

THE 2022 HARVEST IN ARGENTINA



► WOMEN IN WINE

For observers of Argentina, this report will come as a pleasant surprise: it features women exclusively. Women who tend to vines, work at the winery, in marketing and on the business side. We're highlighting this for the 2022 harvest for the simple reason that today an enormous amount of women work in the wine industry but until recently much of their labor has been overlooked.

However, winds of change are blowing across Argentina and the world in general, and this is reflected in a report where the voices are all female. Every year, all across the country, from Salta to Patagonia, one finds plenty of women making wine and because Wines of Argentina subscribes to the UN's Women's Empowerment Principles, the only such organization to do so to date, it is fitting that a season that has undoubtedly produced some memorable wines be told from a female perspective. This report describes many of the ups and downs the industry was put through this year, featuring both early and late frosts amid other events, before vats and barrels were filled with reds and whites that have us eagerly anticipating how they'll be in the glass.

But before we toast the end of the harvest, as General Manager of Wines of Argentina I'd like to add something more. Showing a distinctive commitment to values such as sustainability, women make valuable contributions at every stage of the supply chain and this report, which is also a part of the Women of Argentina program, is looking to emphasize that especially. You don't need to be a member to take part, simply to demonstrate a clear commitment to gender equality as an individual or organization. The only way to produce wines that truly represent the people who make them and the places where they are made is to ensure that women and men have equal access to opportunities.

Magdalena Pesce

General Manager of WOFA

A quality-focused year for good producers

2022 was a quality-focused harvest across the country, with expressive reds and whites in every region and style. However, the season was full of challenges that each producer needed to react to appropriately to get through successfully.

In contrast to other years, this harvest featured some climatic turbulence that left its mark on the vines. Because conditions were similar across the different regions, 2022 was a year when the skills of the technical teams at the wineries really came to the fore.

Laura Principiano, the oenologist at Familia Zuccardi, reports that “the acidity this year suggests that the wines will age wonderfully,” while Agustina Hanna at Ruca Malen, says that “this was a great year in terms of quality with reds with a mellow texture and lovely freshness.”

Other professionals such as Verónica Ortego at Mythic Wines, predict “an excellent year for Cabernet Franc, with vivid color and good concentration.”

Overall, 2022 was a year in which yields were low. Similarly to 2021 and 2017, when grape volumes were also down – especially among the whites – yields dropped by as much as 30% depending on the region, as a consequence of climatic conditions that presented both difficulties and opportunities. This is where the skill and decision-making of each producer really counted.

Laura Catena at Catena Wines puts it very well: “It was a rollercoaster year with two major frosts and brief window between the beginning and end of the harvest which required great dedication and commitment from the wineries and their teams.”

So, what did the rollercoaster consist of? Here we present a brief summary of the weather throughout the season in Mendoza and San Juan, which account for 93% of the surface area under vine in Argentina.

MENDOZA & SAN JUAN

The winter and beginning of spring were very dry, which accentuated the risk of frost damage. “During the first half of October 2021 we saw the usual late frosts which damaged yields, especially during the Malbec’s setting period, particularly the old vines,” says Andrea Ferreyra, an expert at Finca La Celia. Two frosts hit especially hard between October 6 and 8, when temperatures dipped to between -4°C and -6°C in some places. These two events were definitive for a large part of the harvest. In the productive core of Argentina, the lower areas of San Juan and Mendoza, shoots had grown to between 5 and 10 cm when the cold snaps struck.

Laura Principiano, the oenologist at Familia Zuccardi, describes the effect in the Uco Valley: “In October we saw frosts that especially affected the cooler areas of the Valley, reducing the eventual harvest yields quite significantly.”

Gabriela García, the oenologist at Salentein, says that the frosts “mostly affected budding, meaning that they grew unevenly and at different speeds. We had to work hard to level up the bunches through pruning.”

Between the October frosts and an even later, even more unexpected one on November 17, productivity was low. “In Pedernal, San Juan, frosts were the main event of the year,” says Paula González at Pyros Wines drawing a line under the 2022 season. Once it was over, yields were generally 12% lower than 2021 and 30% lower than 2018 (the last significantly productive year) across Argentina.

In addition to the drop in yields caused by the frosts, which varied in severity depending on the region, there was also the random factor of hail damage, which can wipe out one vineyard while leaving its neighbors unscathed. Flavia Martínez at Bianchi says: “After the frosts, the hail was also a slight issue in summer, but within expected margins.”

