

Harvest finishing strong in the Hill Country

It's been an interesting vintage, but aren't they all? Most growers report a large harvest with high quality fruit.

Unfortunately, hail knocked out a few vineyards early in the season, and the recent heat has been unrelenting.

But as harvest winds down in the Hill Country, it picks up in the Texas High Plains AVA.

This growing region, or AVA (American Viticultural Area) near Lubbock is where approximately 75% of the wine grapes in Texas are grown. Many Hill Country wineries receive fruit from growers in the High Plains.

Grapes or freshly pressed grape juice is regularly transported to the Hill Country to be made into wine. This is the busiest and most exciting time of year for Texas grape growers and winemakers.

Some wine notes from the area:

- **Becker Vineyards** began the harvest season on July 19th at their estate vineyards with Sauvignon Blanc. Estate Malbec and Petit Sirah have also been harvested. Some of the additional fruit Becker Vineyards purchases from independent grape growers in the Texas Hill Country AVA and Texas High Plains AVA has started to come in. While heat is a concern, the quality and quantity of fruit has been excellent, reported Jonathan (Jon) Leahy, winemaker with Becker Vineyards.

- “This year is looking to be one of our better harvests, with higher yields and really good quality fruit. A spring hail story in the Texas High Plains damaged one of the vineyards we work with, so we won't be getting Graciano this year. However, we are excited to get Grenache, Mourvèdre, Syrah and Alicante Bouschet from the mostly organic Desert Willow Vineyards and our first fruit from our estate Kuhlken Vineyards since 2020. Everything leading up to this point has looked really good – our vineyards have enjoyed great vigor and canopy. While the heat is unfortunate, I am not overly worried about it compromising a good crop. It's looking to be a good harvest for us.” — David Kuhlken, of **Pedernales Cellars** in Stonewall.



Wilfong is the producer of “This is Texas Wine — The Podcast.” She is sharing news about the Hill Country wine industry with Fredericksburg Publishing to further promote the industry. Subscribe to her podcast on any platform.

- “Due to mild weather during pollination and close to average rainfall we are expecting a great crop with potential above average yields,” reported **William Chris Wine Co.** in Hye.
- This season, **Bending Branch Winery** will have its largest harvest to date, bringing in more than 30 grape varieties from over 30 vineyards for Bending Branch and custom crush clients. While one of Bending Branch's important vineyard partners in the Texas High Plains saw devastating hail a couple of months ago, overall, the harvest yields are up across the state. Bending Branch received its first fruit — Blanc du Bois — on July 8. Later this season, Bending Branch will receive the first-ever Charbono harvested in Texas, owners report.
- “Vineyards are in great shape considering how tough last year was on them. There have been the typical pressures associated with lots of rain, but the main issue has been hail,” said Doug Lewis of **Lewis Wines** in Johnson City.
- “Given we never have a ‘normal’ harvest, this year is turning out to be fairly normal. Spring was kind to the vineyards, giving us a great start for high quality and good yields of fruit. Our forecasted yields are coming in on target,” reports Dave Reilly, of **Duchman Family Winery** in Driftwood.