VQA ONTARIO
Supporting 15 years of Ontario wine industry growth
TASTE THE PLACE

VQA is about place. Special places right here at home. Places like nowhere else in the world. Where the soil, the slope, the sunshine, the warmth, the rainfall and the craftsmanship all matter. Together, they give us better grapes. And better grapes give us better wine.
Each bottle of VQA wine sold in Ontario generates $12.29 into the Ontario economy.

73% of Ontario wine consumers know the term VQA and associate it with quality and origin.

VQA equals QUALITY & ORIGIN.

Wine consumers now associate a higher value with VQA wines that offer a distinct sense of place.

VQA Ontario wine sales have increased 87% in the last 7 years.

VQA equals QUALITY & ORIGIN.

Average price per bottle:
- $15 VQA ONTARIO
- $20 VQA APPELLATION eg. NIAGARA PENINSULA
- $26 VQA SUB-APPELLATION eg. BEAMSVILLE BENCH

$168 million in 2008
$360 million in 2015
How VQA Ontario is supporting consumers in buying local

ORGANIC. FREE RANGE. BPA FREE. OCEAN WISE. Consumers today are presented with an unprecedented range of decisions as they navigate their way through food and beverage purchases.

For consumers wanting to ensure that the wine in their glass has been sourced from 100% Ontario grapes, it’s as easy as looking for the VQA (Vintners Quality Alliance) Ontario logo or letters on the bottle.

As the farm-to-table movement continues to flourish, an increasing number of consumers want to go beyond knowing the province where a wine is from and really zero in on its hometown roots. Land, climate, soil and geology create unique conditions that impact the grapes and wines of specific areas. It’s why the wines of Burgundy differ from their counterparts from Chianti and Napa. Today, VQA Ontario’s Appellations of Origin system is helping develop a similar appreciation for the unique taste of place that differentiates the province’s wine producing regions.

A Guide to Defining Ontario’s Taste of Place

To protect the integrity of Ontario’s wine producing areas, the following appellations, regional appellations and sub-appellations can only appear on the labels of Ontario wines that have received VQA authorization to verify vineyard location.
Labelling Standards

VQA labelling standards also ensure accuracy regarding a wine’s varietal, vineyard and vintage. For example, if a consumer purchases a 2012 Riesling that is said to be from the winery’s “Sandy Knoll” vineyard, 85% of the grapes must be Riesling grapes grown in 2012 and 100% of those grapes must have been grown in the “Sandy Knoll” vineyard.

In addition to appellation names, the VQA Act regulates a collection of terms to ensure truth in labelling. These terms include Estate Bottled, Vineyard, Icewine, Late Harvest Wine and Blanc de Noirs.

Frequently Asked Questions

Isn’t knowing that the wine they’ve purchased is from Ontario enough information for most consumers?

The best wine regions in the world rely on appellation systems to classify and promote their wines, and wine consumers have come to expect this as the standard.

What sets VQA wines apart from other wines?

VQA wine is the only certified, authentic Ontario wine. The grapes are grown in Ontario, often in a specific region or sub-region that is uniquely reflected in the wine. Consumers can trust VQA wines. They are tested and certified, and label claims are verified for accuracy. VQA wines span a wide range of styles, tastes and values, reflecting Ontario’s diversity in regions, grape growers and wine makers.
REGION. VINTAGE. VARIETAL. PRICE. For many consumers, purchasing a bottle of wine can feel like a challenging decision. While there are many factors and individual preferences to consider, all wine drinkers want the assurance of knowing that the bottle they choose will be of excellent quality.

For consumers wanting to ensure that the wine they are purchasing has been sourced from 100% Ontario grapes, is free from concentrates, and has passed independent quality standards testing, it’s as easy as looking for the VQA (Vintners Quality Alliance) Ontario logo or letters on the bottle.

VQA Laboratory Analysis

All VQA wines must pass a comprehensive laboratory analysis, conducted by the Liquor Control Board of Ontario (LCBO), to ensure a number of quality benchmarks are met. Some basic wine chemistry markers including alcohol content and residual sugar are used to assess wine character and ensure accurate labelling, while others, such as volatile acidity, are subject to limits for quality assurance.

VQA Tasting Panel

Because certain wine defects are not as easily detected in the lab, prior to being approved for sale all VQA wines must also pass a sensory evaluation, or tasting process, to ensure:
- The wine is free from obvious faults
- The wine is representative of quality wines of its general category
- The wine is within an acceptable range of varietal character for the stated varieties

VQA wines are tasted by a panel of highly trained tasters provided by the LCBO. These tasters must pass a yearly proficiency test and are screened to eliminate any potential conflicts of interest. The wines are presented blind to the panel in identical glass carafes at the same temperature. Sparkling wines are served in their original container to conserve carbonation and are refrigerated overnight.

The VQA Tasting Panel uses internationally standardized methods to identify common faults and assess whether the wine has the specific attributes that are felt to effectively express what appears on the label.

