

## ‘Right on the edge’: Managing risks and rewards in Central Otago

 Kavinda Herath | [SouthlandTimes](#)

May 11, 2026

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Historic Central Otago winery crafts premium wine harvest

VIDEO CREDIT: KAVINDA HERATH

As the autumn harvest settles across Central Otago, the team at Monte Christo Winery is transforming about 110 tonnes of fruit into wine.

Situated on a site that dates back to the 1860s, the winery was established by Frenchman Jean Désiré Feraud during the gold rush and is considered the first in the region.

The unique climate of Central Otago comes with its own risks and advantages.

Winemaker Karl Coombes said, “We’re the driest part of New Zealand, which helps reduce issues like rot.”

The extreme diurnal temperature swings — hot days and cold nights — were “ideal for pinot noir”, a variety notoriously sensitive to climate, he said.

“Frost is a major risk, especially in spring,” Coombes said. “A single frost event can damage new growth and significantly reduce yield.”

Managing the 22 hectares of vines across Alexandra, Bannockburn, and Pisa falls to viticulturist Sam Woods. The team operates with a strict organic focus, eschewing herbicides in favour of hand-tending the crop.

Despite the challenges of being “right on the edge” of suitable winemaking conditions, Woods believes the environment is the key to their quality.

Photographer Kavinda Herath went along to capture the harvest.



Greg Eden hard at work during harvest time at Packspur Vineyard near Cromwell, which is managed by Monte Christo Winery.  
KAVINDA HERATH / THE SOUTHLAND TIMES



Monte Christo winemaker Karl Coombes says Central Otago's climate is ideal for pinot noir.  
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Robert Bangtor carries harvested grapes to a tractor at Packspur Vineyard.  
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Silas Bumseng is among the workers who help harvest the grapes that will eventually be used in 95,000 bottles of wine.  
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Willie Napua gets down low to pick fruit in the vineyard.  
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Jackson Samsam makes light work of carrying multiple empty buckets to use for harvesting.  
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Viticultivist Sam Woods shows off some grapes grown at the Monte Christo Vineyard near Cromwell.  
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Brenda Bell, Samuel Mera, Greg Eden, Sam Woods, and Katherine Agüero process grapes at Packspur Vineyard.  
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Samuel Mera holding freshly harvested grapes at Monte Christo Vineyard near Cromwell.  
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Brenda Bell processing grapes at Packspur Vineyard under the cover of protective nets.  
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There's a quiet hum in Central Otago vineyards during harvest season as workers extract the fruits of a long growing season.  
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Katherine Agüero holds out the deep purple grapes harvested at Monte Christo Vineyard.  
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