

The 2026 International Cold Climate Wine Competition

**Sponsored by The Minnesota Wine & Grape Alliance &
The University of Minnesota Enology Research and Breeding Program
July 18, 2026**

Statement on Awarding the Governor's Cup

The International Cold Climate Wine Competition created the Governor's Cup to recognize the top Minnesota wine in the competition, awarding the winery that created it the traveling trophy for the year. The intent of the award is to increase the awareness of high-quality Minnesota wine, ultimately so customers can trust that Minnesota wine is worthy of their time and dollars, and to trust that the state can grow in successful businesses and in a quality reputation.

Knowing that wine is a complicated business, there are federal guidelines for what may be labeled Minnesota wine. The competition committee believes that the intent of its rules, in referencing the phrase "Minnesota wine", align with the federal labeling regulation on origin of fruit, with the addition also being produced by a winery inside the state.

At this year's competition, when selecting which wines would be judged for the Governor's Cup, the competition committee selected what it believed were the eligible Minnesota wines. After those wines had been judged, a winning wine was announced to those in attendance based off of the highest aggregate score. No official results had been announced or posted. Upon working to certify the results, however, the competition committee noticed that the winning wine was not labeled as a Minnesota wine. It was made from Minnesota fruit, but had received cellaring treatment and bottling out of state, with the out-of-state address appearing on the label. After many long and difficult discussions, the competition committee decided that this wine falls outside of its own definition of Minnesota wine, in the same way that it falls out of the federal labeling regulations for Minnesota wine, in that a customer looking at the bottle could not tell where it was produced. For that reason, it has been ruled ineligible for the Governor's Cup. The award then goes to the wine receiving the second highest aggregate score.

This wine competition, like many others, is run non-profit by volunteers, and strives to be accurate, honest, and fair. To that end, the competition committee is working to clarify and strengthen its rules so that all participants feel that their wines are evaluated fairly. Anyone who is interested in volunteering for the competition committee or any part of the Minnesota Wine and Grape Alliance is encouraged to do so.

I personally want to thank everybody involved in the competition, be they wineries, judges, hosts, or volunteers. We all want to make this the best industry we can, and I appreciate your efforts.

Ben Banks
ICCWC Chair