

Farm Wineries

Farm wineries are given a special status in Minnesota's liquor laws, a policy chosen specifically to encourage and support the fledgling farm winery industry. State efforts also nurture grape growing and winemaking via financial and technical assistance, applied research and outreach, and tourism promotion. This information brief explains how farm wineries are regulated and the state's role in promoting and funding them. An appendix provides a timeline for grape breeding and winemaking in the state.

Liquor Regulations and Minnesota Wine

Wines produced at Minnesota farms are subject to the Minnesota Farm Wineries Act ([Minn. Stat. § 340A.315](#)). This statute allows a winery to manufacture wine in Minnesota and subjects wineries to Minnesota's liquor regulations, with a number of specific exceptions and allowances designed to protect and foster the growth of Minnesota wines.

Farm winery licenses are issued by the commissioner of the Department of Public Safety for \$50 per year. A license authorizes the on-premises sale of table, sparkling, or fortified wines. Amounts are limited to 50,000 gallons in a calendar year.

As a matter of definition, the law allows more than wine from grapes to be produced at a farm winery. A table or sparkling wine is defined as a beverage made without rectification or fortification—the additions of distilled liquors to make a fortified wine. The definition in [Minnesota Statutes, section 340A.101](#), subdivisions 27, 29, and 30, include cider, vermouth, wine, and wine made from crops other than grapes. In addition, the law specifically allows the production of fortified wines, such as brandies. Therefore, as a practical matter, the farm winery law allows farm wineries to make a wide variety of beverages.

Farm wineries are given a special status in Minnesota's liquor laws, a policy chosen specifically to encourage and support the fledgling farm winery industry.

Farm wineries can:

- sell their products on Sundays between the hours of 12 noon and 12 midnight;
- sell via the Internet, up to two cases per customer, as permitted in [Minnesota Statutes, section 340A.417](#);
- operate a restaurant or other establishment, a change passed in the 2007 session;
- give free samples to visitors; and
- import, with special permits issued by the commissioner, additional grapes to add to their crops in an off-year for farm production.

In the past, there have been bills introduced to allow or require Minnesota wines to be sold at the airport and at the state fair.

Agricultural Diversification and Agritourism

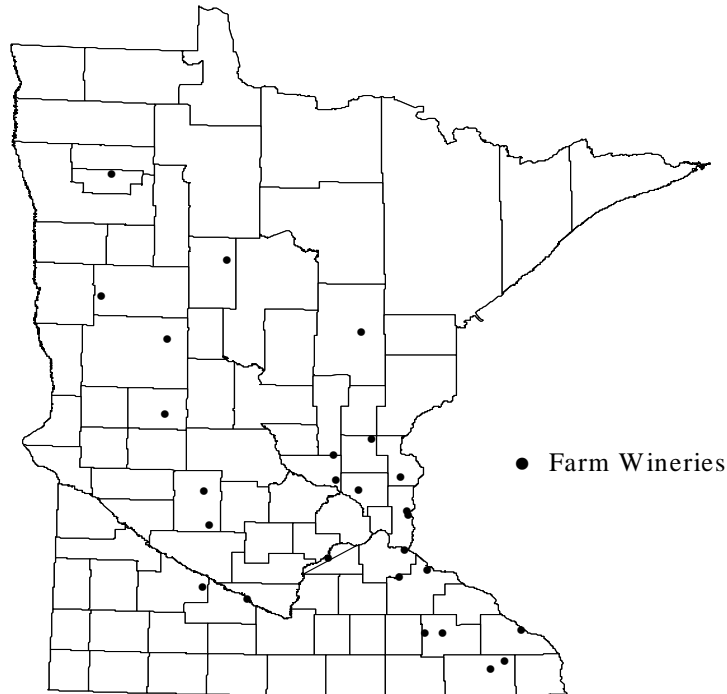
In theory, farms that generate revenue from sources beyond traditional crop and livestock commodity markets are better positioned to weather fluctuations in commodity and input prices. State entities see viticulture (i.e., grape cultivation, especially for wine) and winemaking as two promising avenues for agricultural diversification.

By law, both the Minnesota Department of Agriculture and the state's Agricultural Utilization Research Institute¹ (AURI) are charged with developing and diversifying Minnesota agriculture. Each organization promotes grape growing and winemaking as opportunities for farmers to diversify and capitalize on the growing popularity of wine.

