vinetur

U.S. Wine Sales Plunge as Industry Fails to Attract New Drinkers

Aging consumers and lack of entry-level appeal drive 27% drop in wine sales volume since 2019

Monday, March 9, 2026



Wine sales in the United States are facing a significant challenge as the industry struggles to attract new consumers, particularly at the entry level. Recent data from Southern Glazer's Wine and Spirits (SGWS), the country's largest wine and alcoholic

beverage distributor, shows that while some segments of regular wine drinkers are increasing their frequency of consumption, the overall number of wine drinkers continues to decline. This trend is causing wine sales volume to fall faster than sales value, raising concerns about the long-term health of the category.

During a Wine Market Council webinar held on March 6, Zach Poelma, SGWS's senior vice principal of commercial insights, addressed these issues alongside Wine Market Council president Liz Thach and director of research Christian Miller. Poelma noted that the industry's focus on premiumization—encouraging consumers to trade up to higher-priced wines—was effective for several years but may have come at the expense of attracting new, entry-level drinkers. "We forgot to speak to that consumer that still wanted to hear about lower priced wines," Poelma said.

According to SGWS data, there has been an increase in the share of regular wine drinkers compared to 2023. In a three-month period in 2025, 34% of respondents reported drinking wine once or twice a week, an increase of more than 8% from 2023. Those who drank wine once every two weeks or once every month also rose by 2% each, reaching 16.8% and 16.1%, respectively. Notably, weekly wine consumption among Gen Z is up more than 11% compared to last year.

Despite these positive signs within certain groups, the overall number of wine drinkers is shrinking as Baby Boomers age out of the category and fewer new consumers enter. As a result, SGWS reports that wine sales volume is down 27% and value is down 12% compared to 2019. This decline has led operators to adjust their purchasing habits; on average, they are now placing orders every 14.4 days, one day longer than in 2023. Poelma explained that this change has a meaningful impact on businesses.

The core issue facing the industry is not distribution but velocity—the rate at which consumers purchase and consume wine. Off-premise velocity is down about 6% from last year and down 30% from 2019. On-premise accounts show a similar trend, with velocity down 3% from last year and down 26% from 2019. While there was some improvement at the end of 2024, Poelma cautioned that this modest uptick is based on current demand and does not address the underlying problem: a lack of new consumers.

To address this challenge, Miller presented findings from the Wine Market Council's 2025 study on reducing barriers for "wine hesitant" consumers—those who have some interest in wine but feel excluded or intimidated by the category. Suggested solutions include offering wine cocktails, providing everyday meal pairing suggestions, and creating more opportunities for experimentation such as "Try Before You Buy" tastings at restaurants or grocery stores.

Poelma also shared plans to partner with retailers on new in-store displays that organize wines by vibe, flavor profile or occasion rather than traditional varietal categories. The goal is to make wine more approachable and relevant to different customer preferences. There will also be an increased focus on alternative formats that may appeal to younger or less experienced drinkers.

Miller emphasized that new consumers want clear information about what they are buying—such as better descriptors or sweetness scales—to help them feel confident in their choices. Both he and Poelma agreed that innovation and adaptation are essential if the industry hopes to reverse its current trajectory.

The U.S. wine industry now faces a critical moment as it seeks ways to engage Millennials, Gen Z and other potential new drinkers while continuing to serve its existing customer base. Without successful recruitment efforts and changes in how wine is marketed and sold, experts warn that declining demand could persist for years to come.