A cool, fairly damp year

If one looks at the curves of accumulated temperatures in Agrelo or Gualtallary, in Luján de Cuyo and Tupungato respectively, they’ll see that the spring began quite cool but by December the cumulative temperatures were slightly higher than average.

However, “December and January were quite cool and the rain was rather heavy in the final month of the year, which increased the risk of diseases such as peronospora in the berries and leaves,” says Victoria Brond at Alpamanta in Ugarteche, Luján de Cuyo.

In January, the cycle changed: whereas development had been going quickly due to the slightly higher temperatures, the degree-day curves now started to flatten out. “The rain came back in February,” says Noelia Torres, the oenologist at Marchiori Barraud, also in Luján de Cuyo. For example, if in an average year in Ugarteche rainfall is about 250 millimeters, this year some areas saw 100 millimeters more during that period, raising overall rainfall significantly. That’s what rain is like in the desert: deluges at specific points on the map. More important to the growing season, however, were the cloud cover and humidity.

“It’s normal for it to rain in February,” resumes Torres. “What isn’t is for temperatures to remain low and ripening to be delayed among the reds, while for the whites the humidity made decision-making during harvest trickier.”

The high humidity caused some outbreaks of peronospora although none were too severe. Jimena López at Graffito Wines, who are based in Luján de Cuyo, says: “In vineyards that were treated properly, it wasn’t a problem, and the whites, especially Chardonnay, are fresh and expressive.”

However, conditions that hurt some were great for others. Maricruz Antolín, who runs Krontiras Wines, is very happy: “The cloudy days and lower temperatures allowed Luján de Cuyo to enjoy a cool year, producing very expressive wines.” In a region where the heat can be a challenge, cool, damp days are always good news. Measured in terms of degree days for Luján de Cuyo, for example, 2021 and 2022 were very similar seasons, with warm Marches that helped to round out ripening among well-tended fruit.

In the Uco Valley, where temperatures also tended to drift downward due to the cloudy weather in February, the accumulated temperatures started to dip below average. “Gualtallary was cooler than other years,” says Laura Catena, whose Adrianna vineyard is right in the middle of the region. Andrea Ferreyra from La Consulta, meanwhile, says: “We were about average.”

A perfect window in March

March began with an ideal window for harvesting. “We had warm days that resulted in slow ripening among the reds: it’s a year of fleshy, gentle tannins that enhance silkiness and elegance,” says Alejandra Riofrío from Navarro Correas. “I can’t get over the color, it’s between 2500 and 3500 points with intense, nuanced purples.”

One of the distinctive qualities of the year is that varieties with long growth cycles such as Cabernet Sauvignon ripened in March, 45 days after vernaissage. This is the magic number in Bordeaux. “We don’t really know why,” reports Laura Catena. “But this year we harvested the Cabernet Sauvignon before the Malbec, which is unusual. In both cases we achieved optimal ripeness and health.”

Meanwhile, Victoria Brond at Alpamanta, says: “It’s a stand-out year for Sauvignon Blanc while the Malbecs and Merlots were excellent. If you harvested early, you’ll have got good Cabernet Sauvignons.”

It was during that March window that the reds managed to achieve a perfect year. So says Celina Ribas at Escorihuela Gascón: “It was an exceptional harvest, with concentration, structure and significant phenolic development. And it came in spite of the rain and frosts which set the pace and hurried us into harvesting the grapes, which fortunately were just at the right point of their development.”

The oenologist is referring to an unusual phenomenon seen from Patagonia to San Juan: a cold front, which had been forecast well in advance, brought significant frosts in the higher, cooler areas of Mendoza between March 30 and 31, hitting the Uco Valley and Pedernal in San Juan hard. Those vineyards that hadn’t yet been harvested were left with their grapes exposed to the sun due to leaf losses. “We worked hard with the agricultural department to harvest everything before that last frost on March 30,” says Agustina Hanna at Ruca Malen with relief. Other oenologists report similar haste.

Estela Perinetti, the oenologist of Las Estelas based in El Peral, Tupungato, puts it clearly: “The harvest was perfect in March. Everything that was harvested before the frost is valuable. The grapes picked afterward will depend greatly on how quickly the work was done.”

