

Oregon winegrowers make bid to overhaul 30-year-old industry rules

by Bend_Weekly_News_Sources

Wine growers have petitioned the Oregon Liquor Control Commission (OLCC) to update the agency's 30-year-old administrative rules on wine labeling to reflect the needs of today's industry.

The Oregon Winegrower's Association (OWA) said its petition addresses issues that place some producers at a disadvantage in the marketplace. One proposal is to create allowances for up to a 25 percent grape blend in 39 warm-climate wines, while maintaining the 90 percent single-grape purity requirement for the majority of Oregon wines.

The petition would amend five rules and eliminate three others in Division 10 of the OLCC's Administrative Rules, titled "Wine Produced or Bottled in Oregon from *Vitis Vinifera* or Its Hybrid Grapes." Liquor commissioners will consider accepting or denying the petition when they meet April 20, 1 p.m., at OLCC headquarters in Milwaukie.

When the wine rules were initially adopted, there were fewer than three dozen wineries, mostly in the Willamette Valley; now there are 500 wineries throughout Oregon, explained John Weisinger, chair of OWA's Label Review Committee, in a letter to the OLCC.

Among the changes, the petition seeks to eliminate the OLCC's listing of approved grape varietal names. Instead, the growers would use the federal Alcohol & Tobacco Tax & Trade Bureau's (TTB) list of approved grape varieties. The TTB is the approval agency for all wine labeling.

Weisinger said the petition was drawn up in a collaborative way, with support from producers in various growing regions of the state. Winegrower associations from the Rogue Valley, Southern Oregon, Umpqua Valley and the Oregon Coast submitted letters supporting the petition.

Representatives from 31 wineries, however, urged the OLCC to reject any move to dilute Oregon's minimum percentage required for varietal labeling.

On April 20, commissioners will also ponder a petition by the Oregon Server Education Providers and Instructors Association to amend OAR 845-016-0015, eliminating the minimum 4.5 hour time requirement for initial alcohol server classroom training. Instead of a set classroom time, the instructors seek periodic in-class testing to assess student comprehension of the material, which they say more closely matches online server training courses.

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