a founder of A to Z Wineworks. "Then things changed 180 degrees, the weather patterns shifted and the sun came out. Truly, this is a miracle harvest."

This year has been a roller coaster year for Oregon and other wine producing regions on the West Coast. Oregon experienced a cool and damp spring which got the growing season off to a late start. July produced a good flowering and set, lifting expectations. Warm weather which normally begins in July and August didn't happen until August and September. Then, rain and cooler temperatures cast an ominous cloud as harvest neared.

Oregon's wine producers are all too aware that it's never over until the last grape is picked, but with mostly dry and sunny weather in the forecast, many plan to leave grapes on the vine and continue to harvest well into November. In Southern and Eastern Oregon, however, cooler weather is likely to bring their harvests to a quicker conclusion.

Tannahill likened this year's late, but long finish to the harvest to 1999, considered one of Oregon's stellar vintages. "There are tons of pitfalls and challenges remaining," he warned, "but all the makings are there for a very good year."

Industry veterans give most of the credit to viticulturists and vineyard managers. Aware of the tricky conditions that beset them from the outset of the growing season, vineyard managers drew on their knowledge and experience to counter the weather conditions they were dealt before getting some much needed breaks at the end.

While the grapes still must be made into award-winning wine, producers are optimistic based on what they are seeing in the initial crush. Initial indications are for wines that will be rich with great color and moderate in alcohol that will pair superbly with food.

Wine producers from around the state are reporting similar situations. Southern Oregon experienced some frost damage earlier this week, but its harvest is generally ahead of the northern parts of the state. With copious amounts of sunshine over the past several weeks, the harvest is bringing smiles to the faces of Southern Oregon producers.

In the Columbia Gorge the sunny, dry finish to the harvest is producing high quality fruit with virtually no adverse effects from earlier rain. “We had faith that we would have this window,” said Robert Morus, president of Phelps Creek Vineyards near Hood River.

“We just needed a little more sun in October to finish it off,” Morus added. “We're taking everything now because we don't see a lot of heat in the forecast.”

About OWB:

The Oregon Wine Board (OWB) is a semi-independent Oregon state agency managing marketing, research and education initiatives that support and advance the Oregon wine and wine grape industry. The Board works on behalf of all Oregon wineries and independent growers throughout the state's diverse winegrowing regions. The Oregon wine grape and wine industry contributes more than \$2.7 billion of economic activity to the state economy each year, including more than 13,500 wine-related jobs.

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