

THE SACRAMENTO BEE

Stay Connected » **sacbee.com**

January 1, 2017 12:40 PM

UC Davis dumped barrels of wine each year. Now it might sell for \$80 a bottle.



Katie Wayman, a viticulture major, helps transfer grapes from a hopper in preparation for the wine crush on Thursday, August 21, 2014 at UC Davis. Hector Amezcua hamezcua@sacbee.com

By Loretta Kalb

UC Davis no longer needs to dispose of thousands of gallons of wine that students produce each year, thanks to a new state law clearing the way for nonprofit wine sales.

A new California law, [Senate Bill 683](#) by former Sen. Lois Wolk, D-Davis, authorizes the state Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control to license a university-associated nonprofit mutual benefit corporation that can accept up to 20,000 gallons of wine.

The corporation, in turn, would sell the wine in bulk to winemakers who would package and sell it, said UC Davis Chief Campus Counsel Jacob A. Appelsmith. The bill applies only to UC Davis.

“The hope is we will return some revenue to the university’s viticulture and enology program because it does cost the program a lot of money to produce the wine,” Appelsmith said.

“One of the reasons why we won’t market under our name is we don’t want to be distracted by the need to have a commercial motivation,” he said. “It’s really about making wine as part of our teaching mission and not having to pour it down the drain.”

There are other academic dabblers in the state’s wine industry. Fresno State touts itself as the first university in the nation with a license to operate a winery as part of its overall educational program. And California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, has its own Cal Poly Wine label and a Vines to Wines student club.

UC Davis wine runs the gamut in quality, Appelsmith said.

He noted some of the finished product “teaches students what happens when you make mistakes.” It can be sold as wine vinegar.

Some of the best wine is produced at Oakville Station Vineyard, the UC Davis viticulture department’s 40-acre research vineyard in the Napa Valley, he said.

“It’s worth a lot of money,” Appelsmith said. He said winemakers have suggested comparable wine can sell for \$80 a bottle. Overall, the Viticulture and Enology Department at UC Davis typically produces about 6,500 gallons of wine a year.

The 20,000-gallon limit in Wolk’s bill is a drop in the bucket compared to the wine market in California, according to Tim Schmelzer, vice president of state relations for Wine Institute, part of the broad industry support for the measure. That’s equal to about 8,410 cases of wine, he said. By comparison, California wineries produced over 229 million cases of wine in 2015.

“Other California universities are already bottling and selling the wine that they produce,” Schmelzer said in an email, citing Fresno State and Cal Poly.

The bill, however, drew opposition from Alcohol Justice, based in Marin County, and the California Alcohol Policy Alliance, a coalition of groups seeking to influence policy on public safety issues.

“Basically, it’s UC Davis in the wine business,” said Michael Scippa, public affairs director for Alcohol Justice, which describes itself as an “industry watchdog.”

“We think it’s an aberration of ABC policies and a degradation of the rules that offer protection to public health and safety. Colleges and universities throughout the country have terrible problems with underage consumption (and) binge drinking. There needs to be a separation at some point.”

David Bailey of Alcoholic Beverage Control in Sacramento said the nonprofit corporation still must submit an application and go through the formal process of a public notification and review before a license can be issued.