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# WineAmerica maps out its agenda for the next Congress

The winery group says decisions on the Farm Bill, disaster aid, trade and hemp drinks will shape costs, exports and competition

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WineAmerica used the first days after the midterm elections to lay out its federal agenda for the new Congress, saying lawmakers in Washington will soon be making decisions that could affect vineyards, winery costs, exports and competition across several beverage categories.

In a commentary published Tuesday, Nov. 17, by Wine Industry Advisor, WineAmerica Executive Director Michael Kaiser said the group expects the 120th Congress, which convenes in January 2027, to take up a set of issues that the wine industry views as central to its business outlook. He pointed to the Farm Bill, federal disaster relief, trade policy and the regulation of intoxicating hemp beverages as the main areas to watch.

The article came as industry groups began assessing the political impact of the 2026 midterm elections. Kaiser wrote that the elections had reshaped the political landscape in Washington and that new leadership and committee priorities would influence policies affecting wineries nationwide.

WineAmerica, the national association of American wineries, framed the matter as both an agricultural and economic issue. Kaiser said wineries support farming, employment, tourism and local economies in many states, and argued that those links could help the industry find support from both Republicans and Democrats.

The Farm Bill stands near the top of the group’s list because of its connection to grape research, pest management and broader agricultural assistance. For wine producers, those programs can affect vineyard health, crop losses and longer-term production planning. If lawmakers revisit funding or eligibility rules, the effects could extend beyond wineries to growers, distributors and related beverage businesses that depend on stable supply and pricing.

Disaster aid is another focus after weather-related damage in several wine regions. Kaiser said federal relief remains important for vineyards hit by spring freezes and other climate-related losses. Such aid can shape how quickly growers recover from damaged crops and whether they can maintain output in the following season. In practical terms, that can influence grape availability and costs for wine producers.

Trade policy and tariffs are also high on WineAmerica’s agenda. Kaiser said decisions in Washington continue to affect wineries’ ability to compete in both U.S. and foreign markets. He did not identify a specific pending tariff action in the commentary, but he argued that federal trade choices can alter production costs, market access and customer demand. For the broader beverage sector, trade rules can affect imported inputs, export opportunities and shelf competition among domestic and foreign

products.

One of the more sensitive regulatory issues the group highlighted is the rise of intoxicating hemp beverages. Kaiser said policymakers are increasingly being asked to decide how those products should be regulated alongside traditional alcohol categories and state-legal cannabis products. That debate matters well beyond wine. Any federal move to tighten, clarify or separate the rules for hemp-derived drinks could affect how wine, beer and spirits producers compete for consumers, as well as how retailers handle compliance, labeling and distribution.

Kaiser's commentary did not propose a detailed legislative framework for hemp drinks, but it signaled that WineAmerica wants Congress to pay close attention to the category as it expands. The issue has become more prominent as beverage companies, regulators and state officials debate whether intoxicating hemp products should be treated more like alcohol, more like cannabis or under a separate set of rules.

On Capitol Hill, WineAmerica said bipartisan relationships will remain central to its strategy. Kaiser identified Sen. Ron Wyden of Oregon and Sen. Maria Cantwell of Washington as longtime supporters of the industry, especially on trade issues and federal excise tax relief. In the House, he pointed to Rep. Claudia Tenney, a Republican whose district includes New York's Finger Lakes wine region, as one of the leading voices on wine policy and said the group expects her to continue in that role in the new Congress.

He also cited the bipartisan Congressional Wine Caucus as an important channel for raising awareness of the industry's economic role and for building support around winery issues. With incoming lawmakers set to take office and committee leadership expected to change, Kaiser said maintaining existing contacts and building new ones would be critical.

The commentary reflects an effort by WineAmerica to position the wine sector early in the next legislative cycle, before committee agendas and major bills are fully formed. The group said it plans to keep monitoring federal developments and working with lawmakers and industry partners as those debates move forward.

For beverage companies, the stakes go beyond a single trade association’s priorities. The issues WineAmerica identified could shape farm support, disaster recovery, export conditions and regulatory boundaries between wine and newer intoxicating drinks. Those decisions may eventually affect operating costs, product competition and the legal framework for several parts of the beverage market.

Kaiser also said the association would continue providing members with legislative updates and opportunities to engage with federal policy debates as they unfold in Washington.