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Napa County makes microwinery program permanent, considers expanding access for small wine producers

Officials weigh increasing production and visitor limits as part of ongoing support for family-run wineries in the region

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Napa County officials voted on Tuesday to remove the expiration date from its microwinery program, a move that could reshape the landscape for small wine producers in the region. The decision makes permanent a pilot ordinance first introduced in 2022, which was designed to streamline the approval process for wineries producing 5,000 gallons of wine or less per year. Under the program, these small operations are limited to 20 daily visitor trips and must use grapes grown on-site or on adjacent properties. Promotional events are not allowed, but in exchange, winemakers benefit from a faster and less expensive permitting process.

The microwinery program was initially set to expire after two years, but advocates argued that it offered a crucial pathway for family-run and ultra-small wineries to operate legally in Napa County. Since its inception, only two microwineries have been approved under the ordinance, with eight more applications still pending. According to county officials, four new applications were submitted just before the program’s May 5 expiration date, reflecting a surge of interest as the deadline approached.

Brian Bordona, director of planning, building and environmental services for Napa County, noted that such last-minute activity is common when programs face expiration. He said the county will reach out to recent applicants to see if they wish to update their submissions now that the program is no longer at risk of ending.

Industry groups like Save the Family Farms have pushed for broader access and fewer restrictions within the microwinery framework. They argue that current limits on production and visitation have kept many small producers from participating. In response, county planners are now considering changes that could double both the annual production cap and daily visitor limit for microwineries.

Officials have begun discussions with local wine industry representatives about these potential revisions. The county expects to present proposed changes to the Planning Commission in August. If approved there, the revisions would go before the Board of Supervisors later this year for final consideration.

The move comes as Napa County continues to balance its reputation as a world-class wine destination with efforts to support smaller producers who often struggle with high costs and complex regulations. By making the microwinery program permanent and

exploring ways to expand access, county leaders hope to foster greater diversity among local winemakers while maintaining oversight of land use and tourism impacts.