

MONTEREY COUNTY



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October 6, 2020

The Honorable Gavin Newsom
Governor of California
State Capitol
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: **COVID-19 Winery Tasting Rooms**

On behalf of the County of Monterey, we urge you to allow counties to permit winery tasting rooms to open immediately for indoor wine tasting experiences at a safe capacity, without any food service requirements. This reopening incorporates the implementation of safe winery tasting room practices according to established State, County, and industry health protocols.

The wine industry and its supply chain fall under Agriculture, one of the sixteen federally categorized critical (essential) sectors in the wake of the coronavirus outbreak. This categorization allows the businesses in the wine supply chain – from vineyard to glass – to continue operating safely amid current and potential COVID restrictions. Vineyard-based wineries and village/urban-based tasting rooms provide curated and highly structured educational experiences of California's and Monterey County's rich agricultural heritage – a combined creative expression of the winemaker, the grapes, and the local land. This offers guests an authentic farm-to-table experience that helps sell local agricultural products.

Tasting rooms' curated experiences create over 85% of the total sales for small "boutique" wineries. Without winery tasting rooms having the ability to offer indoor experiences with the onset of fall and winter, wineries, particularly those small, family-owned wineries, will be in a dire situation.

Monterey County has local, family-owned tasting rooms. Over 95% of wineries in Monterey County are family owned. Most local wineries with tasting rooms, over 70%, are considered boutique. The Monterey County wine industry's economic impact nears \$1 billion per year, employing approximately 7,500 full time employees (FTEs). The California wine industry has an annual economic impact of \$57.6 billion, employing 325,000 FTEs. The industry pays \$7.6 billion in taxes every year. In addition to the direct economic impact, the industry provides over \$100.9 million in annual charitable contributions statewide, a significant support of the non-profit sector and all of its important work throughout the State.

Our County's wineries are seeing the continued financial and employment hardships caused by COVID, which is only multiplied by the impact of recent wildfires in the County – limiting winery operations to outdoors results in far fewer employees on payrolls and fewer customers. It is an unsustainable business model. This is particularly true as the fall and winter's cooler weather, rains, and early darkness set in.

The County of Monterey has consistently enforced all State and local COVID-19 regulations. It remains committed to protecting public health while helping winery tasting rooms operate safely and at sustainable capacity levels.

The wine industry has proven that it can mitigate safety issues related to COVID. We are not aware of any incidences of COVID transmission attributed to winery tasting rooms in Monterey County or the State, including when tasting

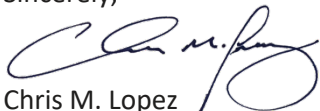
rooms permitted indoor guest experiences. The wine industry independently developed and implemented winery tasting room safety protocols in early May, with the support of the health and medical experts from Johns Hopkins University. This was before State protocols were established. Some of these practices include:

- Reservations Recommended:
 - Advanced reservations are recommended at most tasting rooms
- Education:
 - Training and monitoring employees (ongoing)
 - Education of safety practices for guests (including required signage)
- Safe Space:
 - Seating is configured to meet social distance requirements between guests and employees, including incorporating space for guests to enter or exit safely
 - Disinfectant practices in seating areas between guest experiences
 - Disinfectant available to guests
- Safe Guest Experience:
 - Guests use of face coverings when not participating in curated tasting experiences
 - Employees wearing face coverings
 - Tasting experiences:
 - curated to promote the health and safety of staff and guests
 - time-limited to create enough time between reservations for disinfecting of the space
 - Contactless payment systems
 - Monitoring the number of guests on the premise

On behalf of the County of Monterey Board of Supervisors, we respectfully ask that you allow counties to permit winery tasting rooms to open immediately for indoor wine tasting experiences at a safe capacity without any food service requirement. These winery tasting rooms would be required to follow all health and safety protocols adopted by the State and County, along with additional industry protocols.

Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Chris M. Lopez
Chair, Board of Supervisors

CC: Rhys Williams, Senior Advisor on Emergency Preparedness and Management, Governor's Office
Hon. Bill Monning, 17th Senate District
Hon. Anna Caballero, 12th Senate District
Hon. Robert Rivas, 30th Assembly District
Hon. Mark Stone, 29th Assembly District
California State Association of Counties (CSAC)
Rural Counties Representative of California (RCRC)
Monterey County Mayors Association
Wine Institute
California Association of Wine Growers
Monterey County Vintners and Growers Association