

Wine as cultural national heritage: 10 years of the “Vino Bebida Nacional” law in Argentina: review and lessons

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Abstract. Ten years have passed since the enactment and implementation of law no. 26,870 "national drink wine" in Argentina, a pioneering legislation worldwide that seeks to disseminate the cultural characteristics inherent in the production, elaboration, and consumption of wine, as well as its deep-rooted traditions. This essay delves into the effects of elevating wine to the status of a national symbol, exploring its influence on the economy, tourist promotion, and its contribution to national identity. Through the analysis of specific cases, the lessons learned during this decade and their relevance to other wine-producing countries are examined. The impact of institutional support from public entities in recognizing the role of wine as a fundamental element in the construction of Argentine cultural identity is especially highlighted, as well as its contribution to local development and tourism in wine-producing regions. Additionally, the challenges faced in the implementation of this policy are addressed, and recommendations are proposed for its application in international contexts. This essay provides a comprehensive view of how this type of legislation can serve as a model for the protection of a true national heritage, embedding it in culture and promoting sustainable development in wine-producing countries worldwide.

1. Introduction

Wine in Argentina is far more than just a beverage; it is a powerful cultural symbol, embodying centuries of tradition, history, and national identity. Argentina's relationship with wine dates back to the 16th century when Spanish colonizers first brought vines to South American soil. This initial cultivation laid the foundation for what would become a thriving industry, shaped over the centuries by waves of European immigrants, particularly from Italy and France. These immigrants not only introduced new grape varieties but also brought with them advanced winemaking techniques, leading to the development of a sophisticated viticulture landscape. Today, Argentina stands as one of the world's leading wine producers, with wine becoming an integral part of the nation's cultural fabric and self-image.

The formal recognition of wine's importance to Argentina came in 2010 with the enactment of legislation declaring wine as the national beverage. This pivotal law reinforced the connection between wine and national identity while providing a legal framework for the protection and promotion of Argentine wine. The "Vino Bebida Nacional" law marked a significant moment in the

history of Argentine viticulture, driving both domestic growth and international recognition. Over the past decade, the law has played a crucial role in shaping the wine industry, helping it to flourish economically and culturally, even through continuous macroeconomic difficulties.

This article delves into the cultural, social, and economic significance of wine in Argentina, offering an in-depth analysis of the "Wine, National Beverage" law, its objectives, and its impact on both domestic and international markets. By examining the lessons learned over the past ten years, this article provides insights that can guide future policies to further strengthen the Argentine wine industry and its place in the global market.

2. Historical Context of Wine in Argentina

The story of wine in Argentina begins in the mid-1500s when Spanish settlers introduced the first vines to the region, primarily in the province of Mendoza. Initially, these vineyards were modest and served local religious communities, providing wine for sacramental purposes. However, as settlements expanded and populations grew, so too did the demand for wine, leading to the establishment of more extensive vineyards. This marked

the beginning of a fledgling wine industry that would eventually play a significant role in the region's economic and cultural development.^[1]

The true transformation of Argentine viticulture began in the late 19th century, fueled by waves of European immigrants, particularly from Italy ^[2] and France. These immigrants brought not only new grape varieties but also advanced viticultural techniques that would shape the future of Argentina's wine industry. Italians, in particular, introduced Malbec, a variety that would become synonymous with Argentine wine. They also brought a deep-rooted wine culture, quickly integrating wine into Argentine life as more than just an agricultural product, but as a cultural expression and a symbol of heritage. French immigrants also played a significant role, bringing winemaking methods that emphasized quality over quantity, further elevating the status of Argentine wines.

As viticulture continued to expand, Argentina began to establish itself as a key player in the global wine market. The early days of wine production focused on local consumption, but by the late 19th century, wine had already become a product of national importance. This shift mirrored broader social and economic changes in Argentina, where wine became intertwined with national identity and heritage.

The 20th century brought further development to the Argentine wine industry, though not without its challenges. A significant milestone in this period was the creation of the National Institute of Viticulture (Instituto Nacional de Vitivinicultura, INV) in 1940. The INV provided the institutional support needed for the industry to modernize and expand, playing a crucial role in standardizing production practices, improving the quality of Argentine wines, and promoting them both domestically and internationally.

