

# Michigan Wines

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Michigan Grape and Wine Industry Council

## **Michigan Culinary Tourism Alliance to Form** *Specialty Food and Beverages in the Spotlight*

LANSING—Today, Michigan Department of Agriculture (MDA) Director and Grape and Wine Industry Council Chair Don Koivisto announced the launch of a culinary tourism initiative in Michigan. The goals of the project are to increase menu offerings of local products at restaurants across the state, increase sales and profitability for Michigan specialty crop producers, and promote Michigan as a destination for culinary travel experiences.

“With agriculture and tourism as the state’s second and third largest industries, it makes sense to promote Michigan as a rewarding travel destination for educational, healthy and tasty food experiences,” said Koivisto. “The food and agriculture industry continues to grow even in today’s economy, and the economic development boost the state could see from this type of collaboration will be significant. This is a tremendous opportunity to create increased business for the state’s specialty crop producers.”

MDA will help develop a Michigan Culinary Tourism Alliance in partnership with the Michigan Restaurant Association and Travel Michigan. The project is funded by a grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) with matching funds provided by MDA’s Michigan Grape and Wine Industry Council.

“The Michigan Grape and Wine Council is thrilled to be a part of this innovative partnership to offer visitors a taste of what Michigan has to offer,” said Linda Jones, Michigan Grape and Wine Industry Council program manager. “From fine wines and craft beers to apple cider, maple syrup and dried cherries, blueberries and cranberries, Michigan menus are of great interest to residents and visitors alike.”

The Michigan culinary tourism project was one of 745 grant recipients selected by USDA in 2009 under the Specialty Crop Block Grant Program, a program designed to enhance the competitiveness of U.S. specialty crops. Three additional rounds of competitive grant opportunities to assist specialty crop producers are anticipated in 2010, 2011 and 2012.

“We are excited to be a part of this project as many of our members are already actively supporting local producers and offering a unique Michigan experience when people dine,” said Rob Gifford, president and CEO of the Michigan Restaurant Association. “With the coordinated efforts provided through this grant, we will expand these experiences and help make Michigan known as a travel destination, allowing consumers a chance to fully experience the bounty of our great state.”

The Michigan Grape and Wine Industry Council is an 11-member panel that supports the growth of the grape and wine industry in Michigan. It is housed in the Agriculture Development Division of the Michigan Department of Agriculture, which is the official state agency charged with serving, promoting and protecting the food, agriculture and agricultural economic interests of the people of the state of Michigan.

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*Editor’s Note: This media release is available online at [www.michiganwines.com](http://www.michiganwines.com), in the Media section.*