

EDITORIALS

**Sour grapes
on wine ruling**

Michigan wineries and enthusiasts raised their glasses to a U.S. Supreme Court ruling last month that outlawed the state's practice of banning shipments of alcohol to out-of-state consumers.

The Michigan Liquor Control Commission greeted the news with a whine of a less pleasing bouquet.

The court's 5-4 ruling against Michigan and 23 other states ordered that states treat all alcohol commerce — party stores and Internet sales — equally. To allow a Michigan resident to buy online only from an in-state vintner and to deny a customer across state lines unfairly impedes trade.

The ruling is a boon to small wineries that cannot afford a contract with a wholesaler, and it likely wouldn't harm stores whose consumers don't want to pay shipping or are looking for run-of-the-mill labels. It could free Michigan, which has been more of a wine island than a peninsula thanks to the regulations, to become an exporter. That could help sprout new vines in the wine business.

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What about assuring that underage drinkers don't stock up through online sales, the Liquor Control Commission cries. Fish-posh.

Few teens bent on a drink are going to go through the trouble of ordering chardonnay or pinot noir. Unfortunately, an adult willing to supply them or an unlocked relative's liquor cabinet is far more likely to meet their desire for instant gratification. And shippers such as the United Parcel Service already have protections in place. Only adults can sign for alcohol deliveries, and they won't leave the vino on the porch for a youth to find.

The Liquor Control Commission, in a backward effort to safeguard kids and its own power, says it will push the Legislature to ban all direct-to-consumer online alcohol sales. Such an effort is heavy-handed and would leave our thriving wine industry dying on the vine.

It also would prove a killer for wine of the month clubs and off-season sales, when tourism doesn't bring aficionados into the tasting rooms.

Explain that to Grand Traverse County and the Leelanau Peninsula, Southwest Michigan or, for that matter, to St. Julian Wine Co. Inc. in Frankenmuth.

Lawmakers should amend the law to allow all online alcohol sales, regardless of residency. They would do well to leave Internet wine commerce uncorked.