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Wine industry braces for steep price hikes as new tariffs on European imports take effect

Retailers and importers warn of layoffs and reduced sales as 20 percent tariffs disrupt supply and consumer demand

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Wine retailers and importers across the United States are preparing for a sharp increase in costs as a new round of tariffs on European goods is set to take effect on Wednesday. The Trump administration has announced a 20% tariff on a wide range of products from the European Union, including wine and spirits, which could significantly

impact prices for both businesses and consumers.

Adam Williams, 57, owner of Ansley Wine Merchants in Atlanta, said he is bracing for the financial hit. His store carries about 1,500 different wine labels, most of them imported from small family-owned vineyards in France and Italy. “That means everything will go up,” Williams said. One of his best-selling bottles, a 2023 vintage Sancerre from France priced at $45, could soon become unaffordable for many customers. “I haven’t started losing sleep yet, but maybe I should be already,” he added.

The U.S. is the largest importer of European wines, with France and Italy leading the way. The new tariffs are expected to disrupt this flow significantly. According to the French Federation of Wine and Spirits Exporters (FEVS), sales of French wine and spirits to the U.S. could drop by at least 20% once the tariffs are in place.

The National Association of Wine Retailers issued a statement over the weekend warning that the tariffs could lead to “significant revenue reductions, layoffs, and business closings.” The group also pushed back against the idea that higher prices on imports would boost domestic wine sales. “When faced with the higher prices that will result from the across-the-board tariffs, consumers will rein in their spending,” the statement read. “The first thing they cut back on is non-essential items like wine.”

Williams said he has already noticed a slowdown in shipments from overseas as distributors and importers adopt a wait-and-see approach. “There have been hardly any new shipments,” he said. “Everyone’s just waiting to see what happens.” He expressed concern not only for his business but also for his eight employees. “They’re like family,” he said. “I have to look out for them.”

Ryan Stanton, general manager of Ultimate Wine Distributors in Atlanta, echoed those concerns. His company specializes in importing mid-sized wine brands from Europe and currently has large quantities of wine sitting idle in France. “We have a lot of wine ready to set sail in France, but it’s just parked there as everyone waits to see what happens,” Stanton said. “It’s in negotiations. We’re waiting for the dust to settle.”

Stanton also questioned the effectiveness of encouraging consumers to buy American-made wines as an alternative. “Buy America is great in theory,” he said, “but there are a lot of things that we don’t and can’t make in America.”

Many small retailers like Williams say they are committed to offering unique wines from small producers rather than switching to mass-produced alternatives found in grocery stores. But with prices expected to rise sharply once the tariffs take effect, they worry about how long they can hold out.

The uncertainty surrounding trade negotiations has left much of the industry in limbo. Importers are hesitant to commit to new orders, retailers are unsure how much inventory to carry, and consumers may soon face higher prices at their local wine shops.

As Wednesday approaches, businesses across the country are watching closely to see whether any last-minute changes will be made or if they will have to adjust quickly to a new economic reality shaped by international trade policy.