

KANE'S BEVERAGE WEEK

The Alcohol Beverage Executive's Newsletter

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Wine & Spirits Volume Decline Jumps 49% in Half, to -9.7% from -6.5%

Good riddance to 2025. The first half was bad enough. **Wine & Spirits Wholesalers of America's** SipSource service had reported that combined wine and spirits volume fell 6.5% in the first half of 2025. Through November, second half volume plunged 9.7%.

SipSource notes have “encouragingly, revenue trends continue to outperform volume across most product classes, reflecting ongoing pricing discipline and mix benefits—but that alone cannot offset sustained volume pressure.” Things were expected to get better in December, SipSource said, noting that there was one additional shipping day in 2025r compared to 2024.

Also: There were hopes that the softer December 2024 comps – a year ago Spirits were down 0.7% and Wine was down 4.1% – would make this year better than last. Still, “December began under the weight of two consecutive months of soft depletions, making execution critical,” SipSource said.

SipSource analysts said several product classes will be particularly important to watch entering 2026. Whiskey continues to show significant variability across segments—December may reveal whether any sub-segment can meaningfully break out. Tequila Reposado, which has been a bright spot, could reaffirm its growth trajectory if it experiences a strong holiday performance. Champagne also bears close monitoring, due to the celebration of the holidays; the open question is whether consumer takeaway will translate into sustained depletions.

Looking ahead in 2026, near-term fundamentals remain challenged. In Q1 2025, Spirits volumes declined -4.9% with revenue down -3.6%, while Wine saw a steeper -8.3% decline in both volume and revenue. These results set a conservative baseline for expectations as the industry recalibrates supply, pricing, and promotional strategies.

While December may not reverse the story from 2025, it can provide important signals about consumer engagement, category resilience, and where momentum may begin to rebuild in 2026.

Wine Uncompetitive on a Price-Per-Unit Basis: Ciatti

In so many words, Ciatti, the California wine broker, is telling the wine industry to wake up and smell the coffee. Or, perhaps we should say, the “proliferating array of alternative alcohol products.”

“Much has been made of recent health messaging,” Ciatti says, “but wine’s uncompetitiveness on a price-per-unit basis versus a proliferating array of alternative alcohol products is likely a significant handicap among younger consumers and the 2020s consumer in general, whose spending power remains reduced versus pre-pandemic.

“In those countries in which wine tends to be priced as an everyday item and not a discretionary purchase – Spain and South Africa, for example – consumption has been stabler,” Ciatti notes.

Comment: While Ciatti was writing about the wine business, we suspect the same thing is true about the spirits business. “Premiumization,” the raising of prices faster than inflation, is a significant handicap to sales among younger consumers – as well as those who have been laid off, or who fear they might be laid off.

Johnson Brothers to Rep Proximo Spirits in 8 New U.S. Markets

Effective Feb. 1, **Johnson Brothers** will represent **Proximo Spirits** in eight additional markets, bringing to 17 the total open and control states in which they partner.

The newly expanded footprint includes Texas and Hawaii in open states, along with North Carolina, Virginia, Montana, Wyoming, Utah, and Idaho in control states.

“This expansion reflects our confidence in Johnson Brothers as a best-in-class distributor. One that delivers disciplined execution, clear ownership in the market, and strong alignment with our growth strategy,” said Mauricio Vergara, CEO & President, Proximo Spirits. “We look forward to further strengthening our partnership as we work together to build our category-leading brands, serve our customers, and achieve the next chapter of shared success.”

The expanded partnership reinforces a shared commitment to executional excellence, customer service, and building premium spirits brands that outperform category trends.

“We are proud to expand our partnership with Proximo Spirits and grateful for the confidence they continue to place in our organization,” said Mark Hubler, CEO, Johnson Brothers. “Together, we are focused on disciplined execution, strong market leadership, and delivering sustained growth for Proximo’s portfolio across every market we serve.”

Proximo Ends Relationships With RNDC

The Jose Cuervo maker said it ended partnerships with Republic National Distributing Co. in “all current territories” besides Georgia and New Mexico. It’s another blow for RNDC: Proximo was RNDC’s largest remaining spirits supplier. News of the departure was first reported in Dave Infante’s Fingers newsletter.

Breakthru Beverage Group and Banfi Expand U.S. Distribution Partnership

Breakthru Beverage Group and **Banfi** announced an expanded distribution partnership across 13 U.S. markets.

Breakthru will add Florida, South Carolina, Maryland and Washington, D.C. to its existing representation of Banfi in California, Nevada, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, Illinois, Arizona, Colorado, Minnesota and Delaware. The distributor will carry the full portfolio, which includes Banfi’s proprietary brands as well as new partner brands **Alexander Valley Vineyards**, **Brother’s Bond Bourbon** and **Boatyard Distillery Double Gin**.

