

Community Pages

Wine & Brew Industry vs OHA's "Rethink the Drink" Oregon Wine Council - "Dissatisfied with the OHA"

A public service announcement from the Oregon Health Authority that aired across the state about alcohol consumption, is getting pushback from the wine industry. The PSA called "Why?" is part of the OHA's "Rethink the Drink" campaign that launched at the beginning of December.

The advertisement shows a father and his daughter shopping at a grocery store. The father first picks up a case of beer and his daughter says, "Is not on the list." Then they're shown in the wine section where the man picks up a bottle of wine. The daughter asks, "Why I can't drink wine?" The father struggles to give her a good response as she continues to respond with "Why?" The father eventually decides he doesn't need the bottle of wine and puts it back on the shelf.

The executive director of the Oregon Wine Council, Fawn Barrie, said the PSA's message is to not buy Oregon wine.

"I was really disappointed with the ad OHA put out related to wine," Barrie said. "There's support in the industry for moderation and responsible drinking messaging, not a message of put back the bottle of wine you just picked up."

Her organization, along with the Oregon Beverage Alliance and the Oregon Winegrowers Association, all sent letters to Governor Tina Kotek's office and the OHA asking why taxpayer money was used to discourage wine sales and wine consumption. The industry groups argued the state government is contradicting itself by investing more than \$700,000 to promote buying Oregon wine and then investing more than \$800,000 in a PSA that they say discourages it.

Barrie said the campaign is missing its intended goal of helping people who struggle with alcoholism. "They should really be focused on Oregonians who have an alcohol problem and an addiction problem and offering them resources, offering them ways to get help. There's no way people know how to access resources based on the ad they put up." Barrie claims the state's responsibility is to ensure people are socially responsible and support "moderate" drinking. "And to ensure if people have a problem they have access to

resources."

Two Oregon wine groups, the Oregon Wine Council and the Oregon Winegrowers Association. In a Dec. 20 letter to Kotek, the groups expressed support for educating the public on the risks of excessive consumption but took issue with the OHA's messaging.

"The state should be focusing its public health messages on getting help to those who need it, not on vilifying an Oregonian at the grocery store purchasing a bottle of locally grown wine," the groups said in a joint letter.

The Oregon Beverage Alliance, which represents the state's brewers, winemakers, cider makers, distillers and the hospitality industry, shared its concerns in a letter to Governor Kotek on December 21st. "We are disturbed to see the Oregon Health Authority's Rethink the Drink ad campaign pivot from educating Oregonians about responsible, moderate consumption by legal drinking age adults to a neo-prohibitionist agenda."

To get a local perspective I spoke to Ali Rodgers, Executive Director of the Umpqua Valley Winegrowers Association. The UVWA is at the heart of the Oregon Wine Industry, whose roots go back to those initial Umpqua Valley wine vineyards in the 1880's.

"Most of the wineries and vineyards in Douglas County are small, family-owned and family-operated businesses. The recent TV advertisement from OHA feels like a direct attack on our local wine industry. We are disappointed that the OHA would use taxpayer money to create a campaign that would hurt local agriculture, at a time when small family growers continue to struggle, and are still recovering from Covid, wildfires, and recent inflationary pressures."

It appears that the message the OHA appears to be promoting is abstinence as opposed to responsible alcohol consumption. This does not really jive with the States support of local alcohol related industries. Even the OLCC, who commended the Rethink the Drink campaign in 2023, is quick to point out it's support for the wine and alcoholic beverage industry and how it's own efforts, promotes responsible growth and economic success for the industry as well as the general public.

North Douglas Wine is an Oregon Wine Heritage North Umpqua Valley Region is Thriving

Story by Rusty Savage

The Umpqua Valley has a rich and important history in Oregon Wine growing. The wine-growing history dates back to the 1880s when German immigrants who had worked for the Beringer Bros., the oldest continuously operating vineyard in Napa, planted the first wine grape vineyard in the Valley. Those immigrants established vineyards, a winery and a distillery, and produced an estimated 20,000 gallons of wine in the Umpqua Valley.

