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Wine Industry Leaders Urge WTO to Dismantle Barriers Costing Sector Hundreds of Millions

Alliance survey reveals 91% of global producers struggle with labeling rules and 72% face weak protection for wine origins

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Members of the Wine Origins Alliance (WOA) gathered in Geneva, Switzerland, from February 12 to 13 to advocate for the reduction and elimination of trade barriers affecting the global wine industry. The delegation, representing five countries across three continents, met with senior officials at the World Trade Organization (WTO) to discuss issues such as tariffs imposed on wine due to unrelated trade disputes and the lack of effective protection for wine place names.

The WOA, founded in 2005, represents more than 100,000 wineries and grape growers worldwide. These businesses, mostly micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs), account for over 1.2 million jobs and more than $8 billion in global wine exports. The Alliance now includes 36 organizations from 11 countries, with Ontario, Canada, and Mendoza, Argentina joining as new members this month.

During their visit, WOA members held meetings with WTO Deputy Director General Jean-Marie Paugam; Ambassador Alfredo Suescum of Panama, Chair of the TRIPS Council Special Session; Ambassador Matthew Wilson of Barbados, Chair of the WTO Informal Working Group on MSMEs; Maria Cosme, Chair of the WTO Committee on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures; and Bernard Kuiten, WTO Director of External Relations. The discussions focused on non-tariff measures that disproportionately affect smaller wine producers. These include complex labeling requirements and insufficient protection for geographic indications—names that identify where a wine comes from.

WOA members also participated in a working session with representatives from the WTO Technical Barriers to Trade Committee. The session was led by Chair Beatriz Stevens and Counsellor Mateo Ferrero. It aimed to help Alliance members understand how WTO trade enforcement mechanisms work and how individual wine regions or wineries can stay informed about proposed changes to global wine trade regulations.

In addition to formal meetings, WOA representatives held informal talks with trade officials from both the European Union and United States delegations to the WTO. These conversations provided further opportunities to share concerns about current trade barriers and explore ways to improve international cooperation.

Charles Goemaere, Director General of the Comité Interprofessionnel du Vin de Champagne and co-chair of WOA, emphasized the importance of unity within the industry. “When it comes to global trade, so much more unites the wine industry than divides us,” he said. Jacques-Olivier Pesme, Executive Director of WOA, highlighted ongoing collaboration with both the WTO and diplomatic missions from member countries as key to addressing these challenges.

Coinciding with their Geneva meetings, WOA released results from a new global survey examining non-tariff measures (NTMs) impacting the wine sector. The survey found that more than 3,500 trade measures currently affect the industry worldwide, costing hundreds of millions of U.S. dollars annually. According to the survey, 91% of respondents identified labeling requirements as a significant burden across different regions. Additionally, 72% cited inadequate protection for wine place names as another major obstacle. Respondents reported that these barriers have led to double-digit declines in exports and even complete loss of access to certain markets.

WOA leaders say they will continue engaging with international organizations and governments to address these issues. They argue that reducing trade barriers will benefit not only producers but also consumers by increasing access to diverse wines from around the world.