

KANE'S BEVERAGE WEEK

The Alcohol Beverage Executive's Newsletter

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Allies Tell Trump: Stick With the Tariff Deals You Made. We Will.

U.S. trading partners are telling President Trump a deal's a deal. They'll live with tariffs, but he should stick with previously agreed tariff levels, *The Wall Street Journal* is reporting this morning.

In attempting to get around the U.S. Supreme Court's decision invalidating his "emergency tariffs," Trump has turned to section 301 investigations which involve, among other things, allegations of dumping product because of too much excess capacity.

"The EU is a market driven economy," a European Commission spokesman said. "The EU does not consider itself a contributor to structural excess capacity, but rather a partner in addressing global distortions."

U.S. Beer Production Plunged 9.4% in January

Beer Institute estimated the volume of beer produced in the U.S. subject to federal excise tax 9.4 percent Probably a year earlier.

Beer Imports Fell 17% in January

Beer imports in January declined 17% from a year earlier, although the Beer Institute notes that over the last three years there has been virtually no change. Imports declined from major bear reporting countries of origin, such as Mexico, which were down 14.6%; The Netherlands, down 25.9% and Ireland down 27.9%. However, beer imported from Germany jumped 16.2% year over year.

Raw volume figures hardly tell the whole story. For instance beer from Mexico declined 3.1% but gained two percentage points of share growing to 84.5%. Of total imported beer volume, Irish imports grew 18.6% for the the year and gained 0.6 share points of imported volume. Beer Institute also notes that German beer Imports declined 2% but moved up to the fourth largest country of origin for beer imported to the United States.

Overall, total industry supply fell 11.2% in January, which Beer Institute attributes to crippling winter weather in the final week of January. Andrew Heeritage, Beer Institute chief economist says the "beer industry is performing far better in 2025 than shipment trends suggest." For instance, through February, depletions are down 2.2%, and on-premise volumes have grown in five of the past nine weeks.

California Winegrape Crush Down 8.4%, Smallest Since 1999

California total winegrape crush for 2025 was 2,623,440 tons, down 8.45% from a year earlier, the California Department of Food & Agriculture reported. It was the smallest since 1999, **Ciatti Co.** noted.

In 2025, Chardonnay continued to account for the largest percentage of the total tonnage crushed at 17.8%. Production was down 7%, totaling 491,036 tons vs. 527,798 tons a year earlier. Cabernet Sauvignon accounted for the second largest percentage of the total crush at 15.7% but production was down 7%. Raisin grape varieties crushed for wine accounted for 0.4% of the total crush and table varieties crushed for wine were 4.5% of the total crush.

Pinot Noir production was down 12.9%, totaling 189,842 tons versus 218,022 tons in 2024. Pinot Grigio (+4.2% to 198,619 tons) and Sauvignon Blanc (+16.1% to 160,962 tons) were the only major varieties to see larger production than in 2024.

The harvest in District 8, Santa Barbara/San Luis Obispo counties (which includes Paso Robles), was up 4.5%, largely due to Cabernet Sauvignon increasing 12.7% from 2024.

District 13 (Madera, Fresno, Alpine, Mono, Inyo Counties; and Kings and Tulare Counties north of Nevada Avenue (Avenue 192)), had the largest share of the State's crush at 792,899 tons. The average price per ton in District 13 was \$336.08. Grapes produced in District 4 (Napa County) received the highest average price at \$6,767.53 per ton, down 2.6% from 2024. District 3 (Sonoma and Marin counties) received the second highest average price at \$2,761.37 per ton, down 5.7% from 2024.

The 2025 Chardonnay average price of \$1,012.01 was down 4.2% from 2024 and the Cabernet Sauvignon average price of \$2,127.33 was down 2.7% from 2024. The 2025 average price for French Colombard was \$289.14, down 6.8% from 2024, while the Pinot Gris average price was down 0.3% from 2024, at \$554.98 per ton.

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In the Interior, the harvest in Lodi District 11 was down overall by 11.2%.

The harvest in District 4 (Napa) was down overall by 2.2%, with Cabernet Sauvignon down slightly by 1.4%.

The crush report is produced in cooperation with the U.S. Agricultural Statistics Service.

Mercer Wine Estates Acquires Matthews, 3 Related Brands

Mercer Wine Estates, a multi-generation, family-owned winegrower with deep roots in Washington State agriculture, said it is acquiring four leading Washington wine brands – **Matthews, Tenor, Jaine, and Single Barrel**. Terms weren't disclosed

The acquisition strengthens Mercer's portfolio of vineyard-driven brands and reinforces its longstanding commitment to investing in the people, vineyards, and places shaping the future of Washington's Columbia Valley, Mercer said.

