

February 20, 2012
Senate Federal & State Affairs committee
Senate Bill #379 Opposition

My name is Terry Robbins and I live in northeastern Kansas in Oskaloosa. I have been involved with the Kansas Viticulture and Farm Winery Association since its inception and currently serve as its treasurer.

My family and I moved to a rural area 7 years ago in the hopes of planting a vineyard and opening a winery. We have started our vineyard and initially plan to sell our grapes to local wineries. Before moving to the country and starting our vineyard, I established relationships with the winery owners in the area. I learned of their challenges in producing an agricultural product, and I experienced it first hand by helping in the vineyards. This struggle was not unfamiliar since I had grown up on a farm near Havensville, Kansas.

One of the wineries I worked with primarily was Davenport Orchards, Vineyard and Winery near Lawrence. In the late 1990's and early 2000's I had many discussions with Greg Shipe, the owner, about the legislative issues with growing grapes and owning a winery. At that time it was all new to me, but I understood the importance of the 60/40 law where at least 60% of the juice used to make the wine needed to be grown in Kansas. Not every variety of grape can be grown in Kansas, for instance our climate is not favorable for a Chardonnay or Zinfandel grape. But we can grow a wonderful Chambourcin or Vignoles and produce award winning wines.

I am very concerned by the fact that the current bills would allow a product like wine, which is so integrally connected to the area where the grapes are grown, to contain absolutely no locally grown grapes. Supporting local industry should be a top priority for our Kansas legislature.

Wine is a very romantic product. People associate it with celebrations, family and love. Going to a winery and having the vineyard nearby where people can see it and experience makes lasting memories. Have you ever taken your children to a pumpkin patch in the fall or a tree farm to pick out your Christmas tree? Those are the same kind of experiences we are trying to provide by growing grapes. People can bring their family to the winery, take a walk through the vineyard, and have a picnic with a glass of Kansas wine.

That's not going to happen if the grapes don't need to be grown locally. All you will have is a spot on the liquor store shelf among all the other wines from California or France and no connection to Kansas. Wineries and vineyards can improve Kansas agritourism and in turn the local economy. Given the current economic climate, more people are having "stacations". Wineries and vineyards fit right into that. There is a fantastic locovore movement that Kansas wine fits right into also. Many wineries are members of Simply Kansas, the organization that promotes authentic Kansas made products. Authenticity is one of the primary qualities that consumers look for in wine.

The bills under consideration will remove the connection between wine and local Kansas agriculture. Please do not let that happen. Support the local Kansas farmer and Kansas farm wineries.

Thank you.
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