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# World Wine Trade Group adopts voluntary sustainability principles in South Africa

U.S. regulators joined talks on digital labeling, calorie calculations and standards for no- and low-alcohol wines

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U.S. alcohol regulators joined international wine trade talks in South Africa this month, where governments and industry representatives approved new voluntary sustainability principles and discussed rules that could influence how wine is labeled,

packaged and sold across borders.

On Friday, November 20, the Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau said staff from its International Affairs Division and Office of Chief Counsel took part in the World Wine Trade Group meeting in Stellenbosch, South Africa, from November 1 to November 4. The group brings together officials and industry participants from major wine-producing countries to address regulatory issues and ways to ease international trade.

According to TTB, the meeting focused on several issues now shaping the wine business worldwide, including no- and low-alcohol wine products, digital labeling, sustainability programs and packaging requirements. Those topics have become more important as producers try to meet changing consumer demand and comply with different rules in export markets.

TTB said a main result of the meeting was the adoption of the Stellenbosch Principles, a new set of voluntary guidelines for governments aimed at supporting sustainable winegrowing practices without creating new trade barriers. The agency did not describe the principles in detail in its announcement, but said they were designed to help countries encourage sustainability while keeping trade open.

The U.S. agency said it played an active role as part of the American delegation. TTB said its representatives provided updates on recent American Viticultural Area developments, including the creation of the Columbia Hills AVA in Washington state. The bureau also said it contributed to discussions on guidance for calculating energy and calorie content and on regulatory principles for digital labeling.

Those subjects go beyond narrow trade diplomacy for the wine business. Rules on calorie disclosures, electronic labels and package standards can affect how producers design bottles, labels and compliance systems for multiple markets. They may also carry broader implications for the beverage sector as companies in wine, beer and spirits expand digital consumer information, respond to sustainability demands and develop lower-alcohol products. For importers and exporters, greater alignment between governments could reduce compliance costs and limit the risk that differing national standards become obstacles to trade.

The discussions around no- and low-alcohol wine are especially notable because that segment has drawn growing attention from producers and regulators. As more beverage companies invest in products with reduced or no alcohol, questions about product standards, labeling terms and consumer information have become more urgent. International coordination does not create binding U.S. rules on its own, but it can help shape future regulatory thinking and give exporters a clearer sense of where policy may be moving.

Digital labeling was another significant issue at the meeting. Regulators in many markets are weighing how much information should appear on a physical label and what can be provided electronically, such as through QR codes or web links. For beverage companies, that debate affects not only compliance but also costs and flexibility, especially when the same product is sold in several countries with different disclosure requirements. TTB said it took part in discussions on regulatory principles for digital labeling, suggesting the issue remains a live part of international policy work.

The bureau also pointed to talks on energy and calorie calculations, an area that has gained attention as governments consider nutrition-related disclosures for alcoholic beverages. A common approach, even if voluntary, could help wine producers avoid having to use different methods for different markets. It could also influence how other beverage categories think about future labeling requirements, particularly as public health and consumer transparency remain part of regulatory debates.

The World Wine Trade Group was founded in 1998 and includes Argentina, Australia, Canada, Chile, Georgia, New Zealand, South Africa, the United States and Uruguay, according to TTB. The bureau said the group serves as a forum for government and industry representatives to share information, discuss regulatory issues and pursue joint actions that reduce barriers to wine trade while allowing regulators to protect consumers.