

# DE SOTO

KANSAS

March 29, 2012

## Testimony in Support of SB390

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Blue Jack Crossing--it isn't the name of a hybrid bee. Diamond S? That isn't a cattle ranch in Flint Hills. And Stone Pillar is not the name of a nightclub in New Jersey where Bruce Springsteen got his start. Those are names of well-respected and award winning Kansas wineries--in Eudora, Russell, and Olathe. If someone wants to buy a bottle of wine produced by any of the 23 Kansas farm wineries, the opportunities are very slim: you can either drive to the vineyard itself or find a liquor store or restaurant that will put Kansas wines on its limited shelf space or menu--that's it.

In 1988, the Kansas legislature understood that the once thriving Kansas wine industry of over 5,000 acres was making a return from its pre-prohibition days. The legislature created the Kansas Grape and Wine Industry Advisory Council and charged it, in part, with the responsibility "to help promote and market the state's grape and wine industry." Part of the Advisory Council's challenge is financial; the State has no money to market Kansas farm wineries scattered throughout half of the state. Few people know about the vineyards and fewer still hop in their cars and do a road trip to taste the wines of Winfield's Windswept Winery or St. Marys Renaissance Winery and then go home with bottles of wine that interest them.

The City of De Soto, the De Soto Rotary Club and Somerset Ridge Vineyard and Winery near Paola teamed up in an effort to produce a unique, never-before event--a wine tasting festival on June 16, 2012 from 4PM to 8PM, featuring exclusively wines produced here in Kansas.

I pose three questions along with answers:

**(1) What are we trying to do?** We are trying to help give the Department of Agriculture a tool and an outlet to market a viable and improving agri-business in Kansas.

**(2) How are we trying to do that?** We are providing the Kansas and cross-border public with an easy and entertaining learning experience about the quality and variety of Kansas' wineries. Our wine tasting event, currently with 12 committed Kansas wineries, will provide a "bang-for-the-buck" easy incentive for up to 2,000 wine enthusiasts--uneducated about Kansas quality wines--to get into their cars for a short 10-15 minute drive.

**(3) What Kansas roadblock prevents the public from enjoying a wine tasting event to its fullest?** Current law has a mechanism to allow farm wineries to come together to offer a wine tasting event; but that same law prohibits potential customers from buying bottles of wine to take home with them.

House Federal & State Affairs  
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Attachment # 8

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Think about the reality of what will occur at our June 16 wine tasting festival: a wine taster loves the wine she just tasted, puts her glass down and tells the vintner, "That is really good; I'd like to buy a couple bottles of that wine." The smiling vintner responds, "Glad you like it; but, sorry, you can't buy any of the wine here to enjoy later. Drive to our vineyard and buy it there." Seriously—I can see the dumbfounded face, followed by the disbelieving shaking head when we tell her that

We are asking the legislature to remove that roadblock. ***We are asking you to change the law, with an effective date prior to June 16, in order to allow Kansas wineries to sell their unopened, sealed bottles at wine tasting events that are currently authorized by Kansas law.*** That change in the law will greatly enhance the experience for people attending a wine tasting event and, of even more significance, will provide a valuable marketing and sales tool for Kansas farm wineries. It makes sense for the public and for Kansas' wine businesses, and it is non-controversial—witness the Senate's 40-0 vote on March 15.

Why is the City of De Soto leading the charge for this change in State law? Three reasons:

(1) We believe that the quality of Kansas farmers' wine production is too unknown and that is a shame.

(2) We believe that public wine tastings offer the most convenient and successful marketing aide to encourage the wine enjoying public to get in their cars and travel a short distance to experience a collection of Kansas wines at one time.

(3) Located midway between Lawrence and metro Kansas City, De Soto built a 50 acre Riverfest Park on the banks of the Kansas River. We did so in order to create a regional festival and concert venue to give over 200,000 people within a 10-15 drive a reason to visit De Soto.