Inputs from the individual tasters are entered into a computer where they are tabulated electronically and assigned a weighted score. If a wine fails the tasting, it will go through a second round of tasting. If it fails a second a time, it is rejected for VQA status.
Frequently Asked Questions

Why is a Tasting Panel needed? Shouldn’t it be up to the consumer to decide if they like or don’t like a wine?

Unlike wine critics, the VQA Tasting Panel’s role has nothing to do with whether they like or do not like a wine. The purpose of their evaluation is to rule out faulty wines and wines that are not consistent with the expected characteristics for that particular product. Even if a taster does not particularly “like” the taste of the wine, if it meets the standards defined by the evaluation process, the wine will receive VQA certification and the marketplace will ultimately decide its success. Ontario is just one of many wine producing regions to have implemented a tasting panel process. Both old world and new world wine regions, including France, Italy, New Zealand, South Africa use similar tasting panel approaches.

Isn’t trying to standardize something as subjective as wine tasting unfair to wineries that are trying new approaches with Ontario wines?

In the same way that a customer ordering a “Dark Roast” at their favourite coffee shop has an expectation of what they’ll get in their cup, VQA Ontario believes that most wine drinkers have an expectation that their Riesling, for example, will demonstrate certain characteristics. This is particularly important as we work to educate the consumer about Ontario wines of origin. It’s also important to note that the VQA works closely with its stakeholders to ensure the Tasting Panel’s criteria reflects changes within the industry. For example, when Ontario wineries began to produce Appassimento-style wines, the VQA’s Laboratory Analysis and Sensory Evaluation criteria were adapted to reflect the unique attributes of wines made from dried grapes.

How often do wines not pass the Tasting Panel?

Currently, only about 3 of every 100 wines tested fail to pass the Tasting Panel. In these cases, if a winery feels that consumers would still appreciate the wine, they are free to produce it under the “Product of Canada” label and sell it without VQA certification as long as it meets federal requirements.

“VQA takes the risk out of purchase for consumers and mirrors our wineries’ commitment to provide high quality wines for Ontario consumers. To know that our whole region is held to a set of independent standards makes it easier for people to try a new VQA wine. For new wineries and new regions, this is a significant factor in getting started in the marketplace and becoming recognized at provincial, national and international levels.”

Mike McArthur
Burning Kiln Winery

“To grow as a winery, you’ve got to think far beyond the cellar door. VQA certification gets our product into more hands, provincially, nationally and internationally, and that’s a critical factor in continued growth for us.”

Walter Schmoranz
Pelee Island Winery
15 years of Ontario wine industry growth

- Regulated appellations and sub-appellations: 17 in 2015, 4 in 2000
- VQA Ontario members: 155 in 2015, 44 in 2000
- Annual success rate of VQA wine approvals: 97% in 2015, 80% in 2000
## Core VQA focus areas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Progress made during VQA Ontario’s first 15 years</th>
<th>Managing the appellation system to ensure consumers have trust in VQA wines and wineries value participation</th>
<th>Promoting a culture of quality to encourage the production and promotion of quality wines of origin</th>
<th>Providing tools to communicate the value of origin and build confidence and value in VQA and its appellations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Regulated appellation and sub-appellation systems are firmly established</td>
<td>• Over 85% of VQA wineries agree VQA Ontario plays an important role in protecting the reputation of Ontario’s wines and wine regions</td>
<td>• VQA Ontario supports industry marketing programs with funding and content.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The number of regulated appellations has increased from 4 to 17</td>
<td>• A national definition of Icewine based on VQA quality standards has been adopted across Canada, and in treaties with Europe and 8 other wine producing countries, opening new markets to VQA Icewine</td>
<td>• Simplified messaging about VQA has been created to assist wineries, supported by the Taste the Place tagline.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Regulations have been modernized in response to industry feedback and a changing marketplace</td>
<td>• VQA is now recognized by Europe as a quality wine standard acceptable in its markets</td>
<td>• Ontario consumers have become more aware of VQA to a point where 73% now say they know something about VQA and at least one of the VQA appellations (comparable to their awareness of major global wine regions)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The number of VQA wines on the market has doubled</td>
<td>• Winemakers Forums encourage the sharing of experience and best practices throughout the province</td>
<td>• The value associated with appellations and sub-appellations has become tangible. For example, wines labeled VQA Ontario retail for an average of $15 per bottle, wines labeled VQA Niagara Peninsula for $20 and wines labeled with a sub-appellation for $26</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• VQA wine sales have increased by over 50%</td>
<td>• An industry-wide benchmarking program is in place, helping wineries to assess and improve their quality performance</td>
<td>• VQA labelling rules have been updated to increase the focus on appellation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• VQA Ontario is positioned as a trusted authority on wines of origin</td>
<td>• The success rate of VQA wine approval submissions has improved from 80% to 97% supported by educating members about the tasting panel process</td>
<td>• VQA wines can now be purchased at farmers’ markets across the province, a key channel for communicating the value of origin message to the consumer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• VQA is globally recognized as the standard for Canadian wines of origin</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Administrative processes have been automated, made easier to use and fees have been reduced making the system more accessible</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Future priorities</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Continue to evolve the regulatory framework to remain relevant to consumers and reflect innovation in the industry</td>
<td>• Develop opportunities to work closely with the industry to facilitate quality outcomes</td>
<td>• Build relevant fact-based data on appellations through research on viticulture, winemaking practices and wine character</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Build consumer and industry confidence based on a fair and transparent certification process</td>
<td>• Implement a field trip program to familiarize wineries with the sensory and chemical testing processes and how to improve success rates</td>
<td>• Continue to raise awareness of VQA appellations and sub-appellations, and the added value of origin and authenticity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Create a structured orientation program for new wineries and winemakers</td>
<td>• Facilitate an industry-wide VQA Ambassador Program</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1988
Inspired by Europe’s great wine regions, a collection of Ontario wineries create the Vintners Quality Alliance (VQA) to set out geographic appellations and introduce strict production standards.