“As we continue to evolve our portfolio, every decision is made with a clear focus on execution and market impact,” said **Jennifer Engel**, Banfi Chief Commercial & Strategy Officer. “Expanding our alignment with Breakthru reflects a shared commitment to showing up in the market and driving strategic growth for our premium portfolio, both our proprietary brands and our valued partners. We look forward to leveraging Breakthru’s capabilities and working together to deliver outstanding results for our customers.”

“We are proud to represent Banfi’s dynamic and evolving portfolio and expand our partnership across these important markets, where we will focus on delivering growth and connecting with consumers across all channels,” said Adam Pizer, Senior Vice President of Business Development, Breakthru Beverage Group. “We intend to leverage both our capabilities and ASPECT Fine Wine to work closely with customers, ensuring the right Banfi product is placed on the right shelf or menu for the right consumer, driving success today and supporting Banfi’s long-term growth.”

Ohio Used Its Liquor Business to Fund Job Creation. It Lost Jobs.

It seemed like a good idea at the time to Ohio’s Legislature. In 2011, then-Gov. John Kasich led the effort to create JobsOhio, which now has a [large, highly paid staff](#). The organization claims it is a private company, but it was created by the legislature.

Without competitive bidding, it was allowed to lease the state liquor franchise for less than it was worth. And a year ago, a board under now-Gov. Mike DeWine extended the lease to 2053 — [without requiring JobsOhio to pay taxpayers any additional money](#).

Taxpayers have now foregone well over \$1 billion that they would have received from the liquor franchise. JobsOhio has awarded that money in business incentives, but it has [struggled to show that it’s created any jobs](#).

A 2022 report by the Greater Ohio Policy Center said that the state labor force [declined by 91,000](#) between 2000 and 2020 — a pretty good indicator that a weak job market has been to blame for the Buckeye State’s slowing population growth.

Ohio is expected to lose 675,000 people by 2050, according to the Ohio Department of Development. The bad news comes after more than a decade during which state Republican leaders handed out billions in tax breaks and other incentives heavily tilted toward the wealthy on promises they would create jobs.

DeWine also has provided billions to a Central Ohio chipmaker for a project that [may never become reality](#). In addition, his administration has provided incentives to low-employment data centers that one analysis said cost taxpayers [\\$1 million for each job created](#).

In addition to all that, Kasich in 2013 signed into law a tax break for limited liability companies that is [heavily tilted in favor of wealthy Ohioans](#). Again, the promise was that it would create jobs.

That tax break costs Ohioans about \$1 billion a year. But Ohio now has the nation’s [sixth-highest unemployment](#). So that, too, appears to not be working.

(This story is based on reporting by the [Ohio Capitol Journal](#).)

Joth Ricci, Family Buy Winderlea Vineyard & Winery

Joth Ricci and his family have purchased Wonderlea Vineyard & Winery in Dundee, Ore., from founders John Sweat and Donna Morris. Terms weren't disclosed. Ricci’s ties to Oregon wine deepened during his time as President and CEO of Adelsheim Vineyard, a winery with longstanding ties to Winderlea

Joth Ricci and his family have purchased Wonderlea Vineyard & Winery in Dundee, Ore., from founders John Sweat and Donna Morris. Terms weren't disclosed.

Ricci's ties to Oregon wine deepened during his time as President and CEO of Adelsheim Vineyard, a winery with longstanding ties to Winderlea through pioneering winemaker David Adelsheim. Adelsheim helped lay out the original estate vineyard planted in 1974, well before Winderlea was founded as a winery.

Day-to-day operations will continue with no immediate changes planned. The existing team will maintain its focus on the winery and hospitality spaces, carrying forward the approach that has long defined Winderlea. Leading the business will be Lindsey Morse as Vice President of Strategy and Winery Operations, whose background includes leadership roles at Ponzi Vineyards and Stoller Family Estate, as well as Adelsheim, where she first collaborated with Ricci. The family is also supported by a close circle of trusted advisors and industry veterans, including Kim Bellingar, founder of Century Vineyards and former COO of Adelsheim, who will provide strategic support across business operations and organizational development.

Ricci's daughter Anna, both a fourth-generation Oregonian and OSU graduate, is actively involved at the winery, taking a hands-on position supporting day-to-day operations and work across the estate. Her involvement reflects the family's connection to Oregon wine, agriculture and hospitality, and brings a presence anchored in curiosity and respect for Winderlea's history and character.

