

MICAP RECAP

December 2005

Are American Drinking Patterns Ready for Another Change?

In our last issue, we reported on presentations made at the annual meeting of the American Council on Alcohol Problems, citing data confirming a substantial decrease in alcohol consumption during the decade of the 1990s.

Between 1990 and 2000, the per capita consumption of alcohol from beer, wine and liquor for the Drinking Age Population (14 years and older) dropped by 11.2 percent. United Methodist Bishop Jack Tuell called this phenomenon the biggest unreported news story in recent years.

Shortly after our October issue of *MICAP RECAP* went out, we read in the alcohol industry newsletter, *Kane's Beverage Daily* about reported increases in alcohol sales:

- Constellation Brands Wine Sales were up 19 percent,
- Imported Beer Sales Rose 9 percent and
- Liquor Sales Inched up by 2 percent.

We began to wonder if the trend toward declining alcohol consumption had peaked, and if Americans were ready to continue their double-digit increases in alcohol consumption established in the previous two decades.

A new trend appears to be developing in American drinking practices, as evidenced by the most recent Gallup Poll, which concludes that wine has edged out beer as the alcoholic beverage adult drinkers say they consume the most.

As recently as last year, beer edged out wine as America's standard alcoholic drink. Now, 39 percent of drinkers in the United States say they drink wine most often, while 36 percent say beer is their usual alcoholic beverage choice.

We wondered if the emergence of wine as the alcoholic beverage of choice for drinkers might signal the beginning of a new trend. There is no question that wine sales are on the increase, fueled at

least in part by the U.S. Supreme Court ruling that opened the door for Internet sales, bypassing wholesalers and making wine less expensive for the consumer.

Apparent consumption figures are available through 2004, but until sales are converted to per capita consumption, accurate trends cannot be confirmed. So it was that we decided to make a per capita comparison of 2004 data with 2000 and sure enough, the evidence indicates that our national trend toward consuming less alcohol appears to have made a complete turnaround.

Table A shows, on a state-by-state basis, changes in absolute alcohol consumption for 1990, 2000 and 2004. For the decade of the 1990s, 18 states registered a double-digit decline in per capita alcohol consumption, but by 2004, no state registered a decline and 17 states reported double-digit increases.

During the decade of the 1990s, alcohol consumption in Michigan dropped from a per capita of 2.42