Mercer Wine Estates has supplied fruit to Avallé, owner of the four brands, for many years, creating deep familiarity with their vineyards, winemaking approach, and quality standards. Formalizing that relationship allows for greater alignment across farming, winemaking, and long-term brand stewardship.

“They’ve got some great strengths, and we’ve got some great strengths. Put them together, and it makes the whole stronger,” says **Rob Mercer**, president of Mercer Ranches and owner of Mercer Wine Estates.

The winemaking team behind Matthews, Tenor, Jaine, and Single Barrel will join Ali Mayfield and the team at Mercer Wine Estates, adding decades of experience and talent in crafting some of Washington State’s most highly regarded wines. This team – led by **Alex Stewart, Hal Iverson,** and **Andy Ferguson** – will oversee winemaking across the expanded portfolio.

Jen Bell will join Mercer Wine Estates as Vice President, leading the Wine Division and overseeing the expanded portfolio. Bell brings nearly 25 years of experience in wine operations and portfolio strategy.

“Maintaining continuity was critical,” Mercer added. “The people behind these wines matter. This transition allows us to preserve what works while giving the brands a strong foundation for the future.”

SGWS Execs Indicted for Bribery

The indictment of **Stephen Magliocco**, a former vice president for **Southern Glazer's Wine & Spirits**; **Michael Dehdashtian**, VP of chains; **Adrian Ruiz**, SVP for California; **Ryan Dow**, director of sales; and **Loratina "Tina" Muscara**, director of sales, is the latest in a series of cases arising from alleged violations of the Federal Alcohol Administration Act.

The indictment doesn't name Southern Glazer's, choosing to call it "Distributor 1," but identifying details such as office locations make it clear it is SGWS.

It alleges the defendants and co-conspirators " devised and participated in a scheme to provide bribes to employees of retail grocery chains to increase the purchases of certain alcohol brands and to obstruct any investigations into the bribes by creating and maintaining false financial documents.

“Southern Glazer’s is committed to full compliance with all applicable laws and industry regulations, and we hold ourselves and our employees to the highest standards of ethics and integrity,” said an SGWS spokesperson said. “We have cooperated with relevant authorities and will continue to do so.”

The indictment explains that employees and suppliers of Distributor-1 knew that the distribution company and its partners were prohibited from paying bribes to alcohol retailers and wholesalers to purchase certain brands to the exclusion of others, and that the distribution company was subject to audit and inspection by the **Alcohol & Tobacco Tax & Trade Bureau (TTB)**.

The investigation was revealed last year when two executives of Deutsch Family Wine & Spirits pleaded guilty to bribing SGWS employees to favor their products.

The five former employees of Distributor-1 allegedly took steps to conceal the bribes paid to employees of grocery store chains in California and the funding of those bribes, including using approved vendors of Distributor-1 and some of its alcohol suppliers to issue false invoices purporting to be for a legitimate business expense, but which in reality funded the purchase of prepaid gift cards valued at up to \$1,000 each, luxury and designer items such as watches, purses, and golf and exercise equipment, among other things.

The indictment further alleges that Michael Sean Salene, 60, of Garden City, Idaho, an employee salesman for a Napa winery, bribed the head alcohol buyer for a large national grocery store

chain that operates approximately 300 stores in California, lied to investigators when questioned about those bribes, and falsified invoices.

Magliocco, Dehdashtian, Ruiz, Dow, and Muscara are each charged with conspiracy to commit bribery and obstruct investigations. Magliocco, Ruiz, and Muscara are also charged with falsification of records to obstruct investigations. Salene is charged with Travel Act bribery and making false statements.

The indictment says that from 2016 to March 2024, distributor employees and brand representatives gave Patrick Briones, who LinkedIn identified as an assistant sales manager at Albertsons Co., sweetheart deals in exchange for buying and promoting certain brands carried by SGWS.

The bribes were discussed during regular planning meetings, prosecutors said, with employees sometimes staying after to privately discuss which items came with kickbacks.

These alleged kickbacks included prepaid gift cards, luxury items, consumer electronics and even cash, as well as travel expenses like airfare, hotel stays, expensive meals and golfing trips. Employees allegedly falsified statements and invoices involving vendors to skirt detection, disguising many of them as business expenses such as “marketing” or “seminar.”

