



Wine doggie bags becoming more popular in US

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Taking leftover food home from restaurants in the United States is an age-old practice, but nowadays diners are also asking that their partially drunk wine bottles be put in a doggie bag.

WASHINGTON (AFP) - The practice has grown steadily in the last few years and some 34 states, including New York, Illinois, Vermont and Florida, now have "doggie bag bills" that allow patrons to take home an unfinished bottle of wine.

The only condition is that the bottle be recorked and stashed in the trunk of a car to avoid violating open-container laws. Several states also require that bottles be placed in sealed, tamper-proof one-time use bags. "We've grown from a minimal number of states that allowed this practice to a majority of states that now allow it," Steve Gross, director of state relations at the California-based Wine Institute, an advocacy group, told AFP. "And the restaurant industry has started to embrace the concept."

At Emiliano's Cafe, in Florida, an average two to three customers a day ask to take home their unfinished bottle of wine, Diego Ibanez, the restaurant manager, said.

"We began offering this service in Summer 2005, shortly after the law was enacted, and it's been good for business," Ibanez said. "It's something that customers always requested."

"Now if you have a couple that wants to sample different wines, each can order a bottle and each can take the rest home."

Most of the so-called "Merlot To Go" or "Cork'n Carry" laws have been enacted in the last few years to discourage drinking and driving.

Proponents say the laws make sense as they encourage more responsible consumption of alcoholic beverages and reduce the pressure on restaurant patrons to finish a bottle of wine, especially if it's expensive.

"More people who may have thought twice about ordering a bottle of wine are going ahead with it now," said Adrian Lark, day manager at The Lark restaurant in the state of Michigan, where the average bottle of wine on the menu costs about 80 dollars.

Lark admitted, however, that few patrons are aware of the wine "doggie bag" law and that the restaurant has done little to advertise it. The same is true in many establishments across the country, industry professionals say.

"Consumers still don't know about the law and many restaurants don't even know about it," said Robert Beck, owner of a California-based company appropriately named WineDoggyBag.com, which supplies restaurants with bags designed for patrons wishing to take home unfinished bottles of wine.

Beck, who established his company in early 2005, said that restaurants that have done a better job of informing patrons have seen a jump in wine bottle sales.

"It's going to take a little while before it becomes widespread but as each day goes by we sell more and more bags," he said. "Our business in the last six months has tripled or quadrupled and we now sell hundreds of thousands of wine doggie bags."