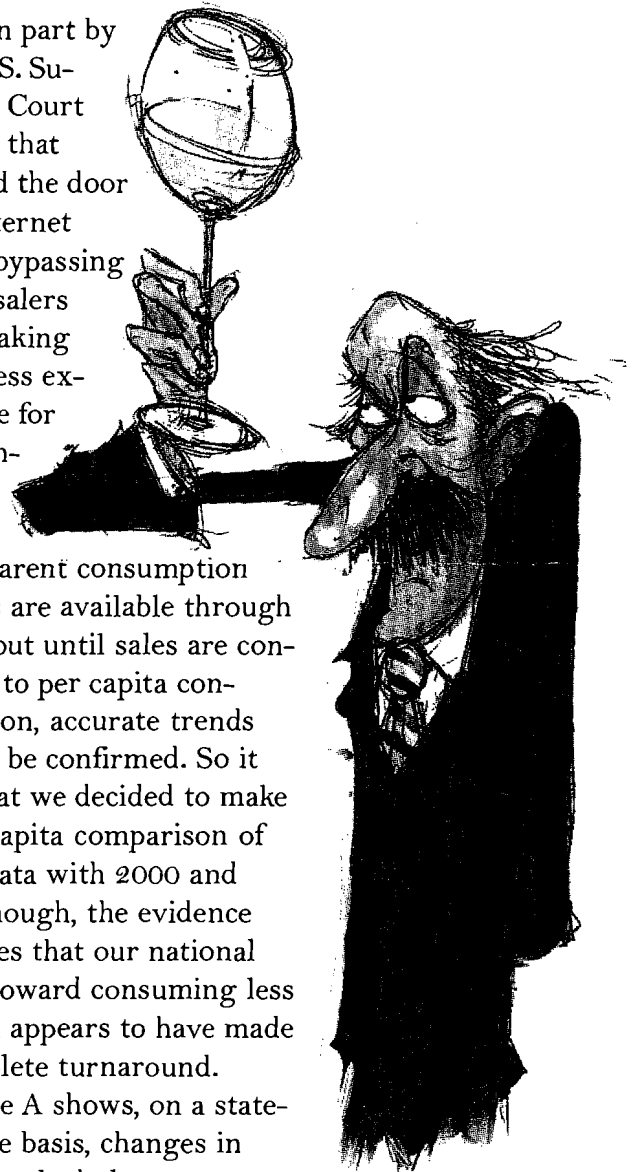


TABLE A**Changes in Absolute Alcohol Consumption 1990-2004 in gallons**

	1990	2000	% Change	2004	% Change
Alabama	1.93	1.90	- 1.55%	2.03	+ 6.84%
Alaska	3.31	2.75	-16.92%	2.88	+ 4.72%
Arizona	2.86	2.57	-10.14%	2.88	+12.06%
Arkansas	1.87	1.79	- 4.28%	1.92	+ 7.26%
California	2.81	2.29	-18.51%	2.45	+ 6.99%
Colorado	2.44	2.64	+ 8.20%	2.92	+10.61%
Connecticut	2.50	2.27	- 9.20%	2.38	+ 4.84%
Delaware	2.97	2.97	—	3.58	+20.54%
District of Columbia	4.16	3.69	- 11.30%	3.76	+ 1.90%
Florida	3.04	2.62	- 13.82%	2.98	+13.74%
Georgia	2.45	2.21	- 9.80%	2.26	+ 2.26%
Hawaii	2.85	2.47	- 13.33%	2.54	+ 2.83%
Idaho	2.27	2.07	- 8.81%	2.33	+12.56%
Illinois	2.67	2.29	-14.23%	2.37	+ 3.49%
Indiana	2.11	2.04	- 3.32%	2.13	+ 4.41%
Iowa	2.02	2.03	+ 0.50%	2.18	+ 7.39%
Kansas	1.80	1.84	+ 2.22%	1.98	+ 7.61%
Kentucky	2.08	1.78	- 14.42%	1.88	+ 5.62%
Louisiana	3.07	2.50	- 18.57%	2.55	+ 2.00%
Maine	2.43	2.26	- 7.00%	2.57	+13.72%
Maryland	2.52	2.13	- 15.48%	2.37	+11.27%
Massachusetts	2.79	2.49	- 10.75%	2.62	+ 5.22%
Michigan	2.42	2.18	- 9.92%	2.29	+ 5.05%
Minnesota	2.72	2.42	- 11.03%	2.64	+ 9.09%
Mississippi	2.02	2.19	+ 8.42%	2.24	+ 2.28%
Missouri	2.22	2.28	+ 2.70%	2.44	+ 7.02%
Montana	2.66	2.59	- 2.63%	2.93	+13.13%
Nebraska	2.29	2.26	- 1.31%	2.39	+ 5.75%
Nevada	4.89	3.93	- 19.63%	4.47	+13.74%
New Hampshire	4.32	4.14	- 4.17%	4.50	+ 8.70%
New Jersey	2.59	2.24	- 13.51%	2.41	+ 7.59%
New Mexico	2.56	2.44	- 4.72%	2.88	+18.03%
New York	2.30	1.92	- 16.52%	2.58	+34.38%
North Carolina	2.08	2.05	- 1.44%	2.16	+ 5.37%
North Dakota	2.60	2.52	- 3.08%	2.08	+11.00%
Ohio	2.10	2.02	- 3.81%	2.16	+ 6.93%
Oklahoma	1.81	1.79	- 1.10%	1.82	+ 1.68%
Oregon	2.52	2.33	- 7.54%	2.61	+12.02%
Pennsylvania	2.16	2.00	- 7.40%	2.02	+ 1.00%
Rhode Island	2.58	2.38	- 7.75%	2.55	+ 7.14%
South Carolina	2.63	2.48	- 5.70%	2.61	+ 5.24%
South Dakota	2.34	2.34	—	2.47	+ 5.56%
Tennessee	2.08	1.88	- 9.62%	2.04	+ 8.51%
Texas	2.50	2.30	- 8.00%	2.44	+ 6.09%
Utah	1.40	1.32	- 5.71%	1.61	+21.97%
Vermont	2.82	2.46	- 12.77%	2.61	+ 6.10%
Virginia	2.26	2.03	- 10.18%	2.69	+32.51%
Washington	2.44	2.22	- 9.02%	2.47	+11.26%
West Virginia	1.72	1.72	—	1.80	+ 4.65%
Wisconsin	3.15	2.82	- 10.48%	2.99	+ 6.03%
Wyoming	2.56	2.55	- 0.40%	3.05	+19.61%
USA	2.50	2.22	- 11.20%	2.43	+ 9.46%

gallons to 2.18 gallons, a decrease of nearly 10 percent. But then from 2000 to 2004, Michigan's alcohol consumption rose from 2.18 gallons per capita to 2.29 gallons, a boost of just over 5 percent.