The U.S. Attorney's Office notes that an indictment merely alleges that crimes have been committed, and all defendants are presumed innocent until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt.

The possible sentence depends upon the crime committed. If convicted of conspiracy, of interstate travel in aid of racketeering enterprise – bribery, of false statements defendants face a maximum sentence of up to five years in prison and a \$250,000 fine for each count. If convicted of falsification of records to obstruct investigations they also face 20 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine for.

Any sentence following conviction would be imposed by the court after consideration of the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and the federal statute governing the imposition of a sentence.

Southern Glazer's last year settled a major lawsuit the complained the company illegally boycotted an online alcohol-selling platform. In 2014, the Federal Trade Commission sues SGWS for illegal price discrimination.

Wine Market Council Exploring Why Some Consumers 'Don't Like Taste of Wine'

The study will focus on infrequent wine drinkers and non-adopters who regularly consume other alcoholic beverages, a segment that represents a significant growth opportunity for the wine category.

“Wine offers an enormous range of flavor styles, but that diversity can make it difficult for consumers to know what they’re getting,” said **Liz Thach**, MW, president of Wine Market Council. “We want to understand whether people are rejecting wine altogether—or simply rejecting the few wines they’ve tried.”

WMC research shows that up to 30% of non-wine adopters avoid wine because they dislike the taste, often describing it as “too bitter, too dry, or too strong,” particularly among young adults. At the same time, 24% of wine drinkers say label information rarely helps them choose a wine,

and 34% report buying a bottle they expected to match a flavor or style they liked—only to be disappointed.

The project combines large-scale sensory data analysis with a consumer survey. Quini, a sensory intelligence platform, will analyze its extensive tasting database to identify patterns in how marginal wine consumers respond to sensory attributes such as sweetness, acidity, smoothness, bitterness, and alcohol levels.

“We have one of the world’s richest consumer wine sensory datasets,” said Roger Noujeim, CEO of Quini. “By isolating responses from infrequent wine drinkers, we can begin to identify which flavor characteristics attract or repel them—and whether those reactions cluster into distinct consumer segments.”

Following the database analysis, the researchers will conduct a national survey of 1,000 U.S. adults ages 21–55 who either rarely drink wine or drink it only occasionally.

Among the questions the study aims to answer:

- * Which flavor attributes consumers most enjoy—or avoid
- * How many wine experiences lead consumers to decide they dislike wine
- * What consumers would like to see on wine labels to more accurately help them find a wine they will like, and to increase their confidence in wine buying

A key hypothesis being tested is that there may be no single flavor characteristic common to all wines that drives rejection. Instead, consumers may simply encounter wines whose flavor profiles do not match their personal preferences.

“If consumers are turning away from wine because they can’t predict how it will taste, the solution may be clearer communication rather than changing the product itself,” said Christian Miller, WMC Research Director.

The findings from this study will guide Phase Two of the project, which will involve quantitative sensory analysis and testing new ways to communicate wine flavor characteristics to consumers.

Preliminary high-level results of the research study will be shared at the 2026 Wine Market Council Research Conference in Napa Valley on March 25, 2026.

Calif. Winegrape Growers List Advocacy Goals

California Association of Winegrape Growers has three major objectives for Advocacy Day, when its members visit their representatives in the California Legislature. They are.

Truth in Labeling for American Wine: would require that wine labeled as “American” be made from 100% American-grown winegrapes, aligning the American designation with California’s long-standing requirement that wines labeled “California” be made from 100% California grapes.

Agricultural Overtime Tax Credit: would create a tax credit to fully offset the cost of overtime wages paid by agricultural employers. This bipartisan legislation recognizes the importance of overtime pay for farmworkers while addressing the real and growing labor cost pressures facing agricultural operations.

Expanding Farmers’ Market Access for Local Wine: would allow small, non-estate wineries that purchase local grapes to sell wine and offer tastings at certified farmers’ markets. The goal is to

strengthen direct-to-consumer connections, support local supply chains, and make California wine more accessible to California consumers.

These bills are expected to be heard in their first policy committees later this month or early April.

Before Iran, U.S. Price Pressures Were OK. Now, Energy Prices Warn of 3% Inflation Again

February inflation data suggests that price pressures were in an OK place ahead of the military action in Iran, **James Knightley**, chief international economist, U.S., ING said in a note to clients. But with energy costs on the rise and concerns about supply bottlenecks in the region, we are likely to see a return of 3%+ headline inflation in coming months.