Andrea Ferreyra at Finca La Celia puts it like this: “The frost mainly affected the number of grapes, not the quality, because we’d harvested 70% by then and had processed all the premium grapes. I think there’s excellent potential, especially among the Malbecs and grapes like Cabernet Franc and Cabernet Sauvignon harvested with fresh profiles.”

Looking back, the unusual humidity and rainfall made some areas of Mendoza not entirely dissimilar to Bordeaux, before the cold front arrived. This is why the experts are enthusiastic about Cabernet Sauvignon as well as the Malbec. Rosario Toso from Cheval des Andes reports: “For the wines themselves, it’s been a notable year for Cabernet Sauvignons because the conditions were exceptional for natural concentration while the rain helped the vines through the few heatwaves there were.”

For Mendoza and San Juan, at least, 2022 was a year of highs and lows. For those who read it well, anticipating the risks to health and acting quickly during the harvest, it will be a vintage to remember.

► THE NORTH AND SOUTH

In the Calchaquí Valley, it was an average year generally and yields were mostly similar to previous harvests. The difference was the timing of the rain in the summer. According to Carolina Cristofani at El Esteco, Cafayate, “in the valley we had mild temperatures with consistent rainfall in December and January and several days of continuous drizzle, which is quite rare; we usually get showers around here. We got 260mm compared to 200mm in a normal year,” she says. These conditions in the north resulted in lower solar radiation and reduced intensity in the wines. It is thanks to this that producers are reporting a long harvest: in some areas it began in January and continued right through to the end of April.

Those who harvested early include Estancia Los Cardones. Diana Bellincioni, the winery’s oenologist, says: “the Malbec is presenting potent red fruit flavors and rich freshness; as for the Torrontés, we harvested at two different times to achieve a citrus profile, good freshness and the variety’s floral aromas. The grapes from the highest valleys, like Cachi, are delivering Malbecs with fruity intensity and I’m crazy about Pucará: fresh, juicy and long-lasting wines with a refined, delicate expression for the North.”

And it is for these same reasons that stand out wines include the Torrontés, which will have citrusy profiles, while Malbec and Cabernet Sauvignon achieved perfect ripeness.

At the other end of the country, Patagonia, the 2022 harvest was affected by the frosts of October 2021 and also that on March 30. In general, losses are estimated at around 20%. However, “we had a January with very high peaks in temperature, up to 40°C, which drove ripening and brought it forward, but then the February was cool,” says Eugenia Herrera at Bodega Aniello in Río Negro. After that, the year returned to normal and good quality grapes were available for harvest in March. “I’m loving the Chardonnay,” she says, while the Malbecs and Merlots are looking strong across the region. Neuquén is reporting similarly, with beautifully fruity Pinot Noirs.

