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California Wine Leader Urges Trump to Expand Tariffs

He says higher duties on imported bottles could help struggling growers as vineyards are pulled out across the state

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A California wine industry leader is urging President Trump to expand tariffs on imported wine, arguing that the policy could help domestic growers and wineries compete as the state's vineyards face falling demand, rising costs and widespread vine removals.

Jeff Bitter, who leads Allied Grape Growers, a statewide marketing cooperative, said imported wine takes up a large share of the U.S. market and puts California producers at a disadvantage because their costs are higher than those in many other wine-producing countries. "One in every three wines consumed in the United States is imported," he told ABC 30. He said California growers are struggling to match foreign

prices and that tariffs on European wine could help level the field.

Trump has already imposed a 10% tariff on European wine products, a move that has prompted some restaurants to change menus and adjust pricing. Bitter wants that approach widened. He said the industry is facing “a lot of headwinds” and pointed to a sharp reduction in vineyard acreage as evidence of the pressure on growers. Over the last two years, he said, about 40,000 acres of wine grapes have been pulled out each year in California as farmers respond to weaker demand.

The push comes as the state’s wine business confronts broader changes in consumer behavior. Younger drinkers are buying less wine, and some producers say the category is losing ground as shoppers turn to cheaper alcoholic beverages or cut back altogether. Wine remains a discretionary purchase, and higher prices can quickly affect sales.

Bitter said that even at lower price points, wine is not an inexpensive product for consumers. That makes it harder for producers to pass along higher costs without losing customers. California still produces most of the wine made in the United States, but it exports only about 3% of its output, leaving much of the industry dependent on domestic demand.

Not everyone in the business agrees that tariffs would help. One producer told The New York Times that Americans are not likely to switch from imported wines such as Sancerre, Chianti or Barolo to domestic alternatives simply because tariffs make foreign bottles more expensive. That view reflects a broader concern among some importers and restaurateurs that tariffs can raise prices without changing consumer preferences.

The debate underscores how trade policy has become tied to the future of California vineyards at a time when growers are already deciding whether to keep vines in the ground or pull them out.