Import prices are continuing to rise and consumers prices look benign, which means, Knightly says, the extra \$25-\$30 billion of tariff costs per month are being borne by Corporate America.

"Productivity gains are often cited as a factor limiting the inflation effect, but we note that imports are rising quickly again now that all the pre-tariff inventory build from late 2024/early 2025 has been exhausted. That suggests more tariff costs to come. As such, we can't exclude the possibility that tariffs will eventually have a more noticeable impact on prices," he said.

Consumers willing to pay 9.7% sustainability premium, despite cost-of-living, inflation concerns

Consumers are willing to spend an average of 9.7% more on sustainably produced or sourced goods, even as cost-of-living and inflationary concerns weigh, according to [PwC's 2024 Voice of the Consumer Survey](#).

The survey, which collected the perspectives of more than 20,000 consumers from across 31 countries and territories, found that almost nine-in-ten (85%) consumers are experiencing first-hand the disruptive effects of climate change in their daily lives and are prioritizing consumption that integrates sustainability-focused practices.

But while consumers are focused on sustainability, they are also weighed by cost-of-living pressures. One-third (31%) of consumers cite inflation as the biggest risk to their consumption habits over the next year, while 62% cite the most significant increase in spending to be on groceries over the next six months as inflation drives the price of essential goods higher.

Sabine Durand-Hayes, Global Consumer Markets Leader, PwC France, said:

"Consumers are increasingly feeling the squeeze of inflation and rising prices in essential goods such as groceries, however in that context, they are prioritizing products that are sustainably produced and sourced.

"Even as consumers look to cheaper, generic options for essentials, they nevertheless cite a willingness to pay 9.7% more for sustainability. In the year ahead, companies must achieve a delicate balance between consumer affordability and environmental impact if they are to source and retain consumers. They will also need to bolster their digital engagement and service-delivery, particularly as more consumers purchase products directly through social media."

Prioritizing Sustainability

Consumers are increasingly prioritizing sustainability in their consumption practices. Almost nine-in-ten (85%) say they are experiencing the disruptive impacts of climate change in their lives. Some 46% say they are buying more sustainable products as a way to reduce their impact on the environment.

Personal actions consumers say they have taken include: making more considered purchases with the aim of reducing their overall consumption (43%), eating different foods (32%), travelling less or differently (31%), or purchasing – or planning to purchase – an electric vehicle (24%), among others.

More than four-fifths (80%) of consumers say they are willing to pay more for sustainable produced or sourced goods. In terms of a price premium, some consumers are willing to pay on average 9.7% more for goods that meet specific environmental criteria, including locally-sourced, made from recycled or eco-friendly materials, produced in a supply chain with a lower carbon footprint, and more. However, this may not translate into actual spending due to factors including inflation, macroeconomic volatility, and cost-of-living concerns, among others.

Consumers are assessing producers' sustainability practices through tangible attributes including: production methods and recycling (40%), eco-friendly packaging (38%), and making a positive impact on nature and water conservation (34%). Consumers are also planning to increase fresh fruit and vegetable consumption (52%) and reduce red meat intake (22%).

Social media consumption surges

Social media's prominence as a primary source of brand awareness and product consumption has surged. 46% of consumers purchased products directly through social media – up from 21% in 2019.

All the while, 67% use social media to discover new brands, and 70% seek reviews to validate a company before making a purchase. Social media influencers continue to drive sales, with 41% of respondents noting a celebrity or influencer has influenced their decision to make a purchase.

But while technology platforms are shaping consumer habits, they are also driving concerns. Overwhelmingly, 83% say the protection of their personal data is one of the most crucial factors to earn their trust, with 80% noting they demand assurances that their personal information remains private. Only 52% feel confident in understanding how their data is stored or shared.

Bacardi Rum Campaign Features New Music From Tainy

Bacardi Rum announces a new chapter of its global "Do What Moves You" campaign, celebrating Latin culture and the infectious rhythms that move us, inspired by Puerto Rico and powered by one of music's biggest hitmakers, Puerto Rican artist and Grammy Award-winning producer, TAINY.

On collaboration with Puerto Rican director and creative powerhouse Alfred Marroquin, TAINY is launching a track teaser for his reimaged version of the beloved Latin classic "Tu Sonrisa" by Elvis Crespo in a lively 30-second campaign film. Filled with scenes of everyday celebration, the video brings the energy of Puerto Rico, the island BACARDÍ Rum has proudly called home for more than 90 years, while also reflecting the shared rhythms and joy found across Latin culture for a new generation of music lovers.