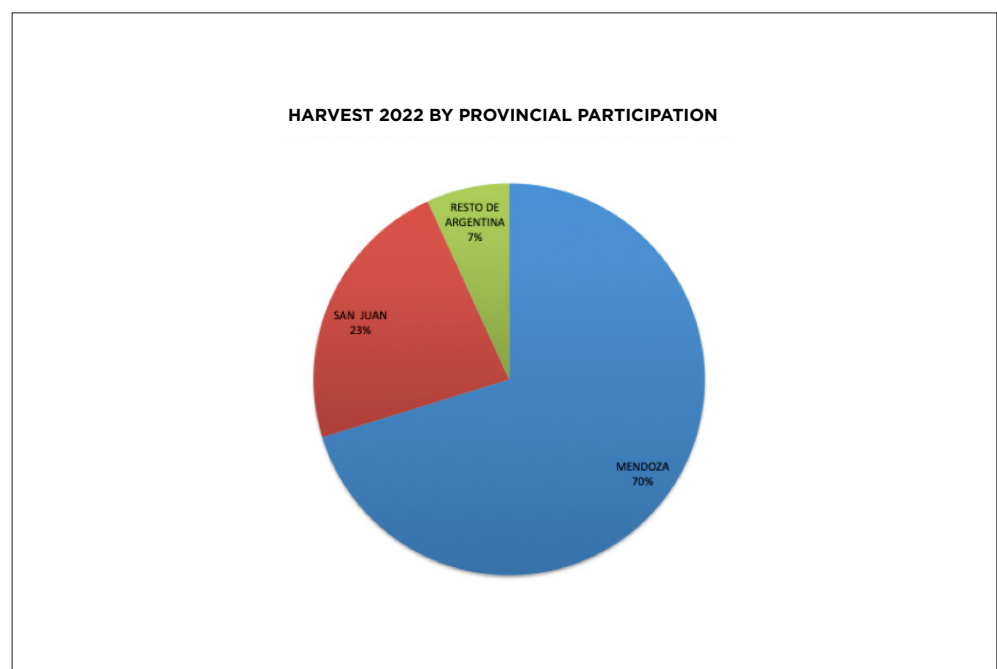
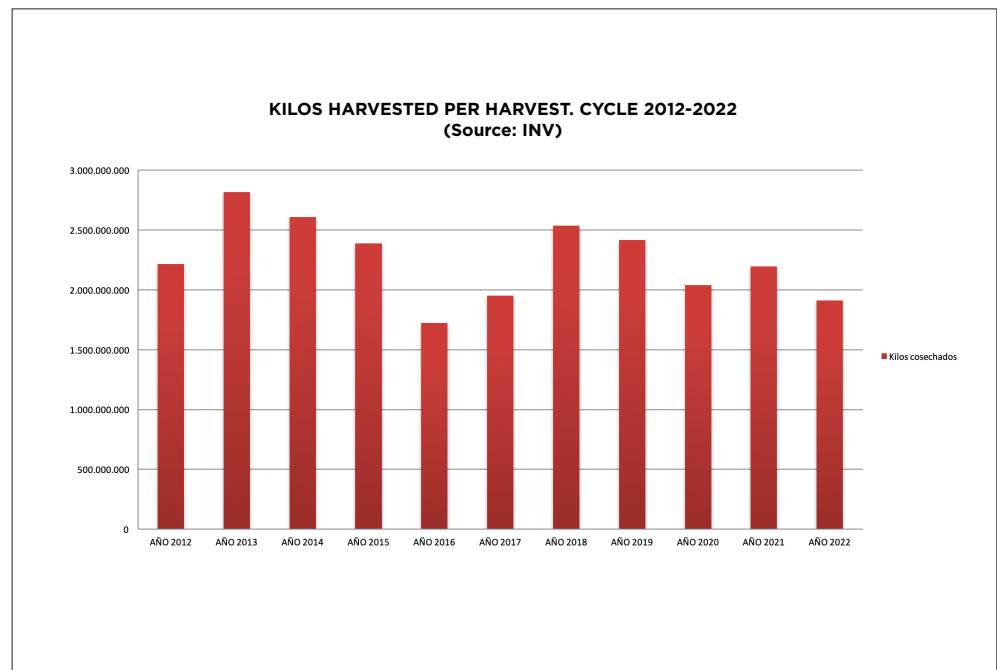
Further south, in Trevelin, Chubut, Sofía Elena, the oenologist at Contra Corriente, reports “a summer without frosts, even though we had an unusually cool February. The plants grew well thanks to the good amount of water. It all points to a year of rich fruitiness and ripeness with delicate acidity. Essentially: balanced wines.”

So, the 2022 harvest presents a mixed picture. Those producers who read the year well were able to adjust their logistics to harvest properly and in time and so to produce wines they’re getting excited about. In the warmer areas, the cool season is resulting in greater refinement and balance among the reds. Where the majority of producers will remember it as a variable, challenging year, all the signs suggest that it will offer consumers memorable wines of nuance and flavor.

► APPENDIX

The hard data back up the accounts of oenologists and agricultural engineers. The statistics available to date include.

Quantities harvested in the decade 2012-2022, showing that 2022 is reporting one of the lowest yields. Compared to 2018, the highest yield of the past five years, 2022 saw a 25% drop.