1988 - 2015
MILESTONES

1988
Inspired by Europe’s great wine regions, a collection of Ontario wineries create the Vintners Quality Alliance (VQA) to set out geographic appellations and introduce strict production standards.

1989
The VQA Act gains royal assent.

2000
VQA production standards are proclaimed into law, designating VQA Ontario as Ontario's wine authority responsible for administering the VQA Act.

44 wineries register to produce VQA certified wines under the legislated system.

2003
VQA Ontario facilitates a number of important regulatory changes including:

• the allowance of screwcap closures on VQA wines.
• the allowance of organic labelling under specified conditions.
• raising the required average brix (ripeness) levels for grapes at harvest.

2004
VQA Ontario membership grows to 71 wineries.

Over 1000 wines receive VQA approval.

VQA standards are recognized in a formal agreement between Canada and the European Union, opening European markets to VQA Icewine.

2005
After three years of study and consultation, Niagara-on-the-Lake and Niagara Escarpment are designated as regional appellations and 10 sub-appellations are identified within the Niagara Peninsula.

VQA Ontario issues the first “Winery Report Card” to help wineries evaluate their performance at the tasting panel.

1998
VQA Ontario is incorporated as a not-for-profit corporation to prepare for the implementation of the Vintners Quality Alliance Act.

2002
VQA Ontario begins publishing comprehensive statistics on VQA wines.

2004
VQA Ontario membership grows to 71 wineries.

Over 1000 wines receive VQA approval.

VQA standards are recognized in a formal agreement between Canada and the European Union, opening European markets to VQA Icewine.
2008
VQA Ontario membership tops 100.
A new VQA Ontario website is launched with comprehensive information on each appellation and sub-appellation and data on VQA production and sales.
A major regulatory review leads to the modernization of labelling rules to increase the focus on appellation and offer wineries more flexibility.

2009
A major systems upgrade allows wineries to apply for wine approval and monitor wines online.
VQA Ontario hosts a media tour to promote the value that appellation adds for consumers.

2011
73% of wine consumers indicate that they are familiar with the term VQA and associate it with quality and origin.
VQA Ontario issues wine approvals for over 1500 wines totaling 2.3 million cases

2013
The “Taste the Place” tagline is developed to promote the essence of VQA and the appellations.

2014
Farmers markets open to sales of VQA wines, selling almost $1.5 million worth of VQA wines from 78 wineries.
VQA Ontario starts Appellation 2.0, a long-term research project to collect comprehensive data on wines from all appellations.
The federal government adopts national definition of icewine that supports the integrity of VQA icewine across the country.
VQA fees are reduced for the fourth time, amounting to a 33% decrease in sales levies and a 50% decrease in membership fees since 2000.

2015
VQA Ontario membership grows to 155 wineries

2007
Prince Edward County is designated as a VQA appellation.
VQA Ontario secures its first two convictions under the VQA Act stemming from unauthorized use of regulated terms.
VQA Ontario launches a series of “Winemakers Forums” to encourage knowledge sharing and build expertise regarding Ontario’s terroir.
An Agreement on labelling is signed by the World Wine Trade Group, recognizing VQA standards for international trade.

2009
A major systems upgrade allows wineries to apply for wine approval and monitor wines online.
VQA Ontario hosts a media tour to promote the value that appellation adds for consumers.

2011
73% of wine consumers indicate that they are familiar with the term VQA and associate it with quality and origin.
VQA Ontario issues wine approvals for over 1500 wines totaling 2.3 million cases

2013
The “Taste the Place” tagline is developed to promote the essence of VQA and the appellations.

2015
VQA Ontario membership grows to 155 wineries

“As a small winery, I know that my message has been heard by many more consumers as a result of VQA marketing efforts than I could have reached on my own.”
Caroline Granger
The Grange of Prince Edward Vineyards and Estate Winery

“In an industry with incredibly tight margins, purchases that don’t provide a valuable return simply don’t get made. The fact that 155 Ontario wineries invest in VQA membership tells you that this is a purchase that provides significant value.”
Ed Madronich
Flat Rock Cellars