

Statement from Mayor Walter Sendzik on push for provincial supports for Ontario's wine industry

February 18, 2021 – As we mark National Drink Wine Day across Canada, I am calling on the province to heed the call of Ontario wineries to implement a series of reforms that will allow our well-rooted Ontario wine and grape industry to become even more competitive and flourish.

I introduced a motion at Niagara Region's Planning and Economic Development Committee on Wednesday (passing unanimously) - that I am hopeful will also receive support from Regional Council next week – calling on the Province of Ontario to undertake several changes to provide our entrepreneurial wine industry with opportunities to invest more into innovation and job creation, while providing consumer choice and convenience for the purchase of Ontario wines.

The motion, seconded thanks to the support of Lincoln Mayor Sandra Easton, urges the province to support the following reforms:

- Eliminate the 6.1% tax applied to VQA (100% Ontario-grown) wines on sales in the 2021 Budget;
- Enable Ontario wines to offer direct delivery, with margin, to grocery stores;
- Establish long-term VQA wine support programs at the LCBO that would increase shelf space for VQA wines and;
- Eliminate import taxes on 100% Ontario VQA wines
- Remove inter-provincial trade barriers related to sale of wines across provincial borders

As we continue to focus on economic recovery, if we're going to build our economy back stronger, we're going to have to look at those sectors that are very well rooted in Ontario. I can't think of an industry that's more rooted than the grape and wine industry here in Niagara. The Ontario wine industry supports, directly and indirectly, more than 18,000 full-time equivalent jobs, and Niagara is Ontario's largest wine-growing region responsible for more than 90 per cent of the province's grape production.

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Niagara's wine sector not only creates jobs and activities in manufacturing and processing, but has developed a unique experiential destination tourism, enhanced by the proximity to Niagara Falls. COVID-19 has had a significant impact on this aspect of the industry – which represents hundreds of millions of dollars in direct and indirect revenue on an annual basis - as well, given the various restrictions the province has faced over the last 11 months.

Ontario's wine industry has evolved into a world-class wine region. These long overdue reforms will position Ontario's wineries – big and small – to thrive and expand becoming an even more important part of Ontario's economic as we work together to rebuild and strength our communities

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