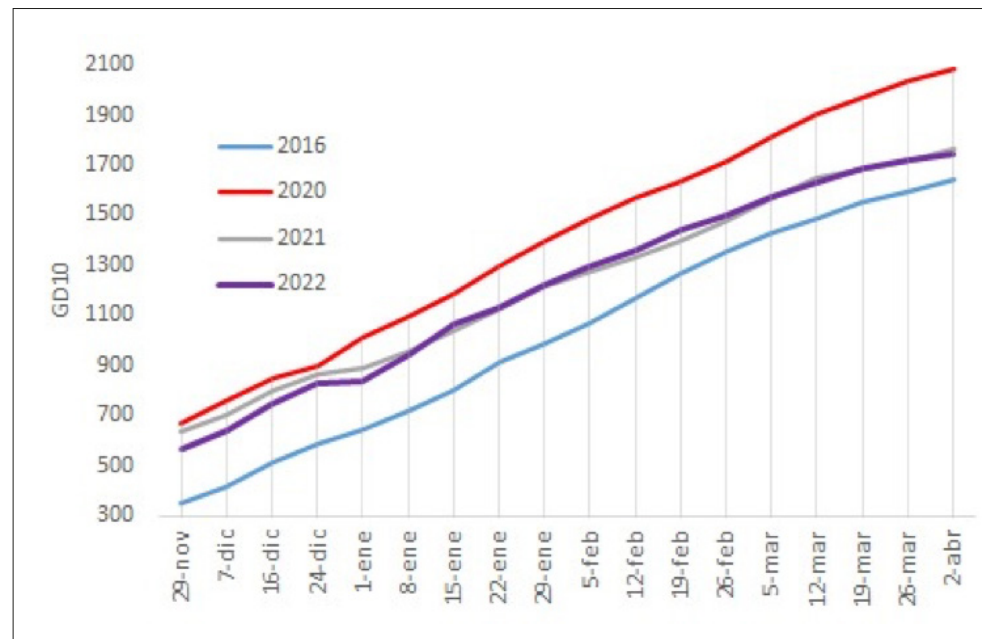


► CLIMATE DATA

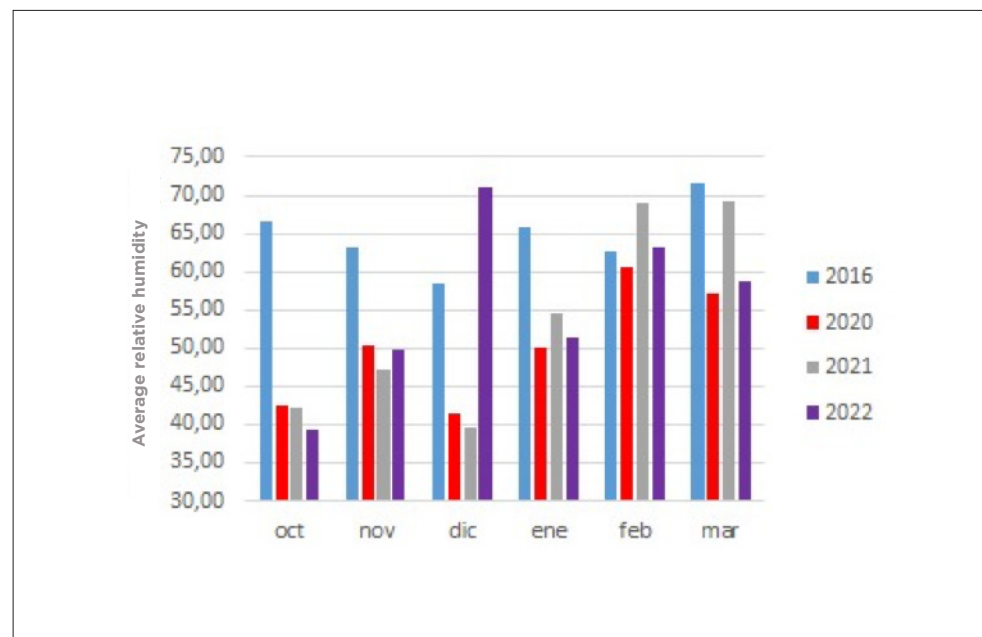
Luján de Cuyo

Comparative accumulated Degree Days in Agrelo, Finca Nuna.

The curves show that in Luján de Cuyo it was a similar year to 2021, with a cool spring cycle, albeit with a steeper curve.