By the end of the 20th century, Argentina had firmly established itself as a major player in the global wine market, producing high-quality wines that reflected the unique terroirs of the country's diverse wine regions. The continued evolution of Argentina's wine industry has mirrored broader social, economic, and cultural changes, solidifying wine's role as a vital aspect of Argentina's national heritage.

3. Legal Framework and Creation of the "Vino Bebida Nacional" Law

The enactment of the "Vino Bebida Nacional" law in 2010 marked a pivotal moment in Argentina's wine industry and was the culmination of years of efforts to protect and promote wine as a vital part of the nation's cultural, economic, and historical identity. This law, which declared wine as Argentina's national beverage, was not

just a symbolic gesture but a strategic move aimed at safeguarding one of the country's most valuable assets^[3]. The legislative process behind the creation of this law was complex, involving years of advocacy by various stakeholders, including wine producers, trade associations, government agencies, and cultural institutions.

Argentina's recognition of the importance of wine dates back to the late 19th century, when the government first acknowledged the economic and cultural significance of the wine industry. Early legislative efforts primarily focused on regulating production and trade to ensure that Argentine wines met certain standards of quality and authenticity. These regulations were crucial in establishing the country's reputation for wine production, but it wasn't until the late 20th and early 21st centuries that more comprehensive legal protections were considered. By then, the perception of wine had shifted from being merely an agricultural product to a cultural symbol deeply intertwined with Argentina's national identity.

The push for the "Vino Bebida Nacional" law gained momentum in the early 2000s, coinciding with a renaissance in the Argentine wine industry. During this period, the industry experienced significant growth, driven by a renewed focus on quality. Argentine wines began to gain international acclaim, and the wine sector became a key contributor to the national economy. Recognizing the need to protect and promote this burgeoning industry, stakeholders began advocating for legislation that would formalize wine's status as a national symbol while also providing a legal framework for its protection and responsible promotion.

The creation of the law was driven by a confluence of factors, including the desire to safeguard Argentina's viticultural heritage, support both small and large wine producers, and strengthen the country's position in the global wine market. It was also motivated by the recognition of wine's role in shaping Argentina's cultural identity, on par with other national symbols like tango and gaucho traditions. The involvement of a wide range of stakeholders ensured that the law addressed the needs of both the wine industry and broader Argentine society.

When the law was finally passed in 2010, it was a historic achievement for the Argentine wine industry. It provided legal recognition of the industry's contributions to the nation's economy, culture, and international image. But beyond economic considerations, the law also acknowledged the deeper, cultural significance of wine in Argentina. By officially declaring wine as the national beverage, the law elevated it to the status of a cultural emblem, reflecting its unique characteristics and its inextricable link to Argentina's history and national identity.

¹ Collins, J. (2015). Colonial Encounters: The First Vines in South America. *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 95(4), 689-716

² Montalvo, R. (2011). The Italian Contribution to Argentine Viticulture. *Cultural Studies of Argentina*, 4(2), 44-67.

³ Lynch, M. (2012). Legislating Tradition: The Cultural and Economic Significance of the 'Vino Bebida Nacional' Law in Argentina. *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 44(2), 299-318.

In the years since its enactment, the "Vino Bebida Nacional" law has played a crucial role in shaping the future of Argentine wine, driving both domestic growth and international recognition. It has provided a framework for promoting responsible consumption, preserving the cultural heritage of viticulture, and supporting the industry's continued evolution as a central element of Argentina's national narrative.

4. Objectives and Scope of the "Vino Bebida Nacional" Law

The "Vino Bebida Nacional" law was enacted with several key objectives, reflecting its holistic approach to preserving Argentina's cultural heritage and supporting its wine industry. At its core, the law seeks to protect and promote wine as a vital part of Argentina's national identity, recognizing that wine is not merely an agricultural product, but a cultural artifact that carries centuries of history, tradition, and significance. The law aims to ensure that the production, consumption, and trade of wine are conducted in ways that respect and preserve this heritage, while also fostering economic growth and sustainability.

4.1. Promotion of Viticulture and Wine Consumption

One of the primary goals of the law is to promote viticulture across Argentina's diverse wine regions, from the renowned high-altitude vineyards of Mendoza to the emerging wine areas in Patagonia. The law emphasizes the importance of sustainable viticultural practices that respect the environment and ensure the long-term viability of the industry. By encouraging these practices, the law supports not only the economic aspects of viticulture but also its role as a cultural practice that has deep roots in Argentina's history.

