

The Compliance Corner

by Mary Beth Williams

Using the terms Farm, Vineyards, Ranch, or Orchard on wine labels

It was great to see so many of you at the Wineries Unlimited show last week. This naming issue came up during a session at Wineries Unlimited. The issue was raised that when any of the terms "farm", "vineyard", "ranch" or "orchard" are used on a wine label, 95% of the fruit in that bottle must come from that farm, vineyard, ranch, or orchard.

Technically, this is true, but so many wineries these days use the word "vineyard" or "farm" in their licensed name that I called the TTB to discuss it with them. The rule in question (27 CFR 4.39m) was written about 75 years ago. In late 2008, TTB loosened enforcement on this rule and a number of others that are antiquated while they go through the process of updating the labeling rules to better reflect the realities of winemaking in the 21st century. The rule was originally put in place with a "truth in advertising" mentality, meaning that the consumer has the right to expect that if the label says the product is from a specific ranch, farm, vineyard, or orchard that the fruit is actually from that location. But, as the number of wineries grows and product becomes more readily available to people far from the actual vineyards from which the fruit is coming, the importance of these terms has diminished. Terms like "estate grown" have replaced these terms in protecting the consumers. If you don't grow your own fruit, I'd avoid using these terms on your labels, but if you are a farm, orchard, vineyard, or ranch and use that term on your labels, it's not going to be an issue if less than 95% of the fruit in a particular wine is grown on site. The reg change process is drawn out at both the federal and state levels, and the actual changes won't happen overnight, but they are **not** looking for violations of this regulation.

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