Production, at first significant, was slowed as Oregon anticipated Prohibition, which went into effect in 1914, six years before National Prohibition. After repeal it took till 1933 for the Oregon legislature to legalize grape growing and establishing the Farmer's Winery License for production of light wine from privately owned fruit.

Umpqua Valley's first Post-prohibition winery is established by Adolph Doerner as "Old # 7" on Heydon Road near Roseburg in 1934. Ray Doerner, Adolph's son, continued to operate "Old # 7" until 1965 when he paid the last BATF taxes and closed his business.

Richard Sommer, a winemaking pioneer in the Umpqua Valley, planted 36 acres of California Vinifera. He established HillCrest Vineyard near Roseburg in 1961. He was the first to plant and bottle Pinot Noir in Oregon despite being told by his UC Davis cohorts that it was impossible to successfully grow wine grapes in Oregon.

By 1970 the Roseburg area was a hotbed of winegrowing in Oregon and the birthplace of the Oregon Winegrowers Association. Today the Umpqua Valley AVA continues to evolve and now has over 30 wineries making over 40 varieties into some of America's most distinctive wines. Everyday more winemakers discover the area, bringing with them a passion for innovation and world-class wine and the Umpqua Valley AVA became official in 1984.

It was through the Umpqua Valley Winegrowers that I learned about the Elkton AVA. The Elkton Oregon AVA is the coolest and wettest region within the larger Umpqua Valley AVA and produces different varieties and different wine styles than the rest of the larger AVA. The northern area around the town of Elkton enjoys a cool, marine-influenced climate with a cooler, but milder and longer growing season than the rest of the Umpqua Valley AVA and receives much more rain annually, about 50 inches. Pinot noir, Pinot

gris, Gewürztraminer, Riesling and other cool-climate varieties thrive here.

The Elkton Oregon AVA is situated 33 miles inland from the Pacific Ocean. It is wholly within the Umpqua Valley AVA, which in turn lies within the larger Southern Oregon AVA. Elkton Oregon is the northernmost region in the Umpqua Valley. The Umpqua River weaves through the middle of the region, offering a cool afternoon breeze during the growing season.

The Elkton Oregon AVA is an American Viticultural Area that was established in 2013 in and around the town of Elkton, Oregon. The AVA encompasses 74,900 acres. It is the 17th AVA in Oregon and resides completely inside the greater Umpqua Valley AVA and huge Southern Oregon AVA, an area known to be warmer than the northern appellations of Oregon.

The Appellation covers approximately 11 percent of the 689,904 acres. Umpqua Valley AVA and .04 percent of the much larger 1,977,298 acres Southern Oregon AVA. The vineyard soils here are predominantly residual clay, silt loam soil, alluvial deposits and river terraces around the meandering Umpqua River. Clay soils retain water very well, resulting in less of a need to irrigate and lower yields. Elkton Oregon is the northernmost and lowest elevation region in the Umpqua Valley.

In Elkton, you'll find some exquisite vineyards and tasting rooms that are tucked into this particular wine country, including, Bradley Vineyards, Brandborg Winery, Haines Creek Vineyard & Tasting Room, Knoll Vineyards, Lexème, River's Edge Winery. Not within the Elkton AVA but still producing fine wines from North Douglas county in Oakland and Umpqua are the Triple Oak Vineyard, Spire Mountain Cellars, Meadows Estate Vineyard & Winery and Henry Estate Winery. I shouldnt fail to mention winery's just north of county line in south Lane county, the Lorane area King Estate Winery, Chateau Lorane, Alesong Brewing & Blending.

It's definitely worth the adventure, checking out the Vineyards and Tasting rooms in the region. In contrast to the rest of Southern Oregon, wines produced from this region are more often from cool climate varieties made in a lush style, fuller in body with bolder fruit notes than those produced in the Willamette Valley. Photo by Tyler Bradley - Bradley Vineyards

