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EU Tightens Wine Labels With New Digital Rules

The bloc’s sweeping regulation reshapes labeling, low-alcohol standards and export requirements for producers.

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The European Union has begun enforcing a sweeping new wine law that changes how producers label, market and, in some cases, make wine across the bloc, while also easing rules for low-alcohol products and export shipments.

Regulation (EU) 2026/471 took effect on March 18 and is being described by industry officials as one of the most significant updates to European wine policy in years. A corrigendum published on May 22 corrected errors in the original text and applies retroactively to Feb. 26, adding urgency for wineries that have already printed labels or updated digital product pages based on the earlier version.

The new framework gives wineries more room to produce dealcoholized wines while keeping protected geographic names, a major shift for producers in regions that had long argued that removing alcohol should not automatically strip a wine of its origin status. Under the new rules, fully or partially dealcoholized wines can retain protected designation or protected geographical indication status if they meet labeling and disclosure requirements.

The regulation also sets clearer definitions for low- and no-alcohol wines. The term “alcohol-free” is reserved for wines at 0.5% alcohol by volume or below, while “0.0%” may be used only when the actual alcohol level is at or below 0.05%. Wines labeled as reduced alcohol must be above 0.5% and reduced by at least 30% from the minimum legal strength of the category before dealcoholization.

For exporters, the package removes a major burden. Wines made exclusively for shipment to countries outside the European Union no longer need to carry the full nutrition table and ingredient list required for bottles sold inside the bloc. Producers say that change should reduce printing costs and simplify logistics for shipments headed to markets in Asia, North America and elsewhere.

The rules are less straightforward for trade with Britain. Because the United Kingdom has not adopted the EU’s new low-alcohol definitions, exporters may still need separate labels for bottles sold there, especially for products marketed as alcohol-free or reduced alcohol.

The package also addresses Europe’s chronic wine oversupply by allowing member states to support vineyard removal programs, known as grubbing-up, with up to 70% of costs covered through Common Agricultural Policy funds. It removes a fixed 2045 deadline tied to planting rights and replaces it with a 10-year review system. At the same time, it raises possible EU aid for climate adaptation investments, such as water

recycling systems and drought management tools, from 50% to 80% of eligible costs.

On retail shelves, the law expands digital labeling. Bottles sold in markets such as the Netherlands now carry a standardized energy symbol showing calories per 100 ml, along with allergen information in local language. The rest of the ingredient list is placed behind a QR code that must lead to a factual page without cookies, tracking tools or marketing links.

Industry compliance firms have moved quickly to offer services that help wineries generate multilingual digital labels across all 24 official EU languages. Many producers are relying on outside platforms rather than trying to manage translations and legal checks in-house.

The changes have drawn criticism from U.S. trade officials. In its 2026 National Trade Estimate Report, the Office of the United States Trade Representative said the EU’s labeling rules create added costs and delays for exporters and amount to a non-tariff barrier, especially for smaller American wineries trying to sell into Europe.

The May corrigendum has created an immediate compliance problem for wineries that prepared labels under the flawed February text. If labels do not match the corrected version, products can be held at customs or removed from shelves, according to regulatory advisers familiar with the issue. National authorities in some member states can also impose fines of more than EUR5,000 per violation.

For producers across Europe and abroad, the new rules mean faster adaptation is now essential as regulators push wine deeper into a system built around digital disclosure, tighter oversight and more room for lower-alcohol styles.