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February 20 2012

Senate Federal & State Affairs

Bill #SB390

My name is Josh Bryant. I work for The Davenport Winery in Eudora Kansas. I have been studying enology (the study of wine making) and one-day hope to have a winery of my own. My dream is to be able to bring people back into connection with the farms that produce the foods they consume, strengthen the bond between the consumer and the producer, revitalize a once strong industry by creating jobs, and show people how strong and bountiful Kansas farming can be.

A wineries focus is not only about making wine, the purpose of a winery is to show through every glass of wine, the connection to the very farm in which the grapes where grown. Kansas has always had strong agricultural roots, and a winery is in essence the perfect example of what farming is all about. Wine making is about putting your heart into growing the fruits, spending the time nurturing the plants with a dream of creating the best quality product you can.

The Farm Winery Statute is a way to help agriculture diversify with the added benefit of creating a larger profit margin by utilizing a value added product from the very fruit the Kansas farmers grows. By lowering the restriction on the grapes that have to be grown in Kansas to hold a farm winery license, it weakens the connection to the land. It creates the opportunity for some wine producers to deceive the consumer into thinking that they are supporting their local farmers. When in fact the fruit they are using was grown in other states or countries, which may not put the same care into growing the fruit, as you must do if you are going to be sharing with your neighbors. This fruit that is being brought in is often of lesser quality and uses illegal labor, so it can be offered at a substantially lower cost. It sends potential jobs out of Kansas, steals from hard working farmers, creates a deceptive marketing tactic, stiffens long-term growth for the industry and ultimately hurts the consumer.

What we are asking is that you do not lower the bar for the farm wineries by allowing them to trick people into using fruit that was not grown here but to insure the vitality of an industry by keeping a consistent standard. If a person wants to make wine using fruit from out side of the state of Kansas the laws have already been put in place for how to go about doing so. The perks that have been granted to the farmers who put their blood, sweat, and tears into their product should not be given to someone who is just trying to make a quick buck by bypassing the hardest part which is growing a quality fruit. The farmers have been granted the opportunity to sell directly to their neighbors and friends so they can better stand behind their products. It is a way for the customers to hold the farmers to the highest standard, keep money from leaving the state, and help people realize that Kansas has more to offer then just wheat, corn, and beef.

The excuse that grapes cannot be grown here is just a smoke screen for people that are afraid of hard work. It is simply not true. There are obstacles to overcome with growing but there is nothing given time that the farmers will not be able to overcome. Farmers are smart, resourceful people, who take pride in everything they do. Please do not allow someone to steal that from them.

We are at the beginning of greatness with your help to safe guard our product from misrepresentation, WE WILL EXCEL.

Thank you for taking the time to hear my opinion on this topic.

Josh Bryant

Cellar Master

Davenport Orchard, Vineyard and Winery

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