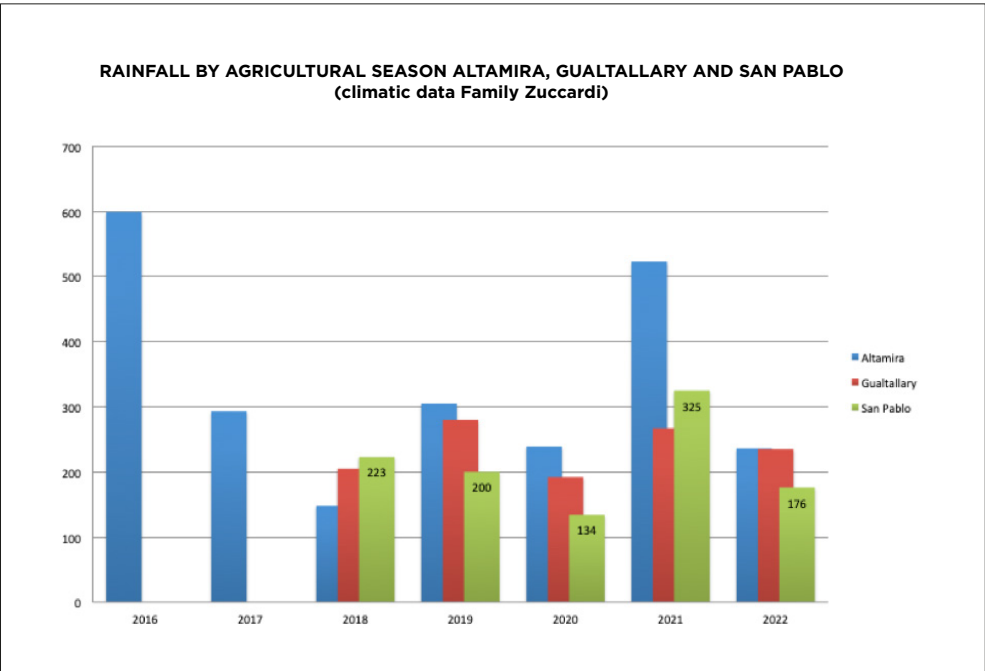
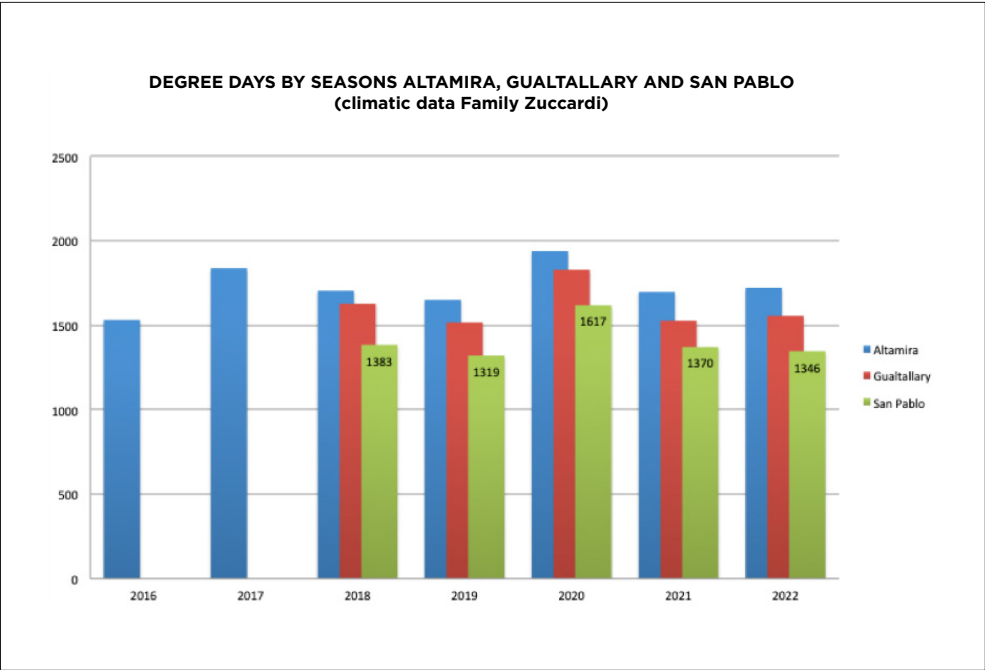


Relative average humidity, broken down by month across the 2021-2022 season.