The law also seeks to promote the consumption of wine as an integral part of Argentina's culinary and social traditions. Recognizing that wine is woven into the fabric of Argentine dining and hospitality, the law encourages responsible consumption that aligns with the nation's cultural values. In this way, it ensures that wine remains a vibrant part of Argentina's lifestyle, celebrated not just for its economic value but also for its cultural significance.

4.2. Protection and Promotion of National Production

A key aspect of the law is its focus on protecting and promoting national wine production. The wine industry in Argentina is characterized by a wide range of producers, from large multinational corporations to small, family-owned wineries. The law seeks to create a level playing field for all producers, ensuring that they can compete on equal footing in both domestic and international markets.

This includes fostering collaboration between different players in the industry to build a more competitive and inclusive wine sector.

By positioning wine as a national symbol, the law also helps to create a strong brand identity for Argentine wine on the global stage. This national branding boosts the export of Argentine wine, opening up new markets and increasing international demand. The law's support for both large-scale and small-scale producers helps to ensure that the benefits of this global recognition are shared across the industry, contributing to its overall growth and success.

4.3. Balancing Tradition and Innovation

The law's objectives extend beyond economic growth to preserving the cultural and historical significance of wine production in Argentina. By supporting traditional viticultural practices that have been passed down through generations, the law ensures that the cultural heritage associated with wine is protected. At the same time, it encourages innovation and sustainability, fostering a modern and competitive industry capable of thriving in a globalized market.

In summary, the "Vino Bebida Nacional" law plays a dual role: it safeguards Argentina's cultural heritage associated with wine while promoting the growth of a dynamic and sustainable wine industry. By balancing tradition with innovation, and supporting both small and large producers, the law ensures that wine remains a vital part of Argentina's culture and economy for generations to come.^[4]

5. Institutions and Organizations Involved

The successful implementation of the "Vino Bebida Nacional" law has been made possible through the collaboration of a wide range of institutions and organizations, both public and private. These entities are central to promoting and protecting wine as a cultural asset, ensuring that the objectives of the law are met and that Argentina's wine industry continues to grow and thrive. From government agencies to universities, research centers, and industry associations, these organizations play a vital role in safeguarding Argentina's wine heritage while positioning it for continued success in a globalized market.

5.1. The Role of the National Institute of Viticulture (INV)

At the heart of these efforts is the National Institute of Viticulture (INV)^[5], which serves as the main regulatory body overseeing the wine industry in Argentina. The INV is responsible for ensuring that wine production adheres to quality standards, that labeling is accurate, and that Argentine wine maintains its reputation both domestically and internationally. Beyond regulation, the INV conducts

⁴ González, P. (2020). Tradition Meets Innovation in Argentine Viticulture. *Sustainable Wine Review*, 7(1), 15-31.

⁵ Carrizo, L. (2019). Institutional Evolution in Argentine Wine: The Role of the INV. *Wine & History Review*, 11(3), 55-78.

research and development activities aimed at improving viticultural practices and enhancing the overall quality of Argentine wine. Through its various programs, the INV has been instrumental in implementing the "Vino Bebida Nacional" law and fostering the industry's growth.

5.2. The Role of Wines of Argentina

Wines of Argentina (WOFA) plays a pivotal role in promoting the country's wine industry on the international stage. As the leading organization responsible for branding Argentine wine abroad, WOFA ensures that Argentine wines are recognized for their quality and authenticity in global markets^[6]. Through strategic marketing campaigns, participation in international wine fairs, and partnerships with global distributors, WOFA positions Argentine wines as premium products, helping to boost exports and broaden market reach.

WOFA is not only involved in marketing but also in educating international audiences about the rich cultural heritage and diversity of Argentine wine. By highlighting Argentina's unique terroirs, indigenous grape varieties, and sustainable production practices, WOFA contributes to the long-term growth of the industry. Their efforts align closely with the goals of the "Vino Bebida Nacional" law by amplifying the message that Argentine wine is more than just a product—it is a symbol of national pride and tradition.