Ricci is a third-generation Oregonian who has held top leadership roles across some of the region's most recognized food and beverage brands, including as general manager at Columbia Distributing and president of Stumptown Coffee Roasters, where he launched Cold Brew and led the brand to its existing partnership with Peet's Coffee. He later guided Dutch Bros Coffee as CEO through its 2021 IPO, the largest in Oregon history. Ricci currently serves as executive chairman of Burgerville.

Miller Lite's New Campaign: Socialize in Person (and Drink Miller Lite)

Miller Lite's new campaign, "Legendary Moments Start with a Lite," debuts Saturday, Jan. 10 during NFL playoff football.

It will extend beyond TV with The Miller Lite Damp January Club, encouraging consumers to socialize along with the chance to win beer money, exclusive merch and more.

The campaign's inaugural spot, "[Ditch the Apps](#)" will debut this Saturday during NFL playoff football.

In the spot, a man exchanges looks of interest with a woman at the bar before returning to scrolling on his phone. Then, the icon Christopher Walken appears out of nowhere, with whispers of his name adding to his grand and mysterious entrance into the frame.

"Don't just like somebody on the app," he says. "Like them in real life."

Walken then hands the man Miller Lites and encourages him to go say hello, sparking the real-life connection. The spot ends with Walken declaring that "Legendary Moments Start with a Lite. It's Miller Time."

'A Win for Big Alcohol,' Anti-Alcohol Advocates Say

The U.S. Alcohol Policy Alliance (USAPA) criticized the newly released [2025–2030 Dietary Guidelines for Americans \(DGAs\)](#) as "a win for the alcohol industry and its allies in Congress."

"The evidence is clear: alcohol is a toxic, addictive carcinogen that kills about 178,000 Americans each year, a 30 percent increase in deaths over the past decade," said Mike Marshall, CEO of USAPA.

USAPA applauds the recommendation to "drink less," but says it falls short of providing the clear, specific guidance needed by healthcare providers and policymakers. Scientific consensus shows there is no healthy level of alcohol consumption.

The updated guidelines eliminate specific recommendations on daily intake, remove the definition of a "standard drink," and omit guidance that people under age 21 should not consume alcohol at all. Also absent are the key findings of the federally funded Alcohol Intake and Health Study, a comprehensive report Congress directed HHS to ignore. (See adjacent story for investigation into the Alcohol Intake and Health study.)

ICCPUD Study 'Deliberately Biased,' House Investigators Say

The Biden Administration sought to "push an (anti-alcohol) agenda on the American people" through a "deliberately biased" report prepared by the Interagency Coordinating Committee on Preventing Underage Drinking (ICCPUD), according to a report released by Rep. James Comer (R.-Ky.), chairman of the House Oversight & Investigations Committee.

The ICCPUD report was intended to influence the Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee to adopt the "Canadian Model" and declare that one drinking could cause one to contract cancer or other dread diseases, the House report says.

That's 19-page report by the Republican staff of the House Oversight & Investigations Committee focuses on three improper elements:

Congress had directed the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering & Medicine (NASEM) to study the relationship between alcohol intake and health and had appropriated \$3.3 million to fund the study. ICCPUD was not authorized to conduct a study and Congress made that clear in an appropriations statute.

Every member of the ICCPUD committee examining the question of alcohol intake and health in adults was a well known anti-alcohol advocate,

ICCPUD hid information about the AIH study's bias and predetermined goal from Freedom of Information (FOIA) requestors and Congress by classifying documents as "pre-decisional and deliberative," with no apparent regard for whether that was true.

The House committee report was issued prior to release of the Dietary Guidelines.

CBands Net Sales, Profit Fall 10% in 3rd Fiscal Quarter

Constellation Brands reports net sales of \$2.223 billion, down 10% from the like year-earlier period, and net profit of \$503 million, or \$2.88 a share, down 18% from a year earlier.

On a comparable organic basis, net sales were also \$2.223 billion, down 10%, but net profit was \$534 million, down 10%, or \$3.06 as share.

The Beer Business saw net sales decline 1% driven by a 2.2% decline in shipment volume, partially offset by favorable pricing. Depletions decreased 3.0% as declines for Modelo Especial of about 4%, Corona Extra of nearly 9%, and the Modelo Chelada brands of about 2% were partially offset by strong growth from Pacifico and Victoria of over 15% and 13%, respectively.

CBrands said its Beer Business ranked as the No. 3 dollar share gainer in Circana U.S.-tracked channels and had four of the top 15 dollar share gaining brands across the entire U.S. beer category.

Turning to the Wine & Spirits business, CBrands said net sales declined 51% driven by a 70.6% decrease in shipment volumes reflecting the impacts of the SVEDKA Divestiture and the 2025 Wine Divestitures, strategic pricing actions taken on select brands, and changes in distributor contractual obligations.