For the United States as a whole, during the 1990s alcohol consumption declined from 2.50 gallons per capita to 2.22 gallons, a drop of 11.20 percent.

Then from 2000 through 2004, alcohol consumption in the nation increased by nearly 10 percent, from a per capita of 2.22 gallons to 2.43 gallons.

The American drinking pattern is one of cycles. Colonial records are scarce, but more accurate documentation of alcohol consumption began in the middle of the last century, in 1850.

At that time, alcohol use was definitely on the upswing, with drinkers preferring distilled spirits as their alcoholic beverage of choice. Government records show a peak of 2.53 gallons of absolute alcohol per capita consumed in 1860.

This was followed by a wave of temperance that dropped per capita consumption of absolute alcohol to 1.72 gallons in 1880, as hard liquor was still the preference of most drinkers.

During the 1880s, as German immigrants brought their brewing skill to America, beer began to dominate the drinking scene. Local taverns

became the poor man's social club and alcohol consumption was on the rise again, until 1910.

Questionable marketing tactics, along with corruption associated with neighborhood taverns helped to fuel a new temperance movement as alcohol consumption now began a decline. This time the decline in drinking was accompanied by a wave of anti-alcohol sentiment whereby local voters banned bars and liquor stores altogether. Long before national Prohibition, much of America had voted dry prior to 1919.

There are those who argue that there was even more drinking during national Prohibition, but the record fails to support such an assumption. When alcohol sales became legal again in 1934, per capita consumption was still below one gallon of absolute alcohol, and it was not until 1971 that alcohol consumption returned to pre-Prohibition levels, as a generation of Americans grew up without legal access to beer, wine or distilled spirits.

Alcohol use continued to increase until the 1980s, peaking at 2.76 gallons per capita in 1981, which marked the beginning of another temperance trend.

Data for the past four years seems to indicate that American drinking patterns are about to change again, ushering in an era of increased alcohol consumption.

MISSION STATEMENT

The Michigan Council on Alcohol Problems seeks to:

1. Broaden the awareness of the religious community, public officials and the Michigan Public to the destructive consequences of alcohol, other drugs, tobacco and gambling, and offer positive solutions.
 2. Educate the Michigan Public for responsible controls in the areas of alcohol, other drugs, tobacco and gambling, and
 3. Alert and mobilize supporters to any public policy changes related to MICAP's mission.
-

Liquor Warnings-With Humor

Because liquor is a legal drug, it is particularly notable that the alcohol industry is not required to provide any list of ingredients, nutritional information, or a full set of warnings on their products as is required of other drugs. Many beer brewers do not even officially note on their labels that they contain a quantity of alcohol.

Years ago the alcohol industry was required to place on the label of each container, a terse warning paragraph that lists a small sample of the possible negative outcomes of alcohol consumption. A complete list, if it were to include all of the pos-

sible negative outcomes, including addiction and negative interactions with other drugs, would probably require several pages of documentation—much like you would receive when you purchased other drugs at a drug store.

A complete warning information sheet would not necessarily include any on the list below. This list was circulated by a “Joke-For-The-Day” email service.

While these “Warnings” are funny, unfortunately it is because many drinkers will find that most, if not all of them, are also true.

Liquor manufacturers have accepted the Government's suggestion that the following warning labels be placed immediately on all varieties of alcohol containers:

WARNING: The consumption of alcohol may leave you wondering what happened to your clothes.

WARNING: The consumption of alcohol may make you think you are whispering when you are not.

WARNING: The consumption of alcohol is a major factor in dancing like an idiot.

WARNING: The consumption of alcohol may cause you to tell your friends over and over again that you love them.

WARNING: The consumption of alcohol may cause you to think you can sing.

WARNING: The consumption of alcohol may lead you to believe that ex-boyfriends are really dying for you to telephone them at four in the morning.

WARNING: The consumption of alcohol may make you think you can logically converse with members of the opposite sex without spitting.

WARNING: The consumption of alcohol may create the illusion that you