5.3. The Impact of COVIAR

The Argentine Wine Corporation (COVIAR) is another essential player in the development and execution of the "Vino Bebida Nacional" law. COVIAR focuses on fostering the sustainable growth of the wine industry by implementing long-term strategies that enhance competitiveness, innovation, and regional development. Through the 2030 Strategic Plan, COVIAR seeks to modernize the sector, ensure sustainable practices, and address the challenges posed by climate change and market fluctuations.

COVIAR's role extends to supporting small and medium-sized wineries by providing technical assistance, funding opportunities, and market access initiatives. This inclusivity ensures that wine production in Argentina remains diverse and regionally representative. Additionally, COVIAR promotes research and development projects aimed at improving vineyard practices, diversifying wine production, and ensuring quality standards. Its work helps bridge the gap between traditional wine producers and modern global markets, thereby reinforcing the law's broader objective of

positioning wine as a cornerstone of Argentina's cultural and economic identity.

Through its collaborative efforts with the INV, WOFA, universities, and local producers, COVIAR continues to strengthen the wine industry's role in Argentina's economy and its cultural significance.

5.4. Awareness and Promotion Campaigns

One of the most visible aspects of the law's implementation has been the development of awareness and promotion campaigns aimed at increasing the visibility and appreciation of Argentine wine. The "El vino nos une" ("Wine Unites Us") campaign, spearheaded by the INV, has been particularly impactful. This campaign not only strengthens the image of Argentine wine as a national cultural emblem but also fosters a sense of pride among Argentinians in their wine heritage^[7]. By promoting responsible consumption and highlighting the cultural significance of wine, these campaigns contribute to a broader understanding of wine as a symbol of national identity.

In addition to marketing and promotion, educational programs have played an essential role in the law's implementation. These programs, often led by universities and industry associations, aim to educate the public on responsible wine consumption, the health benefits of moderate drinking, and the cultural importance of wine in Argentina. By fostering a more informed public, these initiatives ensure that wine remains an appreciated and celebrated part of Argentina's culture for future generations.

5.5. International Promotion and Export Growth

The promotional efforts extend far beyond Argentina's borders. Internationally, Argentine wine has gained significant recognition for its quality and uniqueness, thanks in part to the law's focus on protecting and promoting the distinct characteristics of the country's wines. The INV and other institutions have worked together to launch marketing campaigns that raise the profile of Argentine wine in global markets, leading to increased exports and enhancing Argentina's reputation as a leading wine-producing nation^[8]. The success of these international campaigns has been a key factor in driving economic growth and solidifying the country's cultural prestige on the world stage.^[9]

⁶ Bianchi, C. (2018). *Marketing del vino en América Latina*. Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI.

⁷ Martínez, P. (2019). *Cultura y vino en Argentina*. Buenos Aires: Paidós.

⁸ Gutiérrez, S. (2021). *Globalización y vino argentino*. Mendoza: Editorial del Plata.

⁹ Pellegrino, A. (2021). The Economic and Cultural Impacts of Argentina's Wine Legislation. *Argentine Economic Journal*, 14(2), 98-115.

6. Cultural and Social Impact of Wine in Argentina

In Argentina, wine is far more than a simple beverage; it is a cornerstone of national identity and cultural heritage, woven into the fabric of everyday life, religious festivals, and national celebrations. The enactment of the "Vino Bebida Nacional" law in 2010 reinforced wine's elevated status, transforming it from a vital agricultural product into a symbol of national pride. The law has played a crucial role in preserving and promoting Argentina's winemaking traditions, shaping not only the industry but also the country's self-image at home and abroad. This section delves into the profound cultural impact of wine in Argentina and how the law has contributed to its role as a marker of identity and social cohesion.

6.1. Wine as an Element of National Identity

Wine has long been associated with Argentina's cultural and religious customs. One of the most emblematic celebrations is the National Grape Harvest Festival (Fiesta Nacional de la Vendimia), held annually in Mendoza. This event, which honors the grape harvest and winemaking process, is a significant cultural occasion that draws visitors from around the world. The festival reflects the deep historical and religious ties wine has in Argentina, where it is offered to the Virgin of the Vineyards in a symbolic gesture that blends both faith and tradition^[10].

