
TESTIMONY

TO: CHAIR MARC KORMAN, ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORTATION
CHAIR BRIAN FELDMAN, EDUCATION, ENERGY, AND THE ENVIRONMENT

FROM: TOM CROGHAN
OWNER & EXECUTIVE WINEMAKER, THE VINEYARDS AT DODON
FOUNDING CHAIR, DODON CENTER FOR ECOLOGICAL FARMING

SUBJECT: OPPOSITION TO HB0331 AND SB0342

DATE: FEBRUARY 6, 2026

Situation. HB0331 and SB0342 propose a redemption program for recyclable packaging, including wine bottles, in the state. This memorandum describes some of the consequences of the proposed legislation on Class 4 wine producers.

Background. The Vineyards at Dodon (Dodon) is a small farm winery in Davidsonville that grows, produces, and bottles approximately 3,000 cases of wine each year. Most sales are made directly to consumers at the farm, split evenly between on- and off-premises sales. In 2024, Dodon was chosen as one of five finalists (out of the 11,688 U.S. wineries at the time) for Wine Enthusiast magazine's American Winery of the Year because of its environmental efforts. The nominating writer specifically highlighted Dodon's initiative to promote wine bottle reuse in the mid-Atlantic region as a key reason for her nomination. In other words, Dodon has long been recognized for its support of recycling and reuse of beverage containers.

Maryland wineries use approximately 2,000,000 wine bottles (about 1,000 tons) each year. Recycling a portion of these would significantly reduce the pressure on landfills, but collecting and crushing them has little effect on carbon dioxide emissions. In contrast, reusing a wine bottle decreases those emissions by 5 pounds per reuse. In other words, if each bottle is reused three times annually, a successful reuse program could cut the state's carbon footprint by 15,000 t eCO₂.

Despite claims of widespread demand for used glass, recycling wine bottles is not currently practiced. For example, Dodon's recycling partner, Waste Management, **does not accept** the more than 10,000 bottles we sell for on-premises consumption each year.

Analysis. HB0331/SB0342 presents a significant opportunity to increase the number of wine bottles recycled or reused. It also includes a provision to evaluate the investments needed to reuse containers for at least 10% of beverage containers sold.

Maryland's Class 4 wineries will be affected by this bill both as producers—those who fill bottles—and as sellers—those who sell filled beverage containers. While small wineries (those with annual global sales under \$5 million) are exempt from the producer's provisions, they are not exempt from their seller's responsibilities. Two provisions stand out.

1. **Retailers with less than 3000 sf of sales space and 150 sf of shelf space would need to give refunds for ANY container of the same material and size as those sold at the facility.** (Page 17, line 24.) Dodon is the only wine seller within a 5-mile radius of our facility, creating a significant risk that the farm will become the main refund point for all wine bottles in Davidsonville and Harwood. Although the bill does not specify whether Dodon would be responsible for collecting the bottles it refunds, it is reasonable to assume that it would also collect, store, and return them to a central collection point. In other words, the bill appears to require us, as farmers producing a value-added agricultural product, to establish a new bottle-redemption operation. As a preserved farm, this would conflict with our contract with the Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation, which prohibits non-agricultural activities.
2. **The bill requires that the refund value be included in the listed price for wholesale and off-premises containers, but it specifies that the refund value not be included in the price for on-premises containers.** (Page 14, line 19). Since we sell wine for both on- and off-premises consumption from the same registers—and sometimes to the same customer at the same time—we would have two different prices at the register. This could confuse everyone.

I am also worried that the bill's provisions on reuse, intended mainly to explore the possibility, are so weak that they amount to little more than "wishful" thinking. The legislature's well-known skepticism of "studies" is well placed.

Recommendations. Although bottle-deposit schemes are the most effective way to boost returns, any reasonable interpretation of the bill could have severe consequences for Maryland's small wineries. It could be amended to:

1. Exempt small sellers from any redemption and refund requirements.
2. Allow explicit listing of the deposit instead of including it in the price.
3. Strengthen the reuse provisions.

In the absence of significant amendments to the bill, I ask that you oppose HB0331/SB0342.