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California Winegrape Growers Press Federal Agenda Across Capitol Hill, Agencies, and the White House

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — June 17, 2026 — The California Association of Winegrape Growers (CAWG) led a delegation of growers to Washington, D.C., June 1-3 to advance a federal policy agenda aimed at restoring competitiveness, strengthening risk management tools, and supporting the long-term viability of California vineyards.

Over three days, CAWG representatives met with more than 20 offices, including those of California's two U.S. senators and eight members of the U.S. House of Representatives, along with senior staff on the Senate Agriculture and Finance Committees and the House Agriculture Committee. The delegation also met with officials from the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative, the White House Office of Public Liaison, the USDA Risk Management Agency, and USDA's Research, Education and Economics mission area.

Growers advocated for a broad set of federal priorities, including closing a narrow excise tax loophole that subsidizes imported bulk wine and addressing a labeling gap that allows foreign wine to be blended into bottles labeled "American."

The delegation also engaged in a broader trade discussion about the competitive disadvantages California growers face from subsidized and cheaper foreign wine, and continued to push for closing a Canadian classification gap that allows non-grape, bulk "wine" to enter the U.S. classified and taxed as wine. Growers also pressed for improvements to federal crop insurance programs, both emergency response and sustained funding for recent glassy-winged sharpshooter outbreaks in California, protection of critical USDA crush and acreage reports, and continued investment in wildfire smoke research.

"California winegrape growers are facing one of the most difficult periods in recent history, but there are tangible steps policymakers can take to strengthen the industry's future," said Natalie Collins, president of CAWG. "We're pursuing every available avenue to ensure growers can compete on a level playing field and that federal policies support domestic agriculture, strengthen rural communities, and enhance the competitiveness of California wine."

The delegation emphasized that California winegrape growers have endured years of declining crush volumes, contract cancellations, vineyard removals, and historically high levels of unharvested fruit, placing significant economic strain on farming families, agricultural workers, and rural communities across the state.

"There's no substitute for growers sitting across the table from policymakers and explaining how these issues affect their operations, employees, and communities," said Tom Merwin of Merwin Vineyards and chairman of CAWG's Federal Issues Committee. "At this critical time for growers, these conversations matter more than ever."

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About the California Association of Winegrape Growers: CAWG is a statewide nonprofit trade association advocating for California's winegrape growers to ensure the sustainability of the winegrape industry. CAWG promotes the industry's long-term success by advancing the adoption of sound public policies and fostering awareness and understanding of winegrape growers' contributions to the economy, environment, and California communities. Learn more at cawg.org.