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EU to Revise Terms for Low-Alcohol Wines to Boost Market

New regulation aims to clarify labeling, expand categories, and support the wine sector amid changing consumer preferences.

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The European Commission is preparing to introduce new terms for low-alcohol and no-alcohol wines. This initiative aims to support the expanding market for these products. A draft regulation, seen by Euractiv, outlines the proposed changes. The 2021 Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) introduced terms like "de-alcoholised wine" for wines with up to 0.5% alcohol by volume (ABV) and "partially de-alcoholised wine" for those with

more than 0.5% ABV. However, the Commission believes clearer terms are needed for consumers. The draft suggests using familiar terms such as "zero alcohol," "alcohol free," and "low alcohol." "Zero alcohol" would refer to products with ABV not exceeding 0.05% or 0.1%, though these figures might change as the draft is still under internal review. "Alcohol free" and "low alcohol" would align with existing CAP definitions.

The draft also proposes changes to technical rules for de-alcoholisation. This would facilitate the production of low-alcohol sparkling wines and expand wine categories. For instance, it would allow low-alcohol flavored wines and the use of rosé in Glühwein, a popular winter drink in Europe. Additionally, the regulation would empower the Commission to amend electronic consumer nutritional information labeling rules, reflecting the need for more accessible consumer information.

The final text of the regulation is expected to be presented by April. The wine sector is crucial to the EU's agricultural trade surplus, but it faces challenges like changing consumer preferences, oversupply, and climate change. These factors have put pressure on the industry, leading to its characterization as the "sick man" of Europe's food and drink sector. In response, the Commission convened a forum with officials from EU member states and Commission experts. The group recommended expanding market opportunities by making low-alcohol wines more accessible. The draft regulation incorporates nearly all of the group's recommendations, including more flexibility for EU countries in the wine planting rights regime and measures to promote wine tourism.