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The times, they are a changin'...

Wine retailing in Ontario is about to undergo significant changes. The provincial government has announced that it is fast-tracking its massive liberalization agenda, with wine and beer moving into convenience stores in early September and thousands of new retail outlets potentially opening for business after November 1. These changes were not originally scheduled to happen until January 2026. The LCBO will remain the importer of record for all beverage alcohol into Ontario, the sole retailer of spirits in the province and the wholesaler to new retailers, which are expected to include convenience, grocery and big box stores as well as small, specialty wine merchants.

There are more questions than answers on the process and details currently, including whether individual retailers will have freedom to choose the wines to be ordered through the wholesale division of the LCBO. We are hopeful that we will eventually have a system similar to the one in British Columbia, where a combination of wine boutiques, big box stores and supermarket chains sell a huge array of wines at all price points. One thing is for certain, this represents a massive shift in how wine will be sold in Ontario.

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Potential Conflicts with Canadian Labeling Requirements

Beginning December 2023, new European Union regulations require a nutrition declaration and list of ingredients for wines produced in the EU. These new requirements will present a few areas of conflict with Canadian regulations:

1. Physical labels for wines made in the EU must have a declaration of the energy value based on a 100mL serving, while the reference amount (serving size) for wine in Canada is 188mL.
2. The presence of a European energy declaration on a label in Canada will trigger a requirement to provide a Nutrition Facts table, in Canadian format standards. (Note: alcoholic beverages imported into Canada are otherwise not required to include nutrition labeling).
3. A full nutrition declaration and ingredient list must be provided for wines made in the EU, but may be provided by electronic means identified on the label (such as a QR code). If a nutrition facts table is presented on the label, it must be presented according to the Canadian format standards. And if an ingredient list is presented on the label, it must be bilingual (English and French) and meet Canadian requirements. However, it is acceptable, in Canada, to use a QR code or other electronic means to present the new EU-required information.

To mitigate any product flow interruption and avoid corrective labelling fees, we strongly encourage our European winery partners to avoid using EU-compliant labels when shipping wines to Ontario. Any questions or concerns can be directed to margaret@buyersandcellars.ca.

**Cheers,
The B+C Team!**



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