

SUNSET MEADOW



VINEYARDS

599 Old Middle Street ♦ Goshen, CT 06756 ♦ (860) 201-4654

**Comments Before the Alcohol Task Force
Wednesday, September 12, 2012
George Motel - Owner of Sunset Meadow Vineyards, Goshen, CT**

Good Morning, my name is George Motel. My wife Judy and I are the owners of Sunset Meadow Vineyards in Goshen, CT. Our farm comprises more than 50 acres and we have been in business since 1998. In addition I am Vice President of the CT Vineyard and Winery Association (CVWA). This association is a private, non-profit organization of twenty (24) farm wineries from around the state. Our goal is to promote grape growing in the state, to spread awareness of the quality of wines being produced in our state and to market our businesses through the Connecticut Wine Trail brochure and our website. Together our farms comprise over 2000 acres of open space and our businesses received 500,000 visits from travelers searching for local wines. We are an important part of both Connecticut's beautiful landscape and its local economy.

Owning a winery and producing your own product is a unique business. Although we are regulated by liquor control, our product is a direct byproduct of an agricultural crop. It is subject to the weather as well as disease, insects and other factors out of our control. CT has a wonderful climate to grow grapes and the winery business has grown over the years. The production of good quality, local wines, coupled with a tourism experience is what draws people to our vineyards. But, currently CT wine only makes up 2% off all the wine sold in the State. We would like to develop that further to match our neighbors like New York, but CT statutes are prohibitive as it relates to farm winery sales.

The Governor has set goals in this State to increase agricultural production and in order to do that on the wine front, we need more sales opportunities. Most every State that has a robust wine industry allows tastings at an unlimited number of farmer's markets and off site wine sales. To increase production we must first create demand for our product. To do that we must create markets by which to sell our product other than our tasting rooms. Sales off site and tastings at unlimited farmers markets would be

a few things that would help increase sales. In addition, we feel the hours of operation for a farm winery to begin selling on Sunday should be changed to mirror that of all other liquor outlets, 10:00 am. Currently we are prohibited from selling before 11am.

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I also attached testimony I submitted to the general law committee against SB 59, an act concerning retail wine sellers and wine-related classes, as a reference as to how current legislation has hurt us. In passing this legislation, along with Sunday and holiday sales, liquor stores have been given the same privileges we thought were part of our model exclusively. We believe it is now time for the legislature to consider similar changes to benefit the farm Wineries.

I agree with the Governor's goal of promoting free enterprise in allowing the consumer to make the choice. Towards that goal, our product should be available for sale on a wider spectrum. We ask you to consider allowing unlimited Farmers Markets with tasting privileges as well as offsite bottle sales at events holding a liquor license. As we are less than 2% of the overall wine sold in CT, neither one of these initiatives should cut into the margins of other liquor tiers.

Two other examples of practices allowed in other states with higher winery market share would be: The sale of CT wines in Grocery stores and allowing Farm Wineries to have multiple tasting rooms. The sale of wine in grocery stores would allow the consumer to buy our wine as part of their meal solution. We spend countless hours educating consumers on how to pair wine with food. Why is it we are one of the few states that don't allow its sale in a food store?

Multiple tasting rooms would be another vehicle by which we could get better exposure without duplicating the expense associated with planting multiple acres and investing thousands in a production facility to get another farm winery license.

Both of those initiatives would give our product wider exposure and dramatically increase sales while increasing the demand for local grapes. Both of these practices are more common in other states than the exception to the rule.

I would also like you to bear in mind that not all of these initiatives, if granted, will be utilized by all of the existing wineries. However their implementation would set the course for the future by creating demand and benefiting the progressive wineries while creating an incentive for growers as the value of their crop increases. We are happy to work with the committee as well as the legislature next session to accomplish these goals.

Thank you for your time and kind attention today.