"I grew up listening to 'Tu Sonrisa,' and the moment I hear those opening notes, I'm immediately transported back to Puerto Rico. It's such an honor to get this opportunity to work alongside Elvis and breathe new life into this song for Bacardi Rum," said TAINY. "This is a song that is

deeply personal to me, and I'm excited for the next generation to fall in love with it the same way I did almost 30 years ago."

The teaser captures Bacardi's "Do What Moves You" spirit, inspiring movement, celebrating culture, and honoring the power of music to bring people together.

The new campaign film will be featured on cable networks including MTV, NBC and Bravo, as well as streaming platforms including Netflix, Amazon, Paramount+ and Hulu. It will also roll out across key markets worldwide, including the U.S., Canada, Mexico, the U.K. and the Netherlands.

The teaser of the new track will be available on social platforms and later debut in full on Spotify, Apple Music, and all major music streaming platforms.

Tenuta Luce Releases 2023 Sangiovese-Merlot Blend

[Tenuta Luce](#) releases the 31st harvest of Luce 2023, the newest vintage of the estate's flagship wine.

Luce, the first wine in Montalcino to bring together Sangiovese and Merlot, has represented a distinctive vision for the territory since its inaugural vintage in 1993, combining the structure and character of Sangiovese with the depth and richness of Merlot.

The 2023 Vintage "Luce 2023 is the result of a challenging vintage, which makes the quality we achieved all the more rewarding," says **Alessandro Marini**, Technical Director of the estate.

"The grapes arriving at the winery stood out for their exceptional quality and integrity," Marini continues. "A balanced, stress-free summer supported harmonious ripening while preserving aromatic expression, freshness, and depth. The meticulous work carried out in the vineyard during the spring allowed us to harvest outstanding fruit, resulting in a wine of great class."

Cali by Snoop Honors Tupac Shakur with Special Wine

Cali By Snoop drops its most legendary wine yet – 2 of Amerikaz Most Wanted, a wine built around a personal tribute from Snoop Dogg to Tupac Shakur, commemorating the 30th anniversary of one of rap's most iconic collabs.

2 of Amerikaz Most Wanted is a red blend that celebrates the history of two of hip-hop's greatest superstars. Along with the bottle, Snoop Dogg stars in a [moving tribute film](#), where he reminisces on their experience together and pours a little out as a tribute. The tribute features archival behind-the-scenes footage from the music video for "2 of Amerikaz Most Wanted."

"It's hard to believe it's been 30 years since Pac and I got together to make '2 of Amerikaz Most Wanted.' Nobody did it like us, and I can't think of a better way to honor his legacy than with a drink," said Snoop Dogg. "This wine is perfect for celebrating with loved ones, and I'm looking forward to the people pourin' a little out with me for my friend."

2 of Amerikaz Most Wanted is a Petite Sirah-dominant red blend that features notes of toasty oak, dark fruit, toffee, and baking spice. Michael Garrison, 2 of Amerikaz Most Wanted and Treasury Wine Estates Winemaker, describes the wine as well-structured, with supple, integrated tannins that deliver a long, flavorful finish with each sip. The label design is inspired by a

moment etched in hip-hop history from the 1996 VMA Awards, featuring Snoop and Tupac, and includes a tribute to Tupac written by Snoop Dogg.

2 of Amerikaz Most Wanted is available for an SRP of \$14.99 at major retailers and marketplaces nationwide.

Busch Light Introduces Bass Bank Innovation Contest

Busch Light presents “Bass Bank,” a contest that invites anglers to pitch their most innovative fishing ideas to a panel of experts who know a thing or two about the great outdoors: Chris and Casey Keefer, and The Busch Guy.

Busch Light is looking for clever, useful innovations that make fishing better, easier, or just more enjoyable. If it solves a real on-the-water problem and makes anglers say, “Why didn’t I think of that?”— you’re on the right track.

Anglers can submit their ideas via a dedicated microsite at www.busch.com/bassbank through March 22. Submissions will be judged based on creativity, ingenuity, realistic usage, and passion. The grand prize winner will receive a \$15,000 cash prize to help create their invention, a year’s worth of beer, and a live working session with the Keefer Brothers to help bring the idea to life.

