

Canadian labelling saga gathers steam

24 Sep 2009 by Jancis Robinson

27 Sep - See response from LCBO below.

Can a saga gather steam? I'm not sure, but I am sure that I'm delighted that the issue highlighted several times on this site, most recently in early August in [Canadian con contd](#), has become a national news story in Canada itself, not least because earlier this month it was the subject of an article in no less a publication than *The Economist* headed 'Blended deceit from the nanny state'.

A news story on 18 Sep headed [Consumers 'deceived'...](#) in the *Vancouver Sun* stirred things up, even if it initially suggested that the phenomenon of misleadingly labelling imported wines as 'Cellared in Canada' and displaying them in the government-owned monopoly stores as though they were Canadian was limited to British Columbia.

In fact, the omnipotent LCBO in Ontario is every bit as culpable in this respect and continues to display Cellared in Canada imports on shelves labelled Ontario, I am told.

Vancouver wine writer Anthony Gismondi wrote an excellent [comment piece](#) on the issue to accompany the news story on 18 Sep.

As noted in [members' forum](#), this week I have been interviewed by one Canada morning radio show on Tuesday and will be interviewed by CBC radio's morning current affairs programme *The Current* tomorrow.

There was a [follow-up article](#) about consumers' angry reaction to this deceptive labelling and marketing in the *Vancouver Sun* yesterday, about which I was glad, because it aired many of the issues involved and pulled no punches.

But I was a bit miffed to see the article illustrated by a full-size version of the image used here, a very amateur photograph I took with my Blackberry in one of government liquor stores in Vancouver when I was there last July. This is now being touted by the *Vancouver Sun* as one of their own handsome picture library, it seems. Talk about unintended consequences...

26 Sep - Photo credit now fixed. Thank you. CBC interview can be heard in the second segment at [The Current](#). More comments in our [members' forum](#).

27 Sep - Chris Layton, Media Relations Co-ordinator, LCBO Corporate Communications sends the following from Ontario's liquor monopoly:

I read with interest your September 24 opinion piece on your website, Canadian labelling saga gathers steam, and I would like to correct the record with regard to LCBO practices.

In Ontario, the LCBO does not display Cellared-in-Canada products on shelves labelled Ontario, as you were told. The LCBO separates the VQA sections from the Cellared-in-Canada sections in its stores with prominent signage differentiating the two sections. VQA wines are also clearly distinguished from Cellared-in-Canada wines by the VQA logo that appears on VQA bottles. (Only VQA wines can be called Ontario). Display materials for VQA wines featured in our current LCBO promotion of Ontario-produced wines state that these wines are made from 100 per cent Ontario-grown grapes, while materials accompanying Cellared-in-Canada wines clearly indicate that these wines are a blend of imported and domestic wines.

Not only that but LCBO staff are trained to explain the differences and help customers find VQA wines. Some 300 LCBO employees, called WOW (World of Ontario Wines) Leaders, are designated to promote Ontario VQA wines in stores with customers -- VQA wines are also regularly recommended as staff picks.

The LCBO also has many initiatives in place to support Ontario wines, including an annual, four-week province-wide

promotion from mid-September to mid-October, display prominence at the front of the stores, shelf space that in most stores exceeds their market share and programs to assist small VQA wine producers.

These initiatives are paying off. Dollar sales of VQA table wines at LCBO stores increased almost 17.4 per cent between April 1 and the end of August this year, compared to the same period in fiscal 2008-09. Imported table wines increased by less than one per cent and non-VQA wines produced by Ontario wineries (mostly Cellared-in-Canada) were up less than three per cent.

In addition to LCBO support, VQA sales growth can also be attributed to high quality products that Ontario wineries are producing and the consumer interest in buying local. We commend the Ontario wineries for bringing more appealing and innovative products to the market.

The LCBO is always interested in providing its customers with as much information as possible to make informed decisions. In keeping with this, we have been surveying our customers on how they perceive Cellared-in-Canada wines and whether more clarity is needed regarding their content. Although this research is not complete as yet, preliminary feedback suggests our customers would appreciate more information and we are taking note of this.

One more point for the record, Cellared-in-Canada wines in Ontario are allowed to have up to 70 per cent imported wine or wine content, not 100 per cent, as in B.C.

I answered:

Very many thanks for all that useful information which I will publish on my website. Unfortunately it has only just reached me as it was addressed to our Subscriptions department.

I am delighted that you no longer put Cellared in Canada wines on shelves marked Ontario, as was the case when I last visited an LCBO store. So is that section headed 'Cellared in Canada' then?

28 Sep - LCBO answered:

Yes, Jancis, the section for Cellared-in-Canada wines is headed "Cellared-in-Canada".

Bravo!