

# **General Law Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT**

**Bill No.:** HB-5361

AN ACT CONCERNING THE SOURCE OF THE FRUIT USED BY FARM

**Title:** WINERY PERMITTEES TO MANUFACTURE WINE.

**Vote Date:** 3/12/2025

**Vote Action:** Joint Favorable

**PH Date:** 2/19/2025

**File No.:**

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## **SPONSORS OF BILL:**

General Law Committee

Co-sponsors:

Rep. Vincent J. Candelora, 86th Dist.

Rep. Craig C. Fishbein, 90th Dist.

Sen. Paul Cicarella, 34th Dist.

## **REASONS FOR BILL:**

HB 5361 intends to relax the current requirement that farm winery permittees grow twenty-five percent of their own grapes used in their products. The proposed change would lower the requirement to twenty percent. Some Connecticut farm wineries argue that this change would allow them to better compete with other wine producers.

## **RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:**

[Bryan Hurlburt, Commissioner, Department of Agriculture](#) testified in opposition to HB 5361 largely because the Department of Agriculture does not perceive a need to change the current standard that farm winery permittees must produce at least 25 percent of their own product. They note that despite many recent setbacks to agricultural producers in our state, Connecticut farm wineries are meeting or exceeding that target. He writes that producers who cannot meet that standard still have the option of applying for a manufacturer's permit. Commissioner Hurlburt details the Department's efforts to promote Connecticut farm wines and to educate Connecticut farm wineries on best agricultural practices.

## **NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:**

[Richard Ruggiero, Founder, Paradise Hills Vineyard and Winery](#) offers testimony in support of HB 5361. He argues that the law needs to be revised because demand for Connecticut wines is low and is unfair to CT farm wineries competing with "urban wine

manufacturers." Mr. Ruggiero does not wish to purchase a manufacturer's permit, citing increased cost. He characterizes lowering the requirement by five percent as crucial to "the survival of all the grape growers in the State of Connecticut."

**NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:**

[Paul Larson, President, Connecticut Farm Bureau](#)

[Keith Bishop, President, Bishop's Orchards](#)

[Hilary H. Criollo, President, CT Vineyard and Winery Association](#)

[Jamie Jones, Farmer, Jones Family Farms, LLC](#)

[George Motel, President, Sunset Meadow Vineyards](#)

The individuals listed above submitted testimony in opposition to this legislation. They raise three main points:

- (1) The 25% minimum requirement is already low and already allows for exceptions in extreme circumstances.
- (2) It takes away wineries' incentive to grow fruit in Connecticut.
- (3) A lower standard will negatively impact the reputation of the Connecticut Wine Trail and the Connecticut Farm Wine brand.

Many of these individuals note that wineries unable to meet the 25% requirement can already apply for a manufacturer's permit for wine, mead, and cider.

[A Connecticut consumer](#) submitted written testimony in opposition to HB 5361 because lowering the standard "undermines consumer trust" and "weakens the integrity of the Connecticut Farm Winery designation."

**Reported by: Betsy Francolino**

**Date: 3/17/2025**