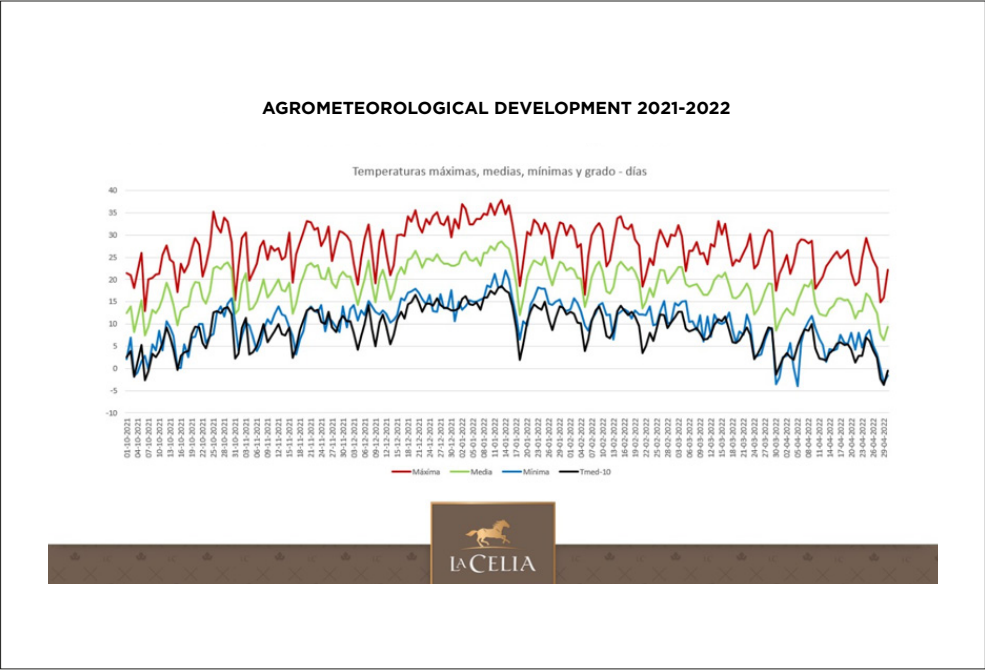


Uco Valley

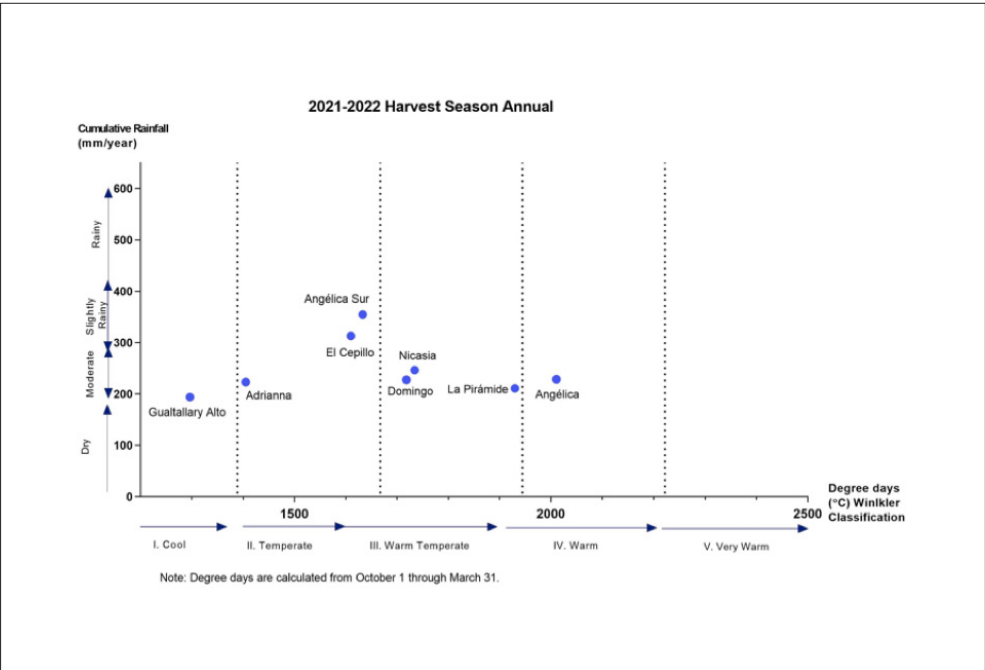
Degree days for the last few seasons in the Uco Valley between October and March (source, Familia Zuccardi).



The breakdown of daily temperatures in Eugenio Bustos, La Consulta & Paraje Altamira are significant. In the graph below, which shows information from Bodega La Celia, we clearly see the frosts that hit the region, as well as the fall in temperatures in February.



Comparing different regions in Mendoza, this graph prepared by Catena Wines shows the different figures for humidity, temperature and thermal accumulation in each of the vineyards: Gualtallary Alto, Adrianna and Domingo, located at different heights in Tupungato; El Cepillo, Nicasia and Angélica Sur in San Carlos; and La Pirámide and Angélica in Luján de Cuyo.





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