

Could That Chardonnay Be a Gluten Danger?

Wine is often the alcoholic beverage of choice for those with celiac disease and gluten sensitivities. For those with celiac disease or gluten sensitivities, ingesting gluten can be a serious health hazard. Wine—made of grapes and yeast— has always been assumed to be gluten free. In the last several years information on certain barreling and fining techniques in the winemaking process have brought that assumption into question.

The Problem.

Until recently, the assumption has been that since wine is made solely from grapes and yeast, both gluten free ingredients, wine is *also* gluten free.

Wine has seemed a safe choice for celiacs and those suffering other gluten sensitivities, when so many other grain-based alcoholic beverages have been disallowed.

Research has been brought to light some wineries age both red and white wines (in the price point of over \$12/bottle) in barrels made from white oak staves. Common cooperage practice has been to seal the cap of the barrel with wheat paste to prevent leaking. This practice introduces a possible point of gluten contamination into the wines aged in these barrels.

The second possible point of gluten contamination comes during the fining process in which wine is clarified. In a (now nearly obsolete) practice of fining,¹ gluten was introduced into wines as a fining agent, acting a protein that captured impurities and dragged them to the bottom to be extracted from the wine.

The Research.

In a test published on The Gluten Free Dietician² two types of wine aged in barrels, a Cabernet Sauvignon and a Merlot, were tested in two batches by two different ELISA tests. Each test revealed that the both wines were < 5 ppm and <10 ppm respective of each test.³ 5 ppm is the smallest amount of gluten that can be detected with currently technology, and is far below the < 20 ppm that the FDA considers a food to be gluten free.⁴

Also, in 2012 the Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau (TTB) released an interim policy on the gluten free labeling of alcoholic beverages, disallowing for gluten free labeling of alcoholic beverages that used wheat, barley, rye, or crossbred varieties of these grains, as a starting material. This Interim Policy also puts forth that beverages that use any of the aforementioned grains, or additives, or storage materials that contained gluten may not be labeled gluten free.^{5 6}

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The Results.

In current cooperage practices, paraffin wax is now generally used in place of wheat paste for barrel sealing.⁷ It is very uncommon, especially in the United States, for wheat/gluten to be used as a fining agent, with most fining agents (if used at all) to be different varieties of animal proteins.⁸

In the final analysis, the amounts of gluten found in wines aged in barrels was less than what is actually measurable by ELISA tests, and very few (if any) wineries use wheat/gluten as a fining agent.

Sufferers from celiac disease or other gluten sensitivities can feel confident while sipping their favorite vintage that American wines are not a hidden gluten danger.

As with all health matters, it is up to the consumer to do her research on the matter and make an informed decision based on her own findings.

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¹ <http://telayawine.com/2014/wine-gluten-free/>

² <http://www.glutenfreedietitian.com/gluten-content-of-wine-aged-in-oak-barrels-sealed-with-wheat-paste/>

³ <http://www.glutenfreedietitian.com/gluten-content-of-wine-aged-in-oak-barrels-sealed-with-wheat-paste/>

⁴ <http://www.winespectator.com/webfeature/show/id/48789>

⁵⁵ <http://www.glutenfreedietitian.com/gluten-content-of-wine-aged-in-oak-barrels-sealed-with-wheat-paste/>

⁶ <http://www.ttb.gov/rulings/2012-2.pdf>

⁷ <http://winemakermag.com/941-can-you-tell-me-if-typical-wines-in-the-store-contain-gluten-or-if-certain-yeasts-contain-gluten>

⁸ <http://www.winespectator.com/webfeature/show/id/48789>