



November 23, 2023

Joel Harden, MPP Ottawa Centre
Lucille Collard, MPP Ottawa - Vanier

Dear MPP Harden and MPP Collard,

We are deeply concerned regarding the AGCO's recent and seemingly arbitrary decision to rescind licences from Mercato Zacconi (Preston Street BIA) and La Bottega Nicaastro (Downtown Rideau BIA) to sell takeaway alcohol.

This decision has serious implications for our small businesses and area residents.

Ottawa small businesses have adapted their models in response to the pandemic. In 2021, when the Government of Ontario made it possible for restaurants to sell takeaway alcohol alongside food, these small businesses began offering "to-go" wine and beer to service residents in your respective constituencies.

For Little Italy, this densely populated area in Ottawa, publicly referenced as a "food-desert", is devoid of an affordable, large grocer that is accessible to locals who rely on public transit and/or walkable amenities. This represents **83% of the population** in Ottawa's Little Italy.

The AGCO has chosen to revoke Mercato Zacconi and La Bottega Nicaastro's takeaway beer and wine licence, which presents a significant issue for residents who rely on the convenience of purchasing alcohol products alongside their groceries.

This restriction has **only been enforced at two Ottawa-based establishments**. Other small grocery stores and delis across the province continue to sell "to-go" beer and wine, some even just steps away, with no issues from liquor inspectors to date.

The **AGCO's mandate is to "establish a framework of critical regulatory controls in the public interest that are sensitive to the economic viability of the alcohol and gaming industry"**. This grey area and arbitrary enforcement provides no benefit to small businesses or to the greater public. As they have a restriction to space being a minimum of 10,000 square feet, this is truly only benefitting large businesses and big players.

Removing wine from the shelves of a responsible, independent locally-owned and operated grocer does nothing to further this mandate and it most certainly does not support small business.

To the families owning and operating these businesses, for whom wine and beer sales represent a significant part of their revenues and who worked hard to develop these business models, it means livelihoods are impacted.

We are requesting that you please advocate for the small businesses impacted by these arbitrary and antiquated restrictions for the small businesses in your constituencies; and request the AGCO reverse these decisions.

Thank you for your consideration,
Michelle Groulx
Executive Director
Ottawa Coalition of Business Improvement Areas



THE OTTAWA COALITION OF BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT AREAS

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