Krystyn Stowe, Head of Marketing Busch Family & Natural Light Family, **Anheuser Busch**, said: “We know our fans are passionate about the outdoors, and there’s no better way to enjoy a day after being on the water than with a cold Busch Light in hand. We’re thrilled to collaborate with Bass Pro Shops on the limited-edition can design and invest back into the fishing community through ‘Bass Bank.’ These initiatives allow Busch Light to continue authentically connecting with anglers and outdoorsmen.”

Heineken 0.0 Unveils 1st 0 Alcohol, 0 Calorie, 0 Sugar Brew

Heineken is doubling down on its leadership in the non-alcoholic beer category with the launch of Heineken 0.0 Ultimate: a new alcohol-free brew with zero alcohol, zero calories, and zero sugar – just great taste.

Following the recent debut of Heineken 0.0 Cold Pressed Lime and Nectarine Juniper, the brand continues to further cement its authority in the non-alcoholic beer space with the first ever zero calorie NA brew in the U.S.

Now more than ever, consumers are refusing to choose between their lifestyle goals and their social lives. Demand for non-alcoholic options that fit into active social moments, from the padel court to a sun-soaked afternoon, is stronger than ever.

According to a Brewers Association study, the non-alcoholic beer category has surged in recent years, with U.S. sales rising 159% and volume growing 111% between 2021 and 2025, now accounting for 2.5% of total beer volume.

"We pioneered the U.S. non-alcoholic beer category with the launch of Heineken 0.0 in 2019 and are continuing to grow and invest with our newest innovations. With over 13 million cases sold, Heineken 0.0 proves that offering more choices empowers everyone to elevate their social experiences on their own terms," said Maggie Timoney, CEO of Heineken USA. "Now, we're raising the bar again.

Heineken® 0.0 Ultimate is our answer for the consumer who wants even more choice: world-class taste, zero alcohol, zero sugar, and zero calories, so you never have to compromise."

Heineken 0.0 Ultimate features soft fruity notes, harmonized with a delicate malty body, all without alcohol, calories, and sugar. Double-brewed to remove alcohol, it delivers a fresh, balanced taste with a refined mouthfeel and refreshing snap, made for daytime hangs and active moments.

After successfully piloting the brew in 2025, Heineken 0.0 Ultimate is rolling out in select states including New York, Delaware, Rhode Island, Pennsylvania, New Hampshire, Connecticut, Maine, Maryland, Texas, Florida, Louisiana, Washington, Oregon, and Vermont.

Highclere Castle Gin's New Flavor: Peach Rose

Highclere Castle Gin, the award-winning super premium gin announces the U.S. launch of Highclere Castle Gin Peach Rose, a new flavored expression expanding the brand's portfolio.

Peach Rose marks the company's first fruity-floral line extension and reflects growing consumer demand for premium spirits with authentic provenance. Bottled at 40% ABV with a suggested retail price of \$31.99, the expression will be available across national retail, on- and off-premise accounts, and direct-to-consumer channels in the United States.

Inspired by the summer gardens of Highclere Castle, the Peach Rose gin is crafted using botanicals sourced directly from the estate, including oil from the Lady Carnarvon Rose, estate-produced honey, and Italian white peaches grown on the estate through the summer season. The result is an aromatic yet balanced profile that bridges their traditional London Dry structure with a contemporary fruit-forward appeal.

"My vision with the Peach Rose was to capture the aromas and flavors of Highclere's garden parties in peak summer. For the recipe design I was inspired by the sweet wine Sauternes, France's liquid gold. To replicate elements of the world's finest wine as a gin has never been attempted until now, and I'm pleased to say this beautiful spirit is shining on the rocks and in cocktails. This is our dedication to innovation while staying true to the terroir, heritage and authenticity of Highclere Castle and the estate," said Adam von Gootkin, founder and chairman of Highclere Castle Spirits.

Within gin specifically, innovation in botanicals and flavor expressions has helped expand the category's consumer base beyond traditional London Dry drinkers. Premium and craft gins continue to gain share as consumers trade up for quality, provenance, and distinctive taste experiences.

"We are thrilled to introduce Highclere Castle Gin Peach Rose. This new expression blends the rich heritage of our estate with contemporary flavors that resonate with today's discerning gin enthusiasts. More than just a new product, it is a sensory journey through the lush gardens and storied history of Highclere. This launch reflects our dedication to meeting the evolving tastes of our customers while staying true to our roots, committed to crafting exceptional spirits that offer a unique taste of British elegance and tradition," said Laurent Schun, CEO of Highclere Castle Spirits.