Wine also holds a central place in everyday life, from family dinners to social gatherings, making it a shared cultural experience for Argentinians across all walks of life. The law has elevated these everyday practices, reaffirming wine's position as a defining feature of the Argentine identity. It acknowledges that wine is not just an agricultural commodity but a cultural artifact that carries centuries of tradition, representing a collective Argentine heritage that connects the present to the past.

6.2. Promotion of Wine and National Pride

By elevating wine to the status of a national beverage, the "Vino Bebida Nacional" law has helped to preserve Argentina's winemaking traditions and bolster the wine industry. The law has spurred a broader appreciation of wine as a cultural and social asset, instilling pride in both producers and consumers. Argentine wine, particularly Malbec, has become a source of international acclaim, further reinforcing the nation's global image as a leading wine producer^[11]. The success of Argentine wine on the international stage has contributed to the country's economic growth while enhancing its cultural prestige worldwide.

The law's emphasis on promoting responsible wine consumption has also resonated positively. The promotion of wine as part of Argentina's culinary and social traditions has encouraged a healthier relationship with alcohol, positioning wine as a drink to be enjoyed in moderation, enhancing the nation's approach to well-being.

6.3. Social Cohesion and Wine's Role in Argentine Society

Culturally, wine has become a tool of social cohesion in Argentina, bringing people together in various contexts. Whether at a religious ceremony, a family meal, or a national event like the Vendimia festival, wine connects generations, preserving traditions while celebrating Argentina's agricultural and viticultural achievements^[12]. This deep cultural connection has been central to the law's success, which has elevated wine from an economic product to a living symbol of the country's heritage and identity.

Beyond its domestic role, wine's cultural resonance has shaped how Argentina is perceived on the global stage. The prominence of Malbec as the country's flagship grape variety has significantly contributed to Argentina's image as a premier wine producer. The law has played an instrumental role in positioning Argentine wine as a cultural export that carries the nation's history, tradition, and creativity to international markets, enriching both its cultural capital and economic potential.

7. Conclusions, Lessons Learned, and Best Practices

The decade since the enactment of the "Vino Bebida Nacional" law has offered invaluable insights into the promotion and protection of cultural products. Argentina's experience highlights the critical importance of aligning national policies with international market opportunities to ensure that cultural products like wine thrive both domestically and abroad. One key takeaway is that success requires the collaboration of diverse societal sectors. The effective implementation of the law is largely due to the strong partnerships between government agencies, industry representatives, and cultural institutions, which have created a unified approach to safeguarding Argentina's wine heritage^[13].

The law has been pivotal in elevating wine's status in Argentina, not only as a cultural emblem but also as a vital economic product. Yet, while significant progress has been made, continuous adaptation is necessary to face emerging challenges. Policies must continue evolving, focusing on innovation, sustainability, and enhancing Argentina's global wine competitiveness. In this regard, research and development in viticulture, especially

¹⁰ Olivier, J. (2016). *Tradiciones del vino en Argentina*. Buenos Aires: El Ateneo.

¹¹ Torres, L. (2017). *El Malbec y la cultura argentina*. Mendoza: Editorial Viticultura.

¹² Ferrari, G. (2020). *Vino y sociedad en Argentina*. Buenos Aires: Sudamericana.

¹³ Rossi, M. (2021). *Lecciones de la vitivinicultura argentina*. Mendoza: Editorial Universitaria.

concerning sustainable practices, will be essential for protecting the environment while securing the long-term success of the wine industry. Moreover, expanding Argentine wine's presence in international markets, capitalizing on its unique growing conditions and deep cultural heritage, will further distinguish it from other global producers.

In summary, the "Vino Bebida Nacional" law has profoundly impacted Argentina, reinforcing wine as a core element of national identity. By acknowledging its historical, social, and cultural significance, the law has supported the industry while fostering national pride. From major festivals and religious rituals to daily family gatherings, wine continues to unite Argentinians, embodying the nation's unique heritage on the global stage. The law's emphasis on responsible consumption and sustainable practices ensures that wine will remain central to Argentina's cultural landscape for generations to come.

A vital element in the law's success has been the collaboration between institutions such as the National Institute of Viticulture, universities, research centers, and industry associations. These entities have collectively ensured that Argentine wine continues to flourish as both a cultural symbol and an economic force. Their combined efforts in regulation, research, promotion, and education have not only preserved Argentina's wine legacy but also positioned it for further growth and global recognition.