

Background to the press release of August 12, 2019

Ministry of Government and Consumer Services (MGCS)
Minister Lisa Thompson

Changes to VQA Regulation 406: Addition of Marquette grape variety and Non-Vintage Table Wine

Following a review and stakeholder consultation, the VQA Ontario Board recommended to the Minister of Government and Consumer Services that VQA Regulation 406 be amended as follows:

- Add Marquette to the list of permitted hybrid grape varieties (Appendix B 2. (i))
- Permit still Table Wines carrying the geographical indication "Ontario" to the list of wines to omit the vintage date from labels

VQA Ontario brought forward these amendments after a lengthy evaluation process including a technical assessment by its Standards Development Committee, the review of many written submissions and informal comments, including suggestions to review the regulatory framework. The changes support VQA Ontario's strategic goal to be a progressive and inclusive regulator.

Here is some further background on the process.

Marquette:

VQAO received a request from a winery to amend the VQA regulation to add Marquette to the list of permitted grape varieties. VQAO has long-standing policy guidelines that govern the evaluation of new varieties. In accordance with these guidelines the proponent provided:

- Detailed records of parentage and breeding history
- Confirmation that Marquette is the recognized horticultural name of the variety
- Wines resulting from at least 2 vintages of production in Ontario for sensory evaluation
- A detailed rationale on why this new variety is expected to produce high quality wines in Ontario, including wine style and quality, market experience and consumer reaction, disease resistance, cold hardiness and sustainability

VQA Ontario's Standards Development Committee, comprised of 14 senior winemakers and representatives from Brock University, Niagara College and the LCBO, reviewed the request and found the submission to meet the technical requirements set out in the policy. A range of wine samples made from Marquette grown in Ontario were tasted and found to be of good quality. Based on its review, the Committee concluded the Marquette met the criteria and recommended it be added to the permitted list of hybrid varieties.

Wineries and stakeholders were consulted over a 3-month period and, although not unanimous, the change was supported by a large majority of those submitting comments. After reviewing feedback from the industry, the VQA Ontario Board agreed that Marquette met all established policy guidelines and

including it on the grape variety list was consistent with consumer interests and with VQA Ontario's strategic vision and mission.

In accordance with current rules governing wines made with hybrid grapes, these wines must declare the varietal name on the label and may be labelled with the VQA Ontario designation of origin only.

Non-vintage dated table wines:

VQAO received a request from a winery to amend the VQA regulation to allow the option to omit the vintage date on the label of VQA table wines that would be eligible for the VQA Ontario label designation only. The proposal was advanced to allow wineries to blend across vintages beyond the existing 15% limit to better control consistency and quality from year to year and to have more flexibility in managing inventory and labels.

Wineries and stakeholders were consulted over a 3-month period and the change was supported by a large majority of those submitting comments. After reviewing feedback from the industry, VQA Ontario found the proposed amendment to be consistent with VQAO's strategic objectives and mission, allowing wineries more flexibility to choose what products to market. To ensure label integrity, wines with any mention of a vintage date on the label will continue to require 85% content from the stated vintage.