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March 21, 2007

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Six Renowned Wine Regions Join Growing Effort to Protect Place Names

Expansion coincides with increased awareness among consumers, producers of importance of location to winemaking

Washington, DC - The wine regions of Sonoma County and Paso Robles, California; Chianti Classico, Italy; Tokaj, Hungary; and, Victoria, and Western Australia, Australia added their names to a growing list of signatories of the Joint Declaration to Protect Wine Place & Origin, a set of principles aimed at educating consumers about the importance of location to winemaking. These six wine regions join the seven founding members of the coalition - Napa Valley, Oregon, Washington, Walla Walla Valley, Champagne, Porto, and Jerez - in a signing ceremony in Washington, DC on Wednesday.

"We are proud to be a part of this effort. As an original signatory to the Joint Declaration, we welcome the other wine regions to the table. Their participation further demonstrates the growing, global movement to protect wine place names," said Peter McCrea, President of the Board of Directors, Napa Valley Vintners.

"We are excited to join this remarkable group of winemakers dedicated to protecting place names. Despite our fierce competition in the worldwide marketplace, we all agree that location is the most important ingredient in creating truly unique and distinctive wines," added Marco Pallanti, President of the Chianti Classico Wine Consortium.

As part of the events marking this historic gathering, representatives of the wine regions met with Members of Congress, Bush Administration officials and local leaders and dignitaries to inform them of their joint efforts to protect consumers from misleading labels. To cap activities in the nation's capital, wine region representatives will host a Congressional wine tasting and reception featuring unique wines from all regions.

The expansion of the Declaration is yet another milestone in the growing movement to protect place names and demand accurate and fair labeling. In 2005, the California Supreme Court ruled that a wine labeled "Napa Ridge" was required to source its grapes to the Napa Valley or cease to use the name on its label. In 2006, the U.S. Supreme Court declined to hear an appeal of the case. Last September, Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger signed a bill that requires any wine with "Sonoma" on its label to contain at least 75% wine made with grapes grown in Sonoma County. In December, Wine Accord negotiators met to discuss wine labeling in a second round of bi-lateral trade talks. And just announced, the European Union recognized Napa Valley as a Geographical Indication (GI) - making it the first wine region in North America to be recognized and protected in the European Union.

These recent events - trade policy changes, judicial actions, and legislative victories - coincide with an increasingly clear demand by American consumers for truth in labeling. In a national survey of U.S. wine consumers released in December 2006, 81% agreed that wines should only be allowed to use a specific geographic name on their labels if they are actually made in that location. (Fairbank, Maslin & Associates, 11/7-13).

"Americans are more knowledgeable than ever before about wine and will not settle for anything less than authentic products. Consumers have a right to know that the information printed on a bottle's label accurately reflects the origin of the wine they are purchasing. When a place name is misused, a part of the identity of that distinctive wine region is lost," said Pete Downs from Sonoma County.

The Joint Declaration to Protect Wine Place Names & Origin was signed by the original seven members on July 26, 2005. The full text of the Declaration can be found at www.protectplace.com.

Hear complete recorded audio coverage of the press conference at GrapeRadio: www.graperadio.com

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