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Americans Turn to Familiar Wines Amid Economic Uncertainty and Rising Costs

Consumers seek comfort in trusted labels and emotional connections as inflation and unemployment reshape spending habits across the country

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As economic uncertainty and rising costs continue to affect daily life in the United States, many consumers are seeking comfort in familiar wines. Inflation is currently at 2.7 percent and is expected to rise further due to new tariffs. Unemployment rates are projected to reach their highest levels since 2021. These factors, combined with ongoing global conflicts and recent policy changes under President Trump’s administration, have created a sense of instability for many Americans. The result is a cautious approach to spending, with people gravitating toward products that offer reassurance and familiarity.

Wine retailers and producers across the country report that customers are increasingly choosing wines they know and trust. Dave Parker, CEO of Benchmark Wine Group and president of the National Association of Wine Retailers, notes that wine remains a beverage closely tied to community and celebration. “Especially as a comfort product

in conjunction with person-to-person interaction, coming off the pandemic where social isolation and perhaps overconsumption were common," Parker says.

This trend does not necessarily mean consumers are opting for cheaper or less sophisticated wines. In Saratoga Springs, New York, Zac Denham and Clark Gale opened Standard Fare, a wine and food bar focused on classic dishes like meatloaf and fried chicken paired with well-known varietals such as Cabernet Sauvignon, Pinot Noir, and Chardonnay. Denham explains that their goal was not to reinvent comfort food but to present it with care and attention to detail. "At Standard Fare, comfort wine means varieties you already know, but sourced from boutique producers," he says.

At their other venue, Bocage Champagne Bar, Gale observes that guests are drawn to Champagnes that are approachable and easy to enjoy. "Guests right now are reaching for bottles that feel joyful and approachable, not overly intellectual," he says.

In Bordeaux, Julie Feola of Château Lagrange has also noticed a shift toward established brands. "People tend to choose valeurs sûres – trusted, established wines," Feola says. She adds that during economic downturns, consumers may drink less but are willing to spend more on higher-quality wines they already love.

Steven McDonald, Master Sommelier and executive wine director at Pappas Bros Steakhouses in Houston and Dallas, sees guests turning to Bordeaux and Burgundy for their reputation for quality and consistency. "Because of technology and farming, the wines have never been better, at all price points," McDonald says.

The desire for comfort extends beyond taste to the stories behind the wines. Paul Alary, head of marketing for Château Gassier in Provence, emphasizes the importance of emotional connection. "People want wine that tells stories that resonate with their human values: pleasure, togetherness, a sense of escape from the harsh reality of daily life," Alary says. He notes that styles like Provence rosé are gaining popularity because they evoke feelings of relaxation and conviviality.

This focus on emotion is echoed by Feola in Bordeaux. She points out that today's consumers want authenticity and transparency from producers. "There's now much more of a dialogue between consumer and producer. We share more stories about the

land and people behind the wine," she says.

At both Standard Fare and Bocage in Saratoga Springs, Gale and Denham prioritize storytelling alongside their wine selections. "Emotion is everything," Gale says. "People are less interested in technical tasting notes and more in how a wine makes them feel."

As Americans navigate an unpredictable economic landscape, comfort wines—those with familiar flavors or meaningful stories—are providing a sense of stability at the table. For many, these bottles offer not just taste but reassurance during uncertain times.