

Bill would expand farm winery provisions

Written by Senator John Lowe

Farm wineries would be authorized to sell alcoholic beverages produced by other manufacturers under certain circumstances under a bill heard by the General Affairs Committee Jan. 30.

LB259, introduced by Kearney Sen. John Lowe, would allow farm wineries to sell beer, mixed drinks and other alcoholic beverages not produced by the farm winery for consumption on their premises if they hold the appropriate retail license.

Lowe said he introduced LB259 to grant farm wineries the same opportunities afforded to craft breweries by a bill passed last session.

Hobert Rupe, executive director of the Nebraska Liquor Control Commission, spoke in support of LB259. He said passage of the bill would reduce significantly the number of special designated license applications processed by the commission, which temporarily authorize alcohol sales on a premises.

“The only way a [farm winery] can have any product other than that produced on their own is through an SDL,” Rupe said. “This is probably going to be 600 SDLs we [currently] issue a year that are going to come off our plate.”

Also testifying in support of the bill was Mick McDowell, co-owner of Miletta Vista Winery. McDowell said the bill would help meet Nebraskans needs by increasing flexibility for customers, decreasing the Nebraska Liquor Control Commission’s SDL workload, improving customer service and broadening the customer base.

“We support the modification of the Farm Winery Act to allow the sale of beer and other alcoholic liquor not produced by our winery to help meet customer requests as we work to create a wine culture in our state,” McDowell said.

Project Extra Mile representative Chris Wagner spoke in opposition to the bill. He said LB259 would go against the established literature on how to reduce the harmful effects of alcohol.

“The World Health Organization recommends three ‘best buys’ for state and local governments to prevent and reduce excessive alcohol consumption and its harms — reducing advertising, affordability and availability,” Wagner said. “[LB259] increases the availability of alcohol in communities across the state.”

The committee took no immediate action on the bill.