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## **Family Wineries of Washington State Created to Advocate for Artisan Wineries**

A new organization has formed to advocate for issues of particular importance to small, artisan wineries. Family Wineries of Washington State seeks state regulatory reform that replaces Prohibition-era attitudes about the sale of Washington wines with a system that permits free market forces to dictate the distribution and sale of wines in the state.

The move comes at an exciting time for the Washington wine industry, the second largest wine-producing state in the nation. With over 540 wineries in operation and increasing international acclaim, the industry has become a strong economic driver in the state and diversified to the point where one advocacy organization can no longer meet with the needs of the entire industry.

Family Wineries of Washington State is an all-volunteer organization, with voluntary dues and a democratic process for determining policy initiatives and positions. Full voting membership is open to all Washington State wineries that qualify for the federal small producer's tax credit. Forty-two wineries have joined the new organization during the group's start-up phase.

Family Wineries will work strategically with state lawmakers to achieve comprehensive regulatory reform – to modernize 1930s-era laws to current market and social realities. Reform will start with seeking to refocus the state's primary wine regulatory agency, the Washington State Liquor Control Board, to allow it to concentrate on its core missions of protecting public safety and collecting taxes. Economic activities regarding wine that do not threaten public safety would no longer be policed by the Liquor Control Board but would be regulated by the existing laws governing free trade in goods. Allowing free market forces to control the sale and distribution of wine in Washington State will allow the Liquor Control Board to focus more resources on issues of public safety and will increase the quality and availability of Washington wine to consumers.

“In an industry known for its spirit of collaboration and excellence, inspired in large part by leaders in the field who have cultivated the tremendous growth and worldwide reputation of our state's wine sector, artisanal wineries represent the passion, courage and boldness on which the future of our industry relies,” stated board president Paul Beveridge.

This new organization intends to function much like Family Winemakers of California. It will support positions and hopes to work with the state's primary wine advocacy organization, the Washington Wine Institute (WWI), while acting independently on initiatives not addressed by WWI that its membership determines are important to smaller family wineries.

Family Wineries of Washington State was launched through the efforts, expertise and determination of many friends and founding members. In its start-up phase, it has established a governing board, a set of guiding principles and a strategic plan for achieving success. It is currently working to recruit additional members and develop its agenda for the 2009 legislative session. For more information on Family Wineries, please click on: <http://familywineriesofwashington.com>.