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The UK's Post-Brexit Initiative to Alter Legal Definitions and Fuel the Low-Alcohol Market

A legal shift aims to capitalize on the low-alcohol market

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In an unprecedented move after its exit from the European Union, the UK government is set to modify the legal definition of wine to include low-alcohol and alcohol-free versions. This is a step that not only challenges traditional norms surrounding wine but also aims to capitalize on the growing market for healthier, low-alcohol alternatives. This change, expected to take effect next year, is part of a broader strategy to

revitalize the British winemaking sector.

As a former member of the European Union, the United Kingdom was bound by EU regulations, which stipulated that wine must contain **at least 8.5% alcohol** by volume (ABV) to be classified as such. These rules have had a restrictive impact on the marketing of wines with lower alcohol content, forcing them to be sold under alternative labels such as "wine-based drinks."

The proposed changes aim to be more inclusive. A spokesman from the UK's Environment Department has stated that this move intends to meet the increasing consumer demand for low-alcohol alternatives, thereby giving the public more choices. Under the new regulation, wines can have a minimum ABV of 0%, thus legally allowing low and no-alcohol wines to be marketed as "wine" in England and around the UK, owing to post-Brexit internal market regulations.

The Wine and Spirit Trade Association (WSTA) has expressed its willingness to collaborate with the government on new labeling rules. Simon Stannard, Policy Director of WSTA, emphasizes the industry's focus on meeting consumer demands for lower and no-alcohol wines. He believes these reforms will render the production rules easier to comprehend but urges that further clarification is necessary to maintain consumer trust, particularly to avoid any misleading implications.

While a government study indicated that naming alcohol-free versions after the original drinks did not generally confuse consumers, some respondents in the survey did express concerns. They worried that the relaxed regulations could lead consumers to unintentionally purchase non-alcoholic versions.

Additional Changes

Alongside this redefinition, the UK government plans to revoke the EU ban on the sale of piquette, a French low-alcohol drink made by fermenting crushed grape skins and water. The decision aims to present vineyards with additional options to increase profitability in a market that shows a growing appetite for low-alcohol beverages. Further changes include easing regulations on the types of bottles in which wine can be sold and abolishing the mandatory use of mushroom-shaped corks with foil sheaths for

sparkling wines.

This redefinition could have broad-reaching impacts on the wine industry, both in the UK and globally. As countries observe the UK's strategy to diversify and modernize its wine market post-Brexit, the question arises: Could this herald a global shift in how we define and consume wine?