Depletions among the remaining brands were flat but d outpaced the corresponding higher-end wine segment in both dollar and volume sales performance in Circana U.S. tracked channels.

Rhinestone Signs Statewide Distribution Deal with Hensley

Rhinestone, the Arizona-born alcohol-free beer brand built for both drinkers and non-drinkers alike, announced a full statewide distribution partnership with Hensley Beverage Co. The agreement brings Rhinestone's portfolio of alcohol-free brews to on- and off-premise accounts across Arizona.

The Hensley partnership comes on the heels of Rhinestone's January rollout into 47 Sprouts Farmers Market locations statewide, marking a major acceleration in retail and on-premise availability.

"We're unapologetically local, so having a partner with deep Arizona roots was extremely important," said Dustin Johnson, Rhinestone founder and Arizona native. "We launched just months ago with a very clear point of view, and a partnership with Hensley this early on validates that there's real demand for a homegrown non-alcoholic beer with grit and swagger. Arizona is our backyard, and there's no better partner than Hensley to help us scale statewide."

Manufacturing Contracted in December

Economic activity in the manufacturing sector contracted in December for the 10th consecutive month, following a two-month expansion preceded by 26 straight months of contraction, say the nation's supply executives in the latest ISM Manufacturing PMI Report. "The Manufacturing PMI ® registered 47.9 percent in December, a 0.3-percentage

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"The Manufacturing PMI ® registered 47.9 percent in December, a 0.3-percentage point decrease compared to the reading of 48.2 percent in November and the lowest reading of 2025. The overall economy continued in expansion for the 68th month after one month of contraction in April 2020. (A Manufacturing PMI ® above 42.3 percent, over a period of time, generally indicates an expansion of the overall economy.)

"The New Orders Index contracted for a fourth straight month in December following one month of growth; the figure of 47.7 percent is 0.3 percentage point higher than the 47.4 percent recorded in November. The December reading of the Production Index (51 percent) is 0.4 percentage." she said, adding:

"The Supplier Deliveries Index indicated slower delivery performance after one month in 'faster' territory. The reading of 50.8 percent is up 1.5 percentage points from the 49.3 percent recorded in November.

(Supplier Deliveries is the only ISM ® PMI ® Reports index that is inverse; a reading of above 50 percent indicates slower deliveries, which is typical as the economy improves and customer demand increases.)

The Inventories Index registered 45.2 percent, down 3.7 percentage points compared to November's reading of 48.9 percent.

point lower than November's figure of 51.4 percent. The Prices Index remained in expansion (or 'increasing' territory), registering 58.5 percent, the same as November's reading. The Backlog of Orders Index registered 45.8 percent, up 1.8 percentage points compared to the 44 percent recorded in November. The Employment Index registered 44.9 percent, up 0.9 percentage point from November's figure of 44 percent.

Services See Expansion

Economic activity in the services sector continued to expand in December, according to the nation's purchasing and supply executives in a monthly survey. The survey finished the year in the 10th month expansion.

"In December, the Services PMI registered a reading of 54.4%, 1.8 percentage points higher than the November figure of 52.6 percent and a third consecutive month of expansion," said Steve Miller, chair of the Institute for Supply Management Services Business Survey Committee. "The Business Activity Index continued in expansion territory in December, registering 56%, 1.5 percentage points higher than the reading of 54.5 percent recorded in November. The New Orders Index also remained in expansion in December, with a reading of 57.9 percent, 5 percentage points above November's figure of 52.9 percent. The Employment Index expanded for the first time in seven months with a reading of 52 percent, a 3.1-percentage point improvement from the 48.9 percent recorded in November — the fifth consecutive monthly increase since a reading of 46.4 percent in July.

"The Supplier Deliveries Index registered 51.8 percent, 2.3 percentage points lower than the 54.1 percent recorded in November. This is the 13th consecutive month that the index has been in expansion territory, indicating slower supplier delivery performance. (Supplier Deliveries is the only ISM PMI Reports index that is inverted; a reading of above 50% indicates slower deliveries, which is typical as the economy improves and customer demand increases.)

"The Prices Index registered 64.3 in December, its lowest level since a reading of 60.9% in March 2025. The December figure was a 1.1-percentage point drop from November's reading of 65.4%. The index has exceeded 60% for 13 straight months.

Maryland Ordered to Allow Out-of-State Breweries to Ship Beer to Residents

A federal judge has voided a Maryland law that prevented out-of-state breweries from shipping beer to Maryland residents.

"Maryland authorizes out-of-state wine producers to ship their products to Maryland consumers," U.S. District Judge Richard Bennett wrote. "Out-of-state beer producers should be permitted to do the same."