Peach Rose joins Highclere Castle Gin's flagship London Dry expression, a super-premium gin distilled using botanicals from the Highclere estate and distilled in England's oldest gin distillery.

Lost Lantern Explores High vs. Low Proof in New Spring 2026 Collection

[Lost Lantern](#), the Vermont-based independent bottler of American whiskey, turns its focus to one of the most spirited discussions in whiskey today: high proof versus low proof.

While high-proof whiskies, especially hazmat whiskies (those bottled at 140 proof or higher), have developed a true cult following among dedicated whiskey drinkers, many whiskey lovers have yet to encounter these intense, powerful whiskies.

At the same time, a growing faction of whiskey enthusiasts are gravitating toward lower proof whiskies, embracing their balance and approachability. Lost Lantern's Spring 2026 Collection is a nod to both movements.

The Spring 2026 Collection was created in honor of Lost Lantern's newest flagship release: Far-Flung Bourbon 100 Proof, the first non-cask strength whiskey in its award-winning bourbon series. Painstakingly slow-proofed to 100 proof, the whiskey is being released alongside the limited, cask strength Far-Flung Bourbon IV.

The collection also includes eight cask strength single casks presented in four curated higher- and lower-proof pairings. Rather than declaring one style superior, the collection invites whiskey drinkers to explore how proof shapes aroma, texture, structure, and overall experience across styles and regions.

The single casks include whiskies from three returning partners (Boulder Spirits in Colorado, Copperworks in Washington, and New Riff in Kentucky), as well as five new partners: Day's Defile in Idaho, Montgomery Distilling in Montana, Dread River Distilling Co. in Alabama, ASW Distillery in Georgia, and Broad Branch in North Carolina.

"As the industry evolves, we're seeing passionate camps emerge around proof," said Nora Ganley-Roper, co-founder and Head Blender at Lost Lantern. "Some people seek intensity and power. Others prefer balance and approachability. We're not choosing sides: we love both higher- and lower-proof whiskies! Instead, we're exploring what each proof reveals about the whiskey itself and encouraging whiskey lovers to make these comparisons for themselves."

"There is no perfect proof for whiskey," said co-founder Adam Polonski. "It depends not just on the distillery and the whiskey, but also on when and why you're drinking it—whether you're enjoying whiskey on the rocks with friends, or slowly savoring a very high-proof dram to close out an evening. Proof is just one part of a whiskey's story, and this collection explores that."

Lucky One Expands Hard Lemonade Lineup

Lucky One hard lemonade brand expands its lineup with the launch of Lucky One Sweet Tea nationwide. The new non-carbonated lineup features four bold flavor varieties: Original, Half & Half, Peach, and Raspberry.

Lucky One Sweet Tea is the first vodka-based sweet tea brewed with real tea and premium vodka, intentionally crafted to stay true to real southern sweet tea with a richer, sweeter, tea-forward taste. With no artificial flavors or high fructose corn syrup, it delivers the smooth, rounded sweetness that unmistakably defines sweet tea at just 100 calories.

"Lucky One quickly grew to over a million cases by listening closely to what consumers, especially younger drinkers, want: bold flavor, real ingredients, and brands that feel culturally relevant," said Britt West, Chief Commercial Officer at Gallo. "Sweet tea is a natural next step for us. As the category has rapidly expanded, we saw a clear opportunity to premiumize the space - delivering the sweeter, full-flavor, and sessionable taste consumers are increasingly seeking, while staying true to the values that make Lucky One more than just a beverage brand."

Aplós Introduces Dragon Fruit Martini

[Aplós](#), one of the fastest-growing non-alcoholic spirits and cocktail brands, released its newest ready-to-drink cocktail: Dragon Fruit Martini. Bright, lush, and unapologetically fun, this release marks Aplós' most playful cocktail offering to date.

In a cultural moment defined by balance, where people want to celebrate loudly but live intentionally, Aplós is taking inspiration from the ongoing global obsession with the Pornstar Martini, the early-2000s modern classic that is everywhere again as this year's breakout cocktail. This vibrant release captures the bold, fruit-forward energy of today's martini renaissance reimagined through Aplós' functional, zero-proof lens.

"Martinis have re-entered culture in a big way. It's an iconic cocktail that has a way of signaling that the night is about to get good," said David Fudge, Co-Founder and CEO of Aplós. "We wanted to honor that bold energy and create a delicious cocktail that is uniquely Aplós and the epitome of a fun night out."

