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Smaller Berries, Big Flavor: Idaho's 2026 Harvest Delivers Promising Quality

Record-early bud break, a spring hail in the Sunnyslope, and summer heat tempered by wildfire smoke shaped an eventful season that produced smaller yields of outstanding quality.

BOISE, Idaho (October 29, 2026) - Idaho's grape growers are wrapping up the 2026 harvest with smaller-than-usual yields in some areas, but the fruit coming off the vines is small, flavorful, and concentrated.

The season tested many growers from the start. A warm winter led to the earliest bud break on record, and a devastating spring hailstorm hit the Sunnyslope Region. Summer ran hot, but wildfire smoke from Oregon tempered sunlight during a key ripening stage, and a cool fall let the fruit ripen longer on the vine.

"We had our share of questions going into harvest after such a warm winter and hot summer, along with wildfire smoke from Oregon and hail damage in parts of the region," said James Nederend of Koenig Vineyards. "Despite all of that, the fruit coming into the winery has been tasting really nice."

In the Snake River Valley American Viticultural Area (AVA), including the Eagle Foothills AVA, yields were mostly down because of extreme weather or because growers scaled back some crops. But growers agree the quality is excellent, with smaller berries delivering rich, concentrated flavor.

"So far the yields have been low," said Jay Hawkins of Lanae Ridge Vineyard. "This is not only a function of the hail and frost damage, but also the cluster sizes seem smaller than normal. On the bright side, the quality is phenomenal," he said.

In contrast, the Lewis-Clark Valley AVA in North Idaho had a much less dramatic growing season. "We had a consistently warm growing season, with the warmth hanging on well into October," said Coco Umiker of Clearwater Canyon Cellars in Lewiston. "Overall, it was a steady season that gave the vines just the right amount of stress, and we brought in some beautiful clusters of grapes," she said.

Below are insights from Idaho winegrowers from across the state on the 2026 harvest.

Caitlin Holesinsky, Holesinsky Vineyard & Winery, Buhl, Idaho: "A warm, early spring woke the vines up sooner than usual. They'd just started to flower when a cold snap hit. Chardonnay got the worst of it, while Merlot and Syrah came through just fine. That left us with uneven ripening, so we dropped a good amount of fruit to protect quality. It's too early to call the vintage, but I love the tension we're seeing. Years with a little struggle in the vineyard tend to give me the wines I'm most proud of."

James Nederend, Koenig Vineyards, Caldwell, Idaho: "For most of the growing season, the grapes were running roughly two to three weeks ahead of a normal year. The warm winter and hot summer pushed development along very quickly, which ultimately led to our unusually early start to harvest. The wildfire smoke later in the summer seemed to slow that progression considerably. Combined with cooler fall weather, that has stretched out the season and gave several varieties more time on the vine."

Jay Hawkins, Lanae Ridge Vineyard, Caldwell, Idaho: "At the risk of sounding like a country and western songwriter, we have seen it all this year in the vineyard. As the year progressed, we looked to be on track for the earliest harvest in our vineyard's history. Then Mother Nature threw several events at us that really changed the season's schedule. In late July, we had a huge hailstorm roll through the Sunnyslope that caused significant damage. Shortly after, smoke rolled in from regional fires. For at least 3 weeks, the UV light reaching the vineyard was significantly reduced. So, we went from 3 weeks ahead to close to the historical average for harvest."

Korina Bennallack, Dude DeWalt Cellars, Eagle, Idaho: "This is the earliest start to harvest yet! We started the first week of September. The warm weather and sunshine affected our vines/grapes with an early bud break, veraison, and overall growth."

Coco Umiker, Clearwater Canyon Cellars, Lewiston, Idaho: "Harvest kicked off the first week of September, right on schedule for our white grapes. We moved into our reds shortly after, a little earlier than past years. Our final pick from our estate vineyard was October 2nd, which just might be a record for our earliest harvest finish."

Idaho growers expressed enthusiasm for a wide range of grape varieties for 2026, ranging from bold reds like Zinfandel, Syrah, and Tempranillo to whites like Chardonnay and Viognier.

"I think there's an increasing appreciation for the diversity of wines Idaho can produce," said Nederend of Koenig. "We can make ripe, structured reds, but our elevation, cool nights, and growing conditions can also give us white wines with a lot of aroma, freshness, and character. This vintage should be another compelling example of that."

Another Idaho wine milestone in 2026 was the 10th anniversary of the Lewis-Clark Valley AVA, federally designated in 2016. Straddling the Idaho-Washington border, the AVA has a deep winemaking history dating back to the 1860s and is known for its dramatic canyon landscapes, diverse soils and balanced wines. Today, the region is gaining recognition as one of the Northwest's most distinctive emerging wine destinations.

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About the Idaho Wine Commission

The Idaho Wine Commission markets, connects, and promotes Idaho's unique wineries, cideries, and growers. With an ideal climate and geography for growing grapes, Idaho is already home to 65 wineries and 8 cideries. We take wine seriously, but never ourselves. To learn more about Idaho wines and ciders, visit www.idahowines.org, or follow the Idaho Wine Commission on Facebook or Instagram, and Expect the Unexpected. Check out the Idaho region guide on WineFolly.com. This online resource lets consumers learn more about the state's wine history, terroir, varietals, and offers tips for planning Idaho wine travel.