The statute allows Maryland breweries to ship to Maryland residents but requires delivery by a brewery employee, not by a common carrier such as UPS. The ruling both requires Maryland to allow out-of-state breweries to ship to Maryland residents and in-state breweries to be able to use common carriers.

Cider, Mead Producer Sues TTB Over Ban on Vintage Years on Labels

Garden Path Fermentation, a beer, cider, mead, and fruit wine producer based in the Skagit Valley, Washington, joined by a consumer plaintiff, said it sued Alcohol & Tobacco Tax & Trade Bureau challenging a federal rule that prohibits producers of cider, mead, and fruit wine from listing "vintage" years on their labels.

The rule violates the First Amendment by suppressing truthful commercial speech without evidence of consumer harm and without a reasonable justification, Garden Path argues. The plaintiffs also allege that the rule is arbitrary and capricious under federal administrative law.

TTB said it doesn't comment on litigation.

"Vintage information is basic agricultural information," said **Justin Leigh**, counsel for the plaintiffs. "Consumers understand what a vintage year means, regardless of whether the product is made from grapes, apples, or honey. There is no rational basis for the government to allow this information for grape wine while censoring it for other wine products."

Leigh brings extensive firsthand experience in the cider, wine, and beer industries. A former owner of Dwinell Country Ales, a Goldendale, Washington-based producer that brewed beer and produced wine and cider, he is also the owner and farmer of his own cider fruit orchard, giving him direct experience with agricultural production, harvest variability, and the importance of vintage information to both producers and consumers.

In addition to his industry background, Leigh has been involved in prior litigation challenging restrictive alcohol regulations. He previously facilitated litigation against the Oregon Liquor and Cannabis Commission involving brewery self-distribution, in which Garden Path Fermentation was a plaintiff. He is currently counsel in a federal constitutional challenge against the Washington State Liquor & Cannabis Board concerning direct-to-consumer sales restrictions imposed on out-of-state distilleries. That case, which alleges that Washington's statutory scheme unlawfully discriminates against interstate commerce and violates constitutional protections, is on appeal before the Ninth Circuit.

“Having worked as a producer, farmer, and attorney in this space, I've seen how these rules affect real businesses and real consumers,” Leigh said. “This case is about transparency, free speech, and treating cider, mead, and fruit wine with the same respect afforded to grape wine under federal law.”

The lawsuit highlights a striking inconsistency in federal regulation: cider, mead, and fruit wine containing less than 7% alcohol by volume are regulated by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), which does not require pre-approval of labels and permits truthful vintage information. Once those same products exceed 7% alcohol, however, TTB prohibits vintage statements altogether.

The plaintiffs are seeking declaratory and injunctive relief to prevent TTB from enforcing the vintage prohibition against cider, mead, and fruit wine producers. They are not seeking damages.

Will Lowering Prices Boost Sales? Maybe

Wine sales aren't what they used to be, but neither are spirits or beer sales, so some execs are considering lowering prices. Good idea?

It all depends. First, remember any action is muddier than normal because of two factors: First, President Trump's tariffs, which have led all but two Canadian provinces to remove American alcoholic beverages from retail shelves. Second, the U.S. economy is sort of bi-furcated – many Americans, even those making a decent income, are feeling squeezed because wage growth hasn't kept up with inflation for a decade or more. At the same time, for other Americans, the economy is doing just fine and so are they.

So, what does academic research say? Traditional luxury products are high quality, very high priced and can make their owners feel superior to ordinary consumers. "Affordable luxuries," such as wine and spirits, on the other hand, are sold at reasonable price premium, but not so high as to be out of reach of mass and still enjoy a neutral and reasonable level of perceived prestige.

Using temporary price discounts can drive sales for affordable luxuries and may attract new customers. But people who are highly in need of social status may be offended by a price promotion at a luxury hotel and have a lesser intention of returning as a result, according to a 2015 study by Wan Yang in *Cornell Hospitality Quarterly*.

Mike Veseth, who writes as *The Wine Economist*, noted in 2016 that if diners in a restaurant respond favorably to lower prices for wine by buying more wine, then money from new purchases more than offsets the revenue lost by lowering the price you have elastic demand. So if demand is elastic, lowering the price makes sense. But if demand is inelastic – i.e., if you lose money, inelastic – you probably shouldn't lower prices.

Of course, you don't have to lower prices on all your wine (or spirits or beer). If you have a tasting room, lower the price on your tasting room fee on your slowest day, or during the slowest period of the day. Or, you could lower pricing on one wine in your lineup. Or on a special day. Or for a special group.

The point is, a modest price might help boost sales revenue and attract new customers. Just have a good story as to why you're doing so. About 40 years ago, when the hotel business was really slow, Marriott rewarded its shareholders with 50% off rooms in Marriott properties. When business picked up, that shareholder benefit disappeared.

