

Amicus Group of Consultants (AGC)

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Topic: Vines to Vessels: A Circular Future for Wine Companies in the West

Audience: Board of Commissioners – Washington State Wine Commission

Around the world, the effects of climate change have been quite harsh and sometimes unforeseen. It's evident to many agricultural producers that both the quantity and quality of their products have decreased, prompting companies to make compromises to stay afloat in this economy. Wine making in the western part of the US, where it's primarily produced, is not foreign to these consequences. The Washington State Wine Commission, the governing body of all wineries in Washington, finds itself at a crossroads amidst the escalating challenges posed by climate change. With the region experiencing a significant decrease in water availability by up to 30% and escalating risks of wildfires, the traditional viticultural practices essential to wine grape cultivation are under severe strain. Moreover, these adverse conditions are impacting the quality of grapes and the productivity of vineyard workers, particularly during periods of oppressive heat and wildfire smoke.

In response, wineries still adhere to traditional viticultural practices like conventional pest management, highlighting the urgency for a shift towards a more ethical and sustainable approach. Unfortunately, the local industry directs its developmental focus predominantly towards the big players like Ste. Michelle, sidelining the growth prospects of smaller wineries. Despite being the second-largest producer of wines in the US, the success of Washington State's wines is limited to its major industry players only. Legal challenges arising from the transition towards direct-to-consumer sales, financial pressures due to contract terminations and pricing inconsistencies, and a void in the mid-priced wine market exacerbate the industry's problems. As Washington grapples with these multifaceted issues, the Commission must aim to include adopting ethical practices supporting smaller wineries, ensuring accessibility to viticultural certifications, and fostering partnerships with sustainable organizations and stakeholders.

In light of these circumstances, AGC recommends the Washington State Wine Commission roll out standards that would strike a balance between traditional and modern agricultural practices: mitigate pesticide impacts, amplify the global presence of Washington's wine brand, explore a circular business model in waste management and to draw insights from successful practices adopted by other regions. Through intensive efforts and collective commitment, Washington's wine industry can navigate these challenges and emerge as a beacon of ethical and sustainable winemaking practices not just on the West Coast but on a global scale.