UK Firms Face Same Threat That Forced Sale of Maker's Mark

Bill Samuels Sr. was 42 years old when he and his wife Margie began developing Maker's Mark. What started essentially as a hobby exploded in popularity when Wall Street Journal reporter David P. Garino had some time to kill and stopped by the Brown Hotel bar. During the evening news there was a brief mention of Maker's Mark and the little distillery.

That might make an interesting A-hed, the off-beat story featured daily on the front page of the national business daily, Garino thought. It is called the A-hed because the headline is surrounded by some rules that sort of look like an A.

As I tell in my book, [The Maker's Mark Story: From Hobby from Hobby to Major Brand in Two Generations](#), when the Journal published Garino's story on its Aug. 1, 1980, front page, Maker's Mark was no longer a hobby. The small small Loretto, Ky., received 30,000 letters from potential customers asking where they could buy a bottle. The Samuels ran ads in major newspapers, including the Journal, explaining that they were stepping up production to meet demand, but it would be a few years before everyone could be satisfied. Samuels said his hobby became a company that day.

Samuels Sr. had distilled the first batch of Maker's Mark in February 1954 and the first bottle was sold in 1958. When he was 48 years old. The Journal story ran when Samuels was 70. No one in his family had ever anticipated the how large the brand would become.

In 1980, when the Journal story ran, the federal estate tax rate was a maximum of 70%, with an exemption of \$161,563. The initial rate above that exemption was 32%. When Samuels died in 1992, at age 82, was 55% for estates exceeding \$3 million, with a \$600,000 exemption.

Because Samuels was 70 when the brand exploded onto the national scene, the family had never been able to afford enough life insurance to pay the federal and state death taxes, and so the business was sold to Hiram Walker & Sons.

Now, independent business owners in the UK fear something similar could happen to their firms.

Beginning next month, for the first time in a generation, family business owners will have to pay inheritance tax based on the value of their business and business assets.

Berry Bros. & Rudd,'s chair, Lizzy Rudd, has warned changes to UK inheritance tax risk undermining the long-term future of family-owned businesses. including those in the drinks sector.

“As a 327-year-old family business, we have always strived to be stewards for future generations,” she said. “As a B Corp, we also place great value on employing people, considering the wider community and the environment in all that we do.

"How are we expected to continue to build value for the long term when our children will one day have to pay inheritance tax on this value – a value which is on paper and not in our pockets unless business assets or the business itself is sold?"

She added, “Changes to inheritance tax are a very real threat to the future success of the business. In addition to the higher costs of operating right now, these changes are an additional burden for family businesses at the very time the Government should be encouraging us to invest.

Despite amendments to the government's proposal, 90% of family businesses expect to be hurt by the changes.

“Since the change was first announced in October 2024, we have seen significant numbers of family businesses cut investment and jobs,” [Family Business UK](#) chief executive Neil Davy said. “Many owners have also told me that they are openly questioning the long-term future of their business. For a government committed to growing the economy, this can’t be the outcome it envisaged. At a time when the UK desperately needs the economy to grow, this is the wrong policy at the wrong time.

57% Drink Sparkling Water Before Noon: Survey

A new survey from Waterloo Sparkling Water finds that Americans are increasingly starting their day with a refreshing twist: Sparkling water is becoming a bona fide morning ritual, especially among younger adults focused on wellness, low-sugar choices, and feel-good routines.

Instead of being just a midday pick-me-up or an afternoon desk companion, sparkling water is becoming part of people’s first-thing habits — and they say it helps set the tone for the entire day.

Below is a snapshot of highlights from the survey:

- More than half (57%) are "Morning Drinkers" — they've had sparkling water either as their first morning beverage or before noon on a weekday.

- Nearly 1 in 5 (18%) say sparkling water is their most likely first drink of the day — second only to coffee/tea (42%)

- First Beverage users skew younger overall: 73% are under 45 (23% Gen Z + 50% Millennial)

- 91% drink sparkling water before noon multiple days per week or every day

- 37% see sparkling water as a "fresh start reset vs. Nondrinkers

- 35% choose it for "flavor without sugar or sweeteners"

In releasing the survey results, Waterloo noted it recently released three sparkling waters inspired by breakfast-friendly flavors: Banana Berry Bliss, Melon Medley, and the returning fan favorite Lemon Italian Ice.

To Your Continued Success,

KANE'S BEVERAGE WEEK



JOEL WHITAKER, Editor

Thanks for reading!

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