Large-Scale Fla. Wine Industry Possible After Research Breakthrough

Researchers have grown and harvested wine grapes that are resistant to the main bacterial disease that has long prevented Florida from establishing a large-scale wine industry.

Researchers successfully grew five grape varieties in Citra, Florida, that are [resistant to Pierce's disease](#), a bacterial infection that kills the vines and shrivels the grapes. The effort, led by [Ali Sarkhosh](#), associate professor in the UF Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS) horticultural sciences department, produced a harvest of grapes that resulted in 13 cases of wine.

While Florida has a thriving muscadine grape industry, the global market for muscadine wine is small compared to wine made from *Vitis vinifera*, the species of grapes behind world-famous wines such as cabernet sauvignon, sauvignon blanc and merlot. Florida is already the nation's second-highest wine-consuming state, behind only California, with an industry valued at \$15 billion in 2022. Yet most of the wines served are produced elsewhere, primarily in California, Oregon and Washington.

Sarkhosh said he hopes this research will offer a potential additional crop for muscadine grape farmers. As of 2017, there were [547 Florida vineyards](#), growing muscadine and hybrid grapes.

"This could be an enormous opportunity for vineyards in Florida to expand into additional types of wine for a wider market," he said. "This could be the start of a new chapter for Florida wine."

UF researchers worked with [Château Le Coeur](#), a winery based in DeFuniak Springs, Florida, to make the wine from their harvest. The wine was crafted with 75% Florida-grown fruit and blended with 25% cabernet sauvignon and merlot.

The grape used in the wine collaboration is a hybrid called "Erante Noir" and was [developed at the University of California, Davis](#). It carries the genes of sauvignon blanc and cabernet sauvignon.

John Choquer, the owner of Château Le Coeur, emphasized the potential for this collaboration.

"If we are successful in growing in the area and combating Pierce's disease effectively, it will be a strong growth industry and emerging market for agri-tourism," he said.

Early tastings point to a dark, fruit-forward wine. Château Le Coeur named this debut wine "Genial," a French expression for something new and innovative.

He said he is also planting a variety of traditional wine grapes, red and white, at his vineyard. He said his winery is grateful for UF's support and collaboration as he works to create a Florida-based traditional wine industry. "This is not a short-term experiment," Choquer added. "We plan to test more Pierce's

disease-resistant and traditional vinifera varieties, refine vineyard practices and build a new type of wine industry here in Florida. There will be challenges, there will be setbacks, but the potential is also so great. There is such a strong market potential here in Florida.”

For Total Alc, Christmas Week Was Merry: Sales Surge 22%

But not that merry: That 22% surge was week-over-week, NIQ said, adding that for the four weeks ended Dec. 27, total alcohol sales were down compared to a year earlier: Dollar sales slipped 5.4% to \$9.48 billion vs. a year ago and case volume was off 5.3% to 157.2 million.

Spirits continued to drive losses, NIQ said. Spirits were down 8.5% in dollar sales vs. down 9.7% in the prior L4W period and down 9.7% in volume. Wine also was down – Value was off 7.7% and volume was down 8%.

If you want some cheer, look at prepared cocktails. Ease wins out again, with this category up 4.95 in dollars, even though case volume dropped 1.3%, a bit slower than the previous period's 1.5% dip. "The results are consistent with the sustained momentum of RTD offerings." NIQ observed.

Top spirits categories all saw losses: Whiskey continued to lead the losses, down 9.1% in value, 8% in volume, followed by tequila, which slipped 8.4% in value and 4.3% in volume. Vodka posted the slowest decline sagging 6.4% in dollars and 5.3% in volume. "All Other" spirits eased 0.6% in dollar sales, but grew 8.8% in volume, driven by non-alc spirits.

Turning to wine, NIQ noted that wine again suffered losses in the four weeks ended Dec. 27, but those losses improved compared to the previous latest four week period where dollar sales sagged 8.4%.

Top 10 States Post Declines

The top 10 states all posted declines. Ohio stood out as the slowest decliner: dollar sales fell 2.2%, followed by Michigan, down 2.8% and Texas. down 2.7%. New Jersey saw dollar sales fall a brutal 13.4%. Volume in the Garden State was off 14.1%.

Christmas Week was miserable for off-premise operators: Liquor led value losses at 8%, food fell 5.3%, mass slipped 3.8%, club 2.9% and convenience maintained its position as the slowest decline with a 1.8% drop.

A-B Expands Sponsorship of MSG Venues

Anheuser-Busch expanded its sponsorship of MSG Entertainment properties, including at Madison Square Garden and Sphere in Las Vegas; as well as with the New York Knicks and New York Rangers, the Concert Series at Madison Square Garden, College Hoops at The Garden, and MSG Networks.

