

Alcohol Service at the Minnesota State Fair

Prior to 2000, alcohol service at the Minnesota State Fair was limited to 3.2 percent beer. Since 2000, the Minnesota Legislature and the State Agricultural Society (State Fair) have expanded and changed the nature of alcohol service at the fair.

Historically the service of alcohol has been limited on State Fair grounds

Prior to 2000, Minnesota Statutes, limited the service of intoxicating liquor on State Fair grounds. The prohibition was placed in the liquor statutes, amongst a number of other service limitations, in order to limit service of alcohol near public areas that were considered public places where alcohol should *not* be served. [Minnesota Statutes \(1999\), section 340A.412](#), subdivision 4, stated this flat prohibition:

“(a) No license to sell intoxicating liquor may be issued within the following areas:

...(3) on the state fairgrounds or any place in a city of the first class within one-half mile of the fairgrounds...”

This prohibition, however, applied only to intoxicating liquor. Low-alcohol beer (3.2 percent) is defined as nonintoxicating malt liquor in Minnesota Statutes. This allowed the State Fair to sell 3.2 percent alcohol beer, which the State Fair did for many years.

The legislature began expanding legalized service of alcohol

In 2000, the legislature legalized service of alcohol at special nonfair events on State Fair grounds and placed this special language in the chapter of statutes that governs the State Fair ([Minn. Stat. ch. 37](#)), creating a “State Fair” standard outside of general liquor laws. The State Fair could then host events that were either adult in nature or rental events, and allow alcohol service.

In 2003, the legislature legalized the service of Minnesota wines at the State Fair, with a license to be issued by the city of Saint Paul. In 2005, this law was changed to have Ramsey County issue the license.

The legislature allowed strong beer to be served

In 2007, the legislature legalized service of strong beer during the fair. Prior to that time, 3.2 beer had been served, but this expansion to strong beer marked a new chapter in alcohol service at the fair. In addition, the new law provided that at least one Minnesota beer must be sold at the fair.

These changes allowed the State Fair to expand into service of Minnesota craft beers, and to take part in the statewide growth of craft brewing.

In 2010, the State Agricultural Society (State Fair) was given the responsibility to issue all licenses to its vendors, a change from having Ramsey County serve as the licensing authority. This change was made with the cooperation of Ramsey County and allowed the State Fair to have greater control over vendors. The State Agricultural Society must comply with all Minnesota Statutes and is subject to the authority of the Department of Public Safety.

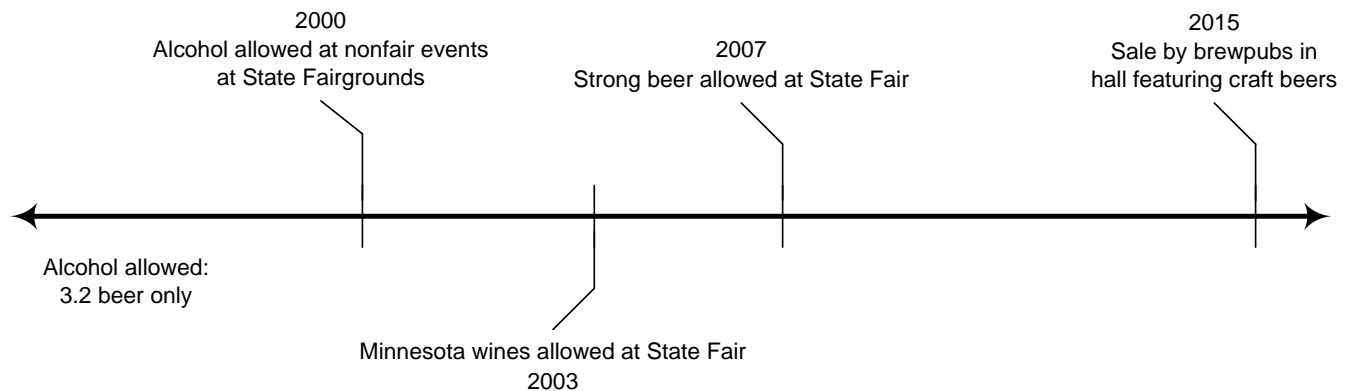
In 2015, the legislature allowed brewpubs to serve their beers at the State Fair, at one location, in the hall where craft beers are featured.

The service of alcohol at the fair has progressed over time

In summary, the State Fair is allowed to license the service of wine and beer for consumption on fair grounds. It cannot license the service of any other type of alcohol.

Service of alcohol at the State Fair has progressed over time, from state control with limited venues and service options to more open acceptance of alcohol on the general grounds of the fair. Historical customs, such as having beer limited to specific tents and limited to 3.2 service, have given way to general consumption across the grounds of the State Fair, controlled by the State Agricultural Society.

Timeline of Changes to Alcohol Service at the Minnesota State Fair



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