2023 Growing Season Report

by Mike D. Etzel

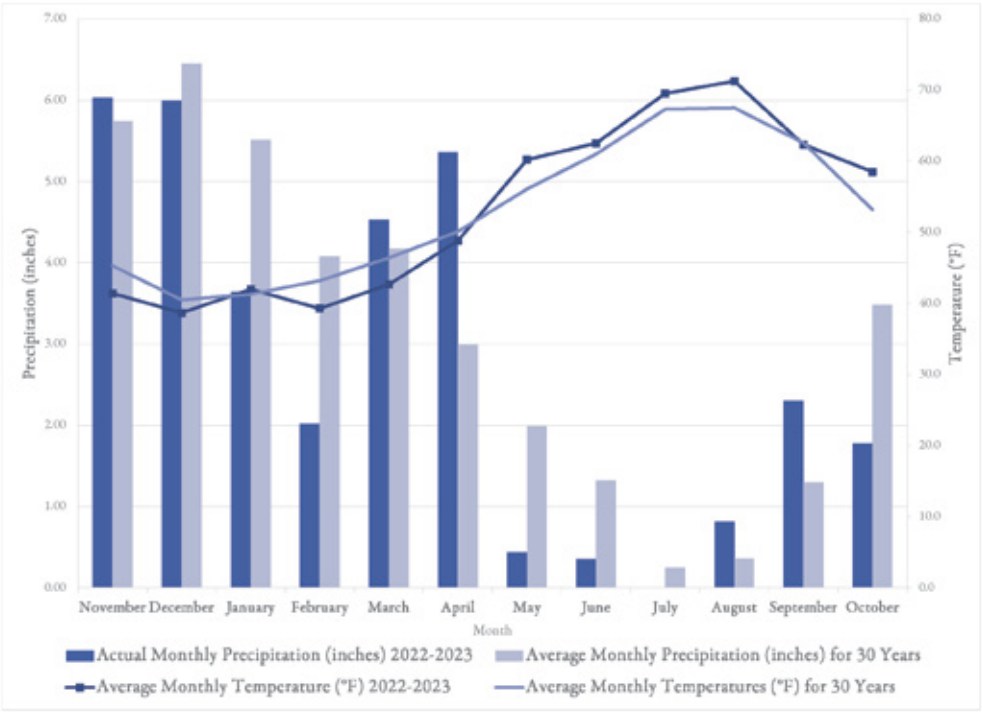
Harvest Timeline

The 2023 growing season started slow, much like the previous vintage. April surprised everyone with almost double the usual rainfall, but we dodged any frost threats, which was a relief. By early May, things kicked into gear with lots of vigorous growth. This season was fast and intense, characterized by above-average heat accumulation and significantly below-average rainfall. We lucked out with low disease pressure, and while the crop load wasn't massive, it was healthy. We didn't have to use as many treatments for disease control—probably the lowest we've seen in years.

Those heavy rains in April were a blessing, keeping moisture in the deeper soil for our dry-farmed estate, especially in the plots with older vines. By late July, though, we noticed some stress in the younger plants that hadn't developed deep root systems to handle a 90-day drought. Just when veraison kicked in around mid-August, we got under an inch of rain, which helped with the final ripening, allowing the flavors and chemical makeup to come together beautifully. We started harvesting at the estate on September 10 and wrapped up swiftly by September 22.

Vintage Adaptations:

We discovered some young vine parcels on the estate that were perfect for our Willamette Valley blend, and these younger vines had a nice, dark, sappy profile. We paid close attention to our picking decisions, typically going for earlier rather than later. We sorted out any sun- or heat-damaged grapes on the processing line and used little to no sulfur before fermentation since the fruit was in excellent shape. We also increased the use of whole clusters to keep the alcohol levels down and promote intracellular fermentation. Additionally, we decided to pick everything at night to ensure the fruit stayed at or below cellar temperature before processing, which worked wonders for maintaining a fresh profile across the lineup.

Qualitative Assessment:

The highlights from this warmer vintage are the pure, fresh, round, and fully realized fruit flavors. It's great to see that the profile mainly features red fruit tones and a bright, medium-bodied appearance in the glass—no inky or overripe tones here. We're thrilled with our 2023 lineup, which looks promising for aging, potentially lasting 15 years or more. It's reminiscent of the 2015 vintage regarding climate and wine profile, though the heat during ripening was a bit more extreme back then, with more rain to boot. Overall, it's shaping up to be a decidedly stellar vintage.