NÜTRL Vodka Seltzer and Cutwater, two of the fastest growing brands in the industry that are leading and growing the ready-to-drink (RTD) alcohol beverage category, will be promoted alongside Michelob ULTRA, America's #1 top-selling beer.

Fans attending sports events at Madison Square Garden will recognize Anheuser-Busch's portfolio of brands advertised both inside and around the venue, with a robust suite of assets that include:

Multiple on-court / on-ice displays during Knicks, Rangers and college basketball games via the basket stanchion, courtside signage and dasher boards
Gardenvision features during multiple Knicks and Rangers home games each season
Branding throughout the arena that includes an activation space in the main concourse for select games
Prominent street signage on 7th Avenue outside the arena featuring Anheuser-Busch's portfolio of brands
VIP experiences and exclusive prizes via Michelob ULTRA's "Superior Access" program

In addition, as the Official American Beer Sponsor of both the Knicks and Rangers, Michelob ULTRA will be integrated in the game day experience wherever 21+ fans watch their favorite team, headlined by in-person viewing parties, sponsorship of MSG Networks' in-studio bar during pre and post-game shows and original content series that will be distributed across each team's social channels.

As an Official Partner of the Concert Series at Madison Square Garden, Anheuser-Busch will have a significant presence on digital signage and as part of on-site activations during live music and entertainment events.

Anheuser-Busch will also gain substantial exposure through an expanded presence at Sphere in Las Vegas including on the Exosphere – the fully-customizable LED exterior of Sphere and the largest LED screen in the world.

"For more than 100 years, Anheuser-Busch has contributed to the world class fan experience at Madison Square Garden and its family of venues," said Spencer Gordon, Group VP of Connections at Anheuser-Busch. "We're committed to continuing that legacy for years to come with this extended sponsorship, whether you're a fan of the Knicks, Rangers or the hundreds of performers at MSG every year. Our portfolio of brands and strategic partnership will provide first-class experiences for some of the most passionate fans in the world."

Carbonation Lifts Likeability, Purchase Intent for Muscadine. Will Canning?

The value-added process of carbonation led to a significant increase in likability, purchase intent, and ranking for the carbonated wine samples over uncarbonated samples of muscadine wine, Nick Wendrick, found while an undergraduate at the University of Florida. Now a master's degree candidate at UF, is studying how

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Now a master's degree candidate at UF, is studying how muscadine wine packaged in glass compares with wine in aluminum cans. The objective is to help wineries determine if canned wine is appropriate for their product portfolio.

He notes that from March 2020 to March 2021, canned wine sales grew 62%. He's hopeful his research will yield another value-added process to help increase the popularity of muscadine wine.

It should. Other research at UF has found that canned wine has been gaining popularity for years. It's easy to produce single servings which increases the locations where wine can be consumed to include beaches, swimming pools, ball parks and stadiums. There's less breakage, and canned wine can be recycled.

Various commercial researchers see CAGRs of anywhere from 13.1% (Global Market Insights) to 17.1% (Future Market Insights).

There are, of course, challenges, some caused by the low internal strength of cans themselves, others by negative consumer perceptions, and still others by the cost of necessary capital equipment.

Still, research thus far at UF suggests that aluminum cans may be a viable packaging alternative to glass for carbonated muscadine wine.

New License Seen Aiding NY Craft Brand Owners

In a move Lindsey A. Zahn, a White Plains, N.Y., attorney, describes as "a major step to support craft beverage entrepreneurs," New York State has adopted an alcohol Brand owners license.

Bogle Promotes Dana Stemmler to Winemaking

Bogle Family Wine Collection promotes winemaker **Dana Stemmler** to Director of Winemaking, as recognition of her outstanding contribution, leadership, and nearly two decades of excellence at the Clarksburg, Calif., winery.

Stemmler has crafted an impressive portfolio of acclaimed, award-winning wines that exemplify Bogle Family Wine Collection's commitment to quality, consistency, and sustainability.

Revelton Builds Executive Team

Revelton Distilling Co. named **John D'Attoma** as VP-Sales, North America, effective Jan. 16, 2026, and highlighting the recent addition of Don Boelens as Chief Operations Officer, who joined the company in September 2025.

D'Attoma's career includes leadership positions at Broken Shed Vodka, Southern Glazer's Wine & Spirits, Allied Beverage Group, and Standard Beverage Corp.

