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Va. governor addresses grape shortage in local wine industry



By [Max Smith](http://wtop.com/author/max-smith/) | [@amaxsmith](https://twitter.com/amaxsmith)
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WASHINGTON — Virginia's alcohol industry is growing, both in production and tourism interest, but wineries face a significant roadblock: There are not enough grapes growing in the Commonwealth.

Gov. Terry McAuliffe calls it a very recent problem, and says his administration is considering addressing the issue with grants to entice new grape growers to take up the business. This approach can have high up-front costs and take years to begin making money.

A caller named David told WRVA's "Ask the Governor" that he had been to a "wine camp" in Hume, Virginia, where winery leaders were excited about the increasing demand for Virginia wines, but concerned about the shortage of grapes outside of the wineries' own vineyards.

“This is a big business for the Commonwealth ... lots of jobs, lots of economic activity, but the demand is there and we don’t have the grapes,” McAuliffe said.

He says state agriculture grants could help to spark growth.

Virginia’s wine industry recently passed Texas’ to become the fifth largest in the nation, but McAuliffe believes it ranks even higher in quality.

“Steve Spurrier — not the coach Steve Spurrier, but the big wine expert who actually created Napa Valley years ago — literally told this crowd that Virginia now has the best wine in America, they can compete with anybody, so this is a burgeoning business for us,” McAuliffe says of a meeting in London this summer.

Steven Spurrier created the blind wine tasting in France in 1976 that found several California wines were better than French selections.

“The last thing we want is people wanting to buy Virginia wine and we can’t produce it for them,” McAuliffe says.

In addition to 250 wineries, Virginia now has more than 100 craft breweries making beer and 10 craft distilleries making spirits.

“It’s not just what we’re producing, but the tourism aspect,” McAuliffe says of the economic impact of Virginia’s alcohol industry.

McAuliffe has a Kegerator in the governor’s mansion and says that he has used it as part of his negotiations to bring two more West Coast brewing companies to Virginia.

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