The state's tourism bureau also promotes farm winery tours and wine-tasting events as an agritourism opportunity for rural communities. The Explore Minnesota Tourism Council maintains a list of Minnesota wineries on its web site, complete with the hours of operation and information on nearby fall-color driving routes.

¹ The Agricultural Research Utilization Institute was established by the legislature in 1987. It is a state-funded nonprofit corporation charged with developing new products and expanding existing markets for the state's agricultural commodities.

As shown in the map below, there are 26 registered farm wineries in Minnesota. Eight are promoted as tourist destinations.



State-Funded Research and Development Activities

Minnesota farm wineries benefit from state-funded grape and wine research. With financial support from the state, the University of Minnesota carries out applied grape growing and winemaking research on ten acres of its Horticultural Research Center near Victoria. The university has developed expertise in breeding and cultivating cold-hardy grapes (i.e., varieties whose vines can withstand the Minnesota winter). Researchers and students at the center also provide education and outreach services to Minnesota’s grape and wine producers.

The university began table and juice grape research in 1908. Responding to demand from local commercial growers and wineries, the university initiated a dedicated wine-grape breeding program in the mid-1980s. Researchers use selective breeding—and to a limited extent, genetic engineering—to develop new grape varieties. Winemaking research was bolstered by the completion in 2000 of a state-of-the-art enology lab and research winery.

Beginning in the 1980s, the legislature explicitly directed the university to perform grape and wine research as part of the university’s biennial appropriation for agriculture research and extension activities. In 2007, the legislature allocated \$50,000 to the university for the purchase of additional winemaking research equipment.

AURI partners with the university and provides direct technical and financial assistance (loans) to Minnesota's grape growers and winemakers. In 1993, the institute awarded a grant to the university to examine characteristics and consumer acceptance of cold-hardy grapes. AURI also contributed funding for the construction of the university's enology lab and research winery.

See Appendix A for a brief timeline of Minnesota's viticultural history and relevant state appropriations.

For more information about liquor industry regulation, visit the commerce area of our web site, www.house.mn/hrd/issinfo/comm_ed.htm.

Appendix A

Timeline: Grape Breeding and Winemaking in Minnesota

Pre-settlement	Native, cold-hardy grape variety (<i>V. riparia</i>) grows in what will become Minnesota.
1850s	Settlers bring popular grape varieties—including Concord and Delaware—from the eastern United States to Minnesota. They bury the vines in trenches over the winter to keep them from dying.
1908	The University of Minnesota begins breeding table and juice grapes. Common warm-weather varieties are bred with Minnesota’s native cold-hardy variety in an effort to find a weather-resistant and palatable grape for Minnesota growers to produce.
Mid-1900s	The University of Minnesota informally begins wine-grape breeding. Researchers begin crossbreeding Minnesota winter-hardy grapes with German and French hybrids and other popular wine grape varieties.
1976	Minnesota Grape Growers Association is formed.
Mid-1980s	The University of Minnesota formally initiates its wine-grape breeding program.
1982	The Minnesota Legislature appropriates grape research funding to the University of Minnesota.
1985	The Minnesota Legislature specifically directs the University of Minnesota to research “grapes” as part of the agriculture special appropriation for fiscal years 1986 and 1987.
1993	The Agricultural Utilization Research Institute (AURI) awards the University of Minnesota funding to examine characteristics and consumer acceptance of cold-hardy grape cultivars.
1997	The Minnesota Legislature specifically directs the University of Minnesota to research “grapes and wine” as part of the agriculture special appropriation for fiscal years 1998 and 1999.
	The University of Minnesota hires a full-time enologist (i.e., winemaker) and begins to develop an experimental winery.

- 1999** The Minnesota Legislature again specifically directs the University of Minnesota to research “grapes and wine” as part of the agriculture special appropriation for fiscal years 2000 and 2001.
- 2000** Construction is completed on the state-of-the-art enology lab and research winery at the University of Minnesota’s Horticultural Research Center. AURI provides partial funding to the University of Minnesota for the facility.
- 2005** Governor Pawlenty vetoes a \$125,000 appropriation to the Northwest Regional Development Commission at Warren for field research on the planting and production of cold-hardy grape cultivars.
- 2007** The legislature authorizes a onetime \$50,000 grant from the Minnesota Department of Agriculture to the University of Minnesota to purchase instrumentation that will allow rapid and accurate measurement of enology components.