Suntory Global Names Seth Lorenz as U.S. Chief Sales Offer

Suntory Global Spirits named **Seth Lorenz** U.S. chief sales officer. He joins from Mast-Jägermeister U.S. At Suntory, he will be responsible for managing the P&L for the company's U.S. commercial business, including managing distributor and customer relationships and delivering sustainable, profitable growth within the

Suntory Global Spirits named Seth Lorenz U.S. chief sales officer. He joins from Mast-Jägermeister U.S. At Suntory, he will be responsible for managing the P&L for the company's U.S. commercial business, including managing distributor and customer relationships and delivering sustainable, profitable growth within the U.S., one of the company's largest markets.

Lorenz succeeds **Dave Turo**, who was recently named EVP/Managing Director – Suntory Global Spirits Portfolio at **Southern Glazer’s Wine & Spirits**.

WSWA Adds 3 to Federal Affairs Team

Wine & Spirits Wholesalers of America (WSWA) appointed three key federal affairs leaders: **Ben Castagnetti, Scott Luginbill, and Kelsey Snyder**. They will report to **Dawson Hobbs**, EVP-Government Affairs.

Before joining WSWA, Castagnetti, a Director, Federal Affairs, for WSWA, worked for Sen. Maria Cantwell (D-WA), focusing on trade, foreign relations, and national security issues.

Scott Luginbill, VP-Federal Affairs, brings more than 15 years of experience in public affairs and government relations to WSWA. Most recently he served as Senior Advisor and Deputy Chief of Staff to Sen. Jim Banks (R-Ind.)

Snyder joins from National Federation of Independent Business where she was a principal of Federal Government relations.

KLG PR Repping ALB Vodka

ALB stands for Albany, the airline code for Albany, N.Y., where the vodka's producer, **Albany Distilling Co.**, the city's first distillery since Prohibition, is based. It's positioning itself as "the hardworking vodka from upstate, not another stylized Brooklyn or Manhattan lifestyle label," KLG says.

Share a Splash Names Erle Martin CEO

Share a Splash Wine Co. hired **Erle Martin** as chief executive officer.

He previously led both the Coppola and Crimson Wine Group organizations. Martin has held senior executive roles on the distribution side of the business, most recently with Winebow. With nearly four decades of experience across both the producer and wholesaler tiers of the wine industry, he brings a rare and comprehensive perspective to the role.

Yoav Gilat, founder, will transition from CEO to executive chairman, focusing on long-term strategy, innovation, board governance, mentorship, and maintaining Share a Splash's unique company culture.

Montana Initiative Would Block Political Spending by Business

The U.S. Supreme Court may have ruled that Corporations have a First Amendment right to spend money on political campaigns and candidates, but that hasn't stopped opponents of corporate political spending.

The Montana Transparent Election Initiative (TEI) is taking a new, different tact: It's targeting corporations through their charters. Because companies and corporations must be granted charters, or legal status by the state, they must comply with state laws regarding how business is conducted. This measure would limit those corporate rights to operate and bar political spending.

TEI is circulating a constitutional ballot initiative to change the Montana Constitution and an initiative would change state statute to make clear that artificial persons and corporations do not have "political spending power." But political committees and "natural persons" can still spend money on politics, the initiatives say.

They also provide that if a state-chartered business spends politically, those corporations could lose limited liability status and be subject to punishment.

Montana has been a historical leader in trying to curb the power of corporations and their ability to spend money in elections for more than a century. Lawmakers, voters and courts wrestled with the issue before the passage of the Corrupt Practices Act in 1912, which began a history of chasing corporate money from Treasure State politics.

Montana's efforts also were key in the controversial "Citizens United" ruling by the U.S. Supreme Court, which said that corporations were artificial persons and entitled to spend money on political campaigns because that act is an expression of free speech and association. Montana voters can propose and vote on laws except those that appropriate money, a power reserved only to the Legislature.

N.C. could lose federal funding over CDLs issued to immigrant drivers

The U.S. Department of Transportation is threatening to withhold nearly \$50 million in federal funding from North Carolina if the state refuses to revoke commercial driver's licenses the department contends were illegally issued to immigrant drivers.

U.S. Transportation Secretary Sean P. Duffy issued a statement Thursday contending 54% of the state's non-domiciled commercial driver's licenses reviewed by the Federal Motor Carrier Administration (FMCSA) were issued illegally. FMCSA said it found:

- Non-domiciled CDLs that extend beyond the expiration of drivers' lawful presence in the United States.
- Non-domiciled CDLs to citizens of Mexico not present in the United States under the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program.
- Non-domiciled CDLs without providing evidence that it verified the driver's lawful presence in the United States.

North Carolina's Division of Motor Vehicles said it has been working with the Fed for several months to resolve the matter.

To Your Continued Success,
KANE'S BEVERAGE WEEK



JOEL WHITAKER, Editor

Thanks for reading!