

**Testimony Presented To the Connecticut Environment Committee by the  
Connecticut Department of Agriculture  
3/20/15**

**H.B. No. 6618 (COMM) AN ACT CONCERNING THE THRESHOLD FOR LABELING WINE AS  
"CONNECTICUT-GROWN".**

Farm wineries represent a growing sector of Connecticut agriculture, having capitalized on consumers' ever-increasing interest in local food and farming. The Department of Agriculture supports increased wine grape and fruit production in Connecticut, and the resulting increased production of wine made from those Connecticut Grown fruits.

The Department of Agriculture also recognizes the role farm wineries play in--and their effects on--the state's broader agricultural industry, based upon those wineries' conduct and representation of actual agricultural production.

Use of the Connecticut Grown brand is and should continue to be limited to only those farm products grown or raised in Connecticut. Processed products should have a majority of ingredients—51 percent or more—consisting of Connecticut Grown farm products if the finished products are identified and/or branded as Connecticut Grown.

Permitting licensed farm wineries to use the Connecticut Grown label on wines made with less than a majority of or no Connecticut Grown fruit deceives consumers and threatens the integrity of the Connecticut Grown brand across the entire agricultural community.

At a time when the agency is working diligently with Connecticut's hard-working farm families to increase consumer confidence in the Connecticut Grown brand through enhanced, more transparent labeling, H.B. 6618, in its proposal to minimize the percentage of Connecticut Grown fruit required in a Connecticut farm wines, undermines that effort.

The agency recognizes the challenges associated with starting a farm of any type, including a farm winery. Instead of a lowering the bar in terms of output and quality, however, the agency supports additional research into suitable wine grape cultivars for Connecticut and development of best practices for cultivation and reliable, high-quality crop yields. Among the specific areas of study recommended are the following:

- (1) Wine grape/fruit cultivars best suited for Connecticut's soils, topography, and climate
- (2) Best practices for cultivation of wine grape/fruit cultivars in Connecticut, including management strategies for insects, diseases, weather, and other environmental factors
- (3) Minimum, maximum, and average harvest yields per plant and per acre for wine grape/fruit cultivars under cultivation in Connecticut at various stages of maturity

- (4) Average time for wine grapes/fruit to reach maturity from cutting/planting to average harvest yields as determined above
- (5) Minimum, maximum, and average weight of wine grapes/fruit required per liter of finished wine
- (6) Total percentage of Connecticut Grown wine grapes/fruit currently used in Connecticut farm winery products
- (7) Reporting requirements for licensed Connecticut farm wineries
- (8) Verification systems for evaluating compliance with and enforcing statutes and regulations pertaining to licensed Connecticut farm wineries
- (9) Existing state grants and programs that could be used to increase production of Connecticut Grown wine grapes/fruit, including but not limited to Farmland Restoration and Farm Transition grants
- (10) Other issues and areas as deemed appropriate by the committee

Connecticut farm wineries and their farm products should be held to the same standard as other agricultural sectors in this state. We hope to work the proponents of this legislation on ways to achieve those goals.

As written the Department of Agriculture does not support H.B. No. 6618.