



Gluten-Free Wine. Isn't All Wine Gluten Free?

In the past several years, we have received more and more consumer inquiries asking if our wines are gluten free. While it may seem that a beverage made primarily with grapes and water would inherently be free of gluten, that's not always the case. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) recently published its [final rule on gluten-free labeling of fermented or hydrolyzed foods](#), which includes alcoholic beverages. The FDA's tolerance of gluten in a product labeled as "gluten-free" is anything under 20ppm. That leaves room for trace amounts of gluten to potentially make their way into finished wine. **There are two points in the winemaking process in which gluten can potentially come in contact with the finished product:**

Gluten can come in contact with the finished wine product:

- 1) If a wheat-based product is used as a fining agent
- 2) If a wine is aged in an oak cask which used wheat paste as a sealing agent

Wheat Gluten Used as Fining Agent in Non-Gluten Free Wine

Though *rare* and being primarily only studied at this time, [wheat gluten-based fining agents can be used to clarify wine.](#)

In a 2019 study called "[Wine Fining with Plant Proteins](#)," researchers looked at alternative fining agents, including those made from "Cereal-Based Proteins:" "Probably the first source of plant proteins that researchers have looked at to replace proteinaceous fining agents of animal origins is **wheat gluten**, an inexpensive, readily available and food grade material largely used as an ingredient in the food industry. Indeed, since the beginning of the 3rd millennia, several authors used wheat prolamins, commonly called gluten, as fining agents for both musts and wines." According to BeyondCeliac.org: "If a winemaker uses gluten or a product containing gluten as a fining agent, the gluten can remain behind in the bottle. For someone with celiac disease or gluten sensitivity, this could potentially be harmful. **However, studies suggest that even if there is gluten in the bottle after fining, it is much lower than the 20 parts per million (ppm) which is the maximum amount of gluten a product is allowed to still be labeled gluten-free, based on guidelines set by the FDA.**" There are no regulations around labeling of wine at this time, so fining agents do not need to be disclosed.

For those concerned about the use of gluten as a fining agent, we have confirmed with our winemakers that all of our wines are produced using only bentonite clay or pea protein for minimal fining.

Many of the wines we carry are aged in steel tanks and never come in contact with any oak barrels. See the list below of our steel tank-aged wines.

The other potential point of minimal gluten exposure can come when a wine is aged in an oak barrel on which wheat paste was used as a sealing agent. **If a wine is aged in such a barrel, a slight trace of gluten could show up in the wine and could potentially be an issue for those who have an extreme gluten sensitivity**



Many of Natural Merchants wines are aged in steel tanks and never come in contact with any oak barrels. For those of our wines (primarily red) that *are* carefully aged in oak barrels, we are working diligently with all of our winery partners to ensure the oak barrels used were not sealed with wheat paste. **We believe that 100% of our oak-aged wines are sealed in a gluten-free manner, using only gluten-free paste, or no paste at all, to seal the barrels.** For those of our wines that are carefully aged in French or American oak barrels, we are working diligently with all our winery partners to try to ensure that the oak barrels used were not sealed with wheat paste. This is a work in progress, and we are aiming for a guaranty that 100% of our oak-aged wines are sealed in a gluten-free manner.

The wineries that produce the wines listed below on this page, have certificates or visual proof from their barrel suppliers that only gluten-free paste, or no paste at all, has been used to seal the oak barrels.

EUROPEAN OFFICE:

Cartagena, SPAIN
pilar@naturalmerchants.com

Tel: +34.968.32.15.11
Fax: +34.902.90.89.61

NORTH AMERICAN OFFICE:

Oregon USA
ed@naturalmerchants.com

Tel: 1.530.554.2333
Fax: 1.866.784.0422

Wheat Paste is Rarely Used And Does Not Readily Contaminate

From *Wine Spectator's* Q&A "[Should I be worried about wine if I have a gluten allergy?](#)"

"First of all, not all coopers use this paste anymore: 'Wax substitutes have largely taken over because of ease of use and cleanliness,' notes Phil Burton, owner of Barrel Builders in Napa...Upon receiving barrels, winemakers typically inspect the interior with a flashlight, and any exposed wheat paste would show 'a greenish haze,' according to Burton, which they would likely clean out before putting any wine in the barrel. In other words, the amount of this paste that ultimately penetrates the wine is probably negligible."

To be certain, an independent test by a diagnostic company was sponsored by Tricia Thompson, MS, RD, the "[Gluten Free Dietician](#)" on two different wines aged in oak barrels which were sealed with wheat paste. **Only a slight trace of gluten (5-10ppm) was found in the resulting wines.** "Two bottles of wine aged in oak barrels sealed with a wheat flour paste were tested for gluten using both the sandwich and competitive R5 ELISA. All results were below the lower limit of quantification for gluten for these assays of 5 and 10 parts per million, respectively."

