

New York: Wine in grocery stores remains shelved

By JIM MILLER jmiller@ftimes.com | Posted: Tuesday, September 13, 2011 10:50 am

Susan Hayes of Miles Wine Cellars made her position clear when Republican gubernatorial hopeful Rick Lazio visited Fox Run Vineyards in Benton last summer.

Any candidate who agreed to support grocery store wine sales would get the votes of everyone in the wine industry, she told him.

Lazio took no position that day, but the issue, one of Albany's heartiest perennials, hasn't disappeared.

Legislation to allow the sale of wine in grocery stores remains stuck in state Senate and Assembly committees. Many liquor stores remain opposed, along with the Council on Alcohol and Addictions of the Finger Lakes. Many wineries remain in favor, arguing that they need new markets to expand their business.

Scott Osborn, owner of Fox Run, called it "Economics 101."

"The more markets that one has closer to home, the more business you're going to do," he said.

Liquor stores worry about lost business, but Osborn said the number of liquor stores has increased in the 35 states that already allow grocery-store wine sales. He also noted that 70 percent of the population doesn't shop at liquor stores.

"It's not a lost sale to the liquor store," he said of a grocery-store sale. "It's a gained sale all around."

In addition, Osborn said the bill allowing wine sales in grocery stores includes several provisions designed to help liquor stores. They would be allowed to sell gift baskets and mixers, and the smaller stores would be allowed to sell to restaurants.

The bill, sponsored in the Senate by Tom O'Mara, R-53 of Big Flats, and in the Assembly by Joseph Morelle, D-132 of Irondequoit, will return to the table when the Legislature reconvenes.

"At this time, it's just up in the air," Osborn said. "I think the present governor has had other issues he wants to deal with before this."

Osborn said he isn't sure where Gov. Andrew Cuomo stands on the issue.

The governor's press office did not respond to a request for comment.