

Testimony in Opposition of Senate Bill No. 379

Good morning Chairman and members of the Committee. My name is George Hoff and I am writing you on behalf of Stone Pillar Vineyard & Winery in Olathe, Kansas, and more importantly as a fifth generation Kansas farmer. We are in opposition to Senate Bill No. 379.

1. This bill is a marketing ploy for foreign states' products.
2. This bill would allow multiple ownership of wineries and would expand the market many times. This is a way products from foreign states could circumvent the wholesalers and distributors.
3. This bill would wipe out true Farm Wineries by doing away with the current 60% Kansas product requirement. All wine producers would have to get a MANUFACTURER'S license from the Kansas Alcoholic Beverage Control Division. A MANUFACTURER'S license is like a BREWERY license and a FARM WINERY license is like a MICRO BREWERY license. The latter two have latitude and perks meant to encourage Kansas agriculture.
4. There is no integrity in making wine or blending bulk wine in our state from grapes that come from California, Washington, and other far reaching viticulture areas; when we have the ability to cultivate and produce quality wines in the vast majority of our state, after all it cannot be true Kansas wine if it is not grown in Kansas by Kansas farmers.

As members of the Kansas Viticulture Farm Winery Association we fully support the statements of our fellow members in opposition of this legislation. Though accurate records may not be fully accessible as to the number of acres of grapes in our state, they are increasing by the year; and as is true of farming, production will vary depending on the conditions of the weather. These self-starting hard working people will be devastated at the loss of a marketplace where inexpensive grapes are readily available due to the deregulation of our industry.

As newcomers to the wine industry we have found an abundance of locally grown grapes that have increased our production intake from nearly 20 tons of grapes in 2009 to over 50 tons in 2011. A very small acreage of farmland can produce enough grapes to sustain a farm winery. Our family has farmed almost every kind of crop/ livestock here in our 150+ years in Kansas. I grew corn, soybeans, and wheat for 15 years prior to vineyards; grapes have proven they hold the potential to be a highly sustainable and productive crop in our state; and far exceed the ton/acre ratio of the grain crops. California and many other states across the nation embrace agriculture in its various forms as a way of connecting people to where and how our foods are produced; Simply Kansas aims to do the same for our state. If passed this bill would serve to further disconnect our consumers from the idea that we have the ability to grow and produce award winning wines in Kansas

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Allowing this bill to pass would devastate many years of hard work from many local vineyard owners. We work closely with our fellow small local growers to pursue a high quality crop every year to produce world class wines. We intend to plant more acres as do our growers. There are many acres that are not yet producing because it takes 3-4 years to produce a usable quality grape; this story rings true of many people starting vineyards that are not on the radar all across the state. We have experienced the loss of crops as grain farmers and know Mother Nature will give us what she wants and take it as she pleases; such is the life of a farmer. All of the major wine regions of the world are built on integrity, not purchasing grapes from somewhere else and making them into wine. It is a trial one must prove themselves to be capable of taking on the challenges of growing and producing fine wines. Wine-growing is a widely used term because we grow it from the ground up; from plant to bottle we are putting farm in farm-wineries using Kansas grapes.

I suggest that the bill be sent to the Kansas Grape and Wine Advisory Council for evaluation. This bill was introduced without the input of the entire industry. The Kansas Grape and Wine Advisory Council is the place for this to take place before any bill is introduced to the legislators. The Council meets with the Secretary of Agriculture four times a year.

Thank You,

George Hoff

President/ Winemaker

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