

Beer, Wine and Spirits FAQ

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Does PCC have a standard for beer, wine, and spirits?

Yes, although because of lack of regulations concerning ingredient and production method transparency, our standards serve more as goals and guidelines for what products and practices we want to see more of in the marketplace. PCC prioritizes alcoholic beverages, including beer, wine, hard ciders, and spirits, made from organically grown ingredients and from producers who are dedicated to making more sustainable products. Our hope is that as consumers and retailers like PCC push the alcohol industry to be more transparent about ingredients, nutritional information, and production processes, we will continue to update and strengthen our standards when possible. For details on the current beer, wine, and spirits standard, [click here](#).

Why don't alcoholic beverages have ingredient and nutrition panels?

While there are numerous mandatory regulations concerning the labeling of alcoholic beverages, these regulations do not require manufacturers to disclose ingredient and nutrition information like those found on other food products. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) does not regulate beer, wine, and hard ciders like it does other foods that are sold in stores. Despite this gap in transparency, there are some brands who are beginning to voluntarily add ingredient and nutrition information on their products. As shoppers become more informed, and ingredient transparency and sustainability become larger driving forces in customer decisions, brands are beginning to shift to meet those demands and remain relevant. To learn more, see the Sound Consumer Policy Report [Uncorking Transparency](#).

Why doesn't PCC mandate ingredient disclosure?

Sadly, if we mandated disclosure at this time, we would not have many wine and beer offerings because companies can, by law, keep that information private. We cannot force producers to disclose it. Instead, producers are encouraged to disclose ingredients and add nutritional panels and PCC gives priority to more transparent producers. PCC always encourages shoppers to “vote with their dollar” and support those producers who are more transparent and responsible.

What does it mean for alcohol to be certified organic?

If alcohol is certified organic and bears the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) organic seal that means the crops used to make the product was grown, processed, and handled in accordance with the National Organic Program (NOP) standards. Often, alcoholic beverages are not certified as organic, but rather declare that the primary ingredient was grown organically. For example, it is common to see wines that are not certified organic with the green circle seal on the front, but state that they are “made with organic grapes.” This means the grapes were grown to meet the federal organic standards, but that the processing and handling of the wine into the final product does not follow the organic standards. (Many wine producers opt out of the full certification because USDA organic regulations prohibits the addition of sulfites, and it can be difficult to achieve the same shelf stability and taste without additional sulfites.) To learn more, visit the USDA's webpage on [organic wine](#).

What is a biodynamic wine?

Biodynamic wine comes from grapes grown following the principles of biodynamic farming, which focuses on cultivating natural systems and using the synergy of plants, animals, and soil to reduce the need for external and chemical inputs. Wine certified as biodynamic must meet the standards of Demeter USA. Under [their standards](#), synthetic pesticides, synthetic fertilizers, and Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) are prohibited, sulfites must be 100 parts per million or less, and only native yeasts are used in fermentation.

What does PCC look for in a “sustainable” wine?

The term “sustainable” can be broad and interpreted very differently depending on the context in which it’s used. For PCC, when we refer to a wine, or any alcohol, as being sustainable, we have certain expectations around the practices and values of the producer, including:

- The grapes or agricultural crops were grown in a manner less harmful to the environment and people; growers seek to reduce pesticide use and water and energy consumption, or pursue organic, biodynamic, or regenerative certifications.
- The final product does not contain unnecessary additives, and is free of artificial colors, flavors, and preservatives.
- The supplier has or is working to reduce the carbon footprint of their operations, which could include installing renewable energy, developing programs to reduce waste and energy consumption, reducing packaging materials, enrolling in a carbon offset program, or shifting any vehicles to fully electric.
- Workers are treated with respect, are not subjected to unsafe working conditions, and are paid a fair wage.

Why doesn’t PCC offer only organic alcoholic beverages?

The supply of organic certified alcoholic beverages that also meets our quality, taste, and cost standards is simply not sufficient yet in the retail marketplace. PCC gives preference to organic and sustainable products, and encourages vendors to pursue organic ingredients, use fewer additives, and be transparent about their ingredients in an effort to help shift the market in the right direction. The organic sector has had enormous growth over the last decade and alcoholic beverage producers are beginning to join that growth, which will lead to a larger selection of organic and sustainably producer options.

I’ve heard concerning information about sulfites, why doesn’t PCC prohibit them?

PCC encourages wine vendors to use sulfites responsibly and not in excess, but they are a naturally occurring substance in wine resulting from the fermentation process. Scientific evidence indicates sulfites are safe at reasonable levels for most of the population. They are found in all wines at some level and prevent the wine from oxidizing, preserving flavor and freshness.

By law, wines that contain more than 10 parts per million (ppm) of sulfites must disclose on the bottle that it contains sulfites. Because even naturally occurring sulfites in wine production often exceed the 10-ppm standard, most bottles make a sulfites disclosure, even if no sulfites were added beyond those naturally occurring.ⁱ

Except for those suffering from a sulfite allergy, our research shows that there is a lack of conclusive evidence concerning any negative impacts from consuming sulfites. For example, many foods naturally contain sulfites or related sulfur compounds, such as peanuts, eggs, chives, leeks, and broccoli.ⁱⁱ Also, some experts indicate that the “wine headache” that is often attributed to sulfites is more likely caused by something else, such as histamines,

tannins, or polyphenols in the wine.ⁱⁱⁱ Yet, we do recognize that for some with sulfite sensitivities or allergies, sulfites can be a concern and encourage these individuals to avoid both naturally occurring and additive sources in all foods, not just wine. If you are looking minimize sulfite consumption in alcoholic beverages, opt for the certified organic wines and beer which may have naturally occurring amounts, but no added sulfites.

ⁱ Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau, "Wine Labeling: Declaration of Sulfites," TTB, September 26, 2019, <https://www.ttb.gov/labeling-wine/wine-labeling-declaration-of-sulfites>.

ⁱⁱ Block, Eric. "organosulfur compound". *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 14 Aug. 2018, <https://www.britannica.com/science/organosulfur-compound>.

ⁱⁱⁱ "Ask the Doctor: What Causes Red Wine Headaches?," Harvard Health, December 2017, <https://www.health.harvard.edu/diseases-and-conditions/ask-the-doctor-what-causes-red-wine-headaches>.