

Legislation in the land of weed and wine

BY REPRESENTATIVE PAM MARSH

I sometimes refer to my district, which meanders between the Green Springs and the Applegate, as the land of weed and wine. That's meant to be (at least a little) facetious, but there's no question that the cannabis and wine sectors are significant economic drivers in southern Oregon.

Both cannabis and wine were the subject of lively debate and discussion during the 2019 legislative session. In particular, in a session marked by controversy of all kinds, winemakers' issues were front and center. Legislation to regulate wine labeling revealed deep divisions about the direction of the industry and the role the state should play to ensure continued vitality of the sector.

Five different bills proposed limiting or regulating out-of-state purchase of Oregon grapes and empowering the Oregon Liquor Control Commission (OLCC) to develop higher content and labeling standards for wines produced in designated American Viticultural Areas (AVAs). In the end, just two bills were approved.

Senate Bill 829 will require Willamette Valley wineries labeling their product with a sub-AVA (for example, Dundee Hills) to also use the larger Willamette Valley AVA. Winemakers in other regions can also request that the OLCC institute a similar requirement specific to that AVA. A second bill, which was broadly supported by the industry, will ensure that out-of-state purchasers pay their share of the \$25-per-ton tax applied to grape purchases.

Although the most controversial bills died, the debate over direction of the industry is sure to continue. Some winemakers, especially in the Willamette Valley, believe that the OLCC needs to establish higher content and labeling standards in order to protect the Oregon brand and to increase product value. Others, including many growers and winemakers in southern Oregon, argue that additional regulation will stifle opportunities and suppress growth and innovation.

One thing is certainly clear: Legislators are ill-equipped to mediate the dispute. With the session behind us, grape growers and winemakers from across the state have a chance to come together and figure out a shared vision for growing the sector. Legislation that is considered in the future needs full support and affirmation from every corner of the state.

Cannabis

While the presence of controversial wine legislation was something of a surprise, the maturing cannabis industry has never left the legislative limelight.

Much of the work around cannabis was aimed at the surplus of inventoried product held by our recreational growers, currently estimated at six years' worth of supply. While that's a somewhat controversial calculation, it's clear that we have a lot of weed sitting around waiting for sale or processing.

In response, the legislature took two very different strategies to deal with excess product. Senate Bill 218 instructs the OLCC to place a moratorium until January 2022 on the issuance of new production licenses. Growers who have been on the agency's waiting list for the past year will still be allowed to move forward, as long as they have obtained local land-use approval.

The second bill aims to send some of that extra product to new markets. Senate Bill 582 authorizes the governor to enter into agreements with other states for cross-jurisdictional coordination, regulation, and delivery of marijuana products. While implementation of these agreements will have to wait for federal legislation that approves interstate cannabis transfer, Oregon wants to be ready when that occurs so that our excellent, homegrown product can be shared with the national market, along with our fine wines and craft beers.

Wine and weed weren't the only issues we discussed in the 2019 legislature, but they are certainly among those that affect life in the Applegate. If you have questions about any of this legislation, or anything else we addressed in the session (education, climate, hate crimes, popular vote, health care, paid family leave, campaign finance reform, and on and on...), please contact me anytime at Rep.PamMarsh@oregonlegislature.gov.

Representative Pam Marsh

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Note: Representative Pam Marsh serves Oregon House District 5, which includes Ruch, parts of the Applegate within Jackson County, Jacksonville, the southwest corner of Medford, Phoenix, Talent, and Ashland. To follow legislative updates and news, visit oregonlegislature.gov/marsh and e-subscribe.

Roving Reporter

Representative Marsh comes to the Applegate

BY TOM CARSTENS

On August 14, Valley View Winery in Jacksonville hosted an opportunity for residents to meet with State Representative Pam Marsh, the Democrat whose district includes the Jackson County portion of the Applegate Valley.

The purpose of the gathering was to go over the results of the recently concluded legislative session. Representative Marsh said that she viewed the session as a relative success, with many of her own priorities seeing fruition.

In her view, favorable outcomes included:

- New investment in public education
- Improvements in state-sponsored health care
- Juvenile justice reform

- Additional funding for wildfire mitigation
- Establishment of a new family leave program

She also talked about the collapse of the climate change legislation and the bill's complexity. This issue remains on her to-do list.

The legislature, she explained, is trying to support the local cannabis industry by preparing for the day when marijuana becomes legal nationwide and can be transported across state lines.

The lively and well-informed Applegaters in attendance offered both support and pushback and had plenty of questions.

Tom Carstens • 541-846-1025



Representative Pam Marsh met with her constituents at Valley View Winery in the Applegate in mid-August. Photo: Paige Prewett.

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Questions? Email applegateconnect@gmail.com.

AVC is a joint effort of two local nonprofits, A Greater Applegate and the *Applegater*, and is supported by the Ford Family Foundation and Community Systems LLC.

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