Thompson says, "Wine has always been considered naturally gluten-free. Wine aged in oak barrels sealed with wheat paste appears to be gluten-free. Because the possibility of gluten in wine is an issue that consumers are slowly becoming aware of, it is important for vintners to be fully transparent about their practices." According to Katarina Mollo, Registered Dietician and Director of Education for the [National Celiac Association](#) "We ascribe to the FDA and TTB's definition of gluten-free to be anything under 20ppm of gluten residue. We have also referred back to the diagnostic test conducted by Tricia Thompson that found less than 10ppm of gluten residue in any wine aged in an oak barrel. **This is a very low amount and we consider all wines to be gluten free.**"

Still this very slight trace of gluten could potentially be a concern for those who are Celiac or have an extreme reaction to gluten. **For those who want to ensure there is absolutely no trace of gluten, our red and white wines aged only in stainless steel tanks are the safest choice.**



The FDA and TTB Weigh in Regarding Labeling of Gluten-Free Alcohol

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) recently published its [final rule on gluten-free labeling of fermented or hydrolyzed foods](#), which includes alcoholic beverages. The FDA's tolerance of gluten in a product labeled as "gluten-free" is anything under 20ppm. In the rule, the FDA states:

"There may be inherently gluten-free foods or ingredients that still do not meet the definition of "gluten-free" due to cross-contact with gluten that leads to gluten content in the food that is at or above 20ppm."

"Because there is no scientifically valid analytical method in detecting and quantifying with precision the gluten protein content in fermented or hydrolyzed foods..." "...the manufacturer of such foods bearing the claim must make and keep records about their ingredients and details about their manufacturing processes."

The official statement (an interim statement issued in February 2014, prior to the final FDA rule in effect October 13, 2020) regarding wine from the Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau ("TTB") which regulates the labeling and advertising for the majority alcohol beverages says:

Many alcohol beverages subject to the Federal Alcohol Administration Act (FAA Act) are produced without any ingredients that contain gluten. For example, a **wine fermented from grapes, or a vodka distilled from potatoes, may not contain any gluten if the producer used good manufacturing practices, such as taking adequate precautions to prevent cross-contact, and did not use additives, yeast, or storage materials that contain gluten.** Under the interim policy, TTB allowed the use of a "gluten-free" claim in the labeling and advertising of such products. TTB reminded industry members that it would be the responsibility of the importer or bottler of the product to ensure that the claim is truthful and accurate.

EUROPEAN OFFICE:

Cartagena, SPAIN
pilar@naturalmerchants.com

Tel: +34.968.32.15.11
Fax: +34.902.90.89.61

NORTH AMERICAN OFFICE:

Oregon USA
ed@naturalmerchants.com

Tel: 1.530.554.2333
Fax: 1.866.784.0422

Gluten in Coloring or Flavoring for Wine-Based Canned or Bottled Beverages

While most bottled wine may be free of wheat-based additives, those who enjoy wine coolers spritzers, dealcoholized wine or malt beverages, gluten could be hiding there as well. "One thing for consumers to watch for is any wine or wine product that contains added colors or flavors, or that is made from barley malt, such as bottled wine coolers," says Marilyn Geller, CEO of the nonprofit Celiac Disease Foundation.

In their final ruling, the FDA lists ingredients derived from wheat, including barley malt in their list of potential gluten-contamination:

"Food and ingredient manufacturers should be aware that malt extract and other similar malt-derived ingredients are ingredients derived from gluten-containing grains that have not been processed to remove gluten and, therefore, cannot be used in foods that bear "gluten-free" labeling.

"Cooking wines and Wine coolers (editor's note: or canned wine cocktails) can be sweetened with any type of sugar, some of which (like maltose) are derived from grains," explains Keith Wallace, founder of the [Wine School of Philadelphia](#). "For that reason, they can have trace amounts of gluten." Same goes for flavored wines, which may include coloring or flavoring agents that contain gluten." Look for canned organic wines with no added flavors or colors.

None of our wineries produce any wine-based products considered malt beverages, so the possibility of any contamination is extremely low.



How to Guarantee Gluten Free Wine

Through discussions with our winery partners as well as their supplier documentation, **we believe that all of our wines currently in distribution are gluten-free — either fermented and aged in steel tanks or in oak barrels that do not contain wheat.** All of our winemakers are committed to clean production standards, and **no addition of any ingredients that are derived from any gluten containing sources.**

Those who are Celiac must remain vigilant to ensure that all consumable products in which they come in contact are free of any gluten contamination. Though rare and at minute amounts, potential gluten sources can be found in wine. We promise to continue to do our best to readily identify all of our safely gluten-free wines and all gluten-free certificates and documents are available upon request. **Our gluten-free wines can be found at fine retailers and restaurants nationwide.**

EUROPEAN OFFICE:

Cartagena, SPAIN
pilar@naturalmerchants.com

Tel: +34.968.32.15.11
Fax: +34.902.90.89.61

NORTH AMERICAN OFFICE:

Oregon USA
ed@naturalmerchants.com

Tel: 1.530.554.2333
Fax: 1.866.784.0422

Wines fermented and aged only in stainless steel tanks:



EUROPEAN OFFICE:

Cartagena, SPAIN
pilar@naturalmerchants.com

Tel: +34.968.32.15.11
 Fax: +34.902.90.89.61

NORTH AMERICAN OFFICE:

Oregon USA
ed@naturalmerchants.com

Tel: 1.530.554.2333
 Fax: 1.866.784.0422

Wines aged in oak casks for which we have verification of gluten-free practices by winery's barrel manufacturers and winery:



EUROPEAN OFFICE:

Cartagena, SPAIN
pilar@naturalmerchants.com

Tel: +34.968.32.15.11
 Fax: +34.902.90.89.61

NORTH AMERICAN OFFICE:

Oregon USA
ed@naturalmerchants.com

Tel: 1.530.554.2333
 Fax: 1.866.784.0422