

Court Restricts Use Of "Napa" In Label

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Hatch & Parent's Wine Practice Group wishes to advise that the California Supreme Court recently ruled that if the label on a wine bottle calls itself a Napa brand, then the wine inside that bottle must be made from grapes that mostly come from the Napa Valley.

The Court ruled that a California law enacted in 2000 stating that wine sold with the word "Napa" on its label must be made from at least 75% Napa-grown grapes was valid. The Court indicated that it was making this ruling to "provide stricter protection to consumers".

The ruling will require one of the nation's largest producers of bulk wines to either change the names of three of its products, or use grapes grown in the Napa Valley.

In making this ruling, the Supreme Court stated that, "California is recognized as a preeminent producer of wine, and the geographic source of its wines-reflecting the attributes of distinctive locales, particularly the Napa Valley-forms a very significant basis upon which consumers worldwide evaluate quality when making a purchase."

The three wines that were the focus of this case were made with grapes grown in locations other than Napa. The origin of the grapes was printed on both the front and back labels, but in smaller print than the brand names.

California's law follows a similar federal law. The federal law requires that if a wine label refers to a specific region, then at least 75% of the grapes in the wine must come from that region. However, there is an exception in the federal law for brands established before 1986.

California's law does not have this exception.

This case is simply one example of the close attention that must be paid to labels and the information contained on them. There are various state and federal regulations that must be closely adhered to, and label modifications sometimes need to be made as the laws change.

We would be happy to provide you with a copy of this case upon your request, as well as answer any other wine-related legal questions you may have. Please contact Eric Berg at (805) 882-1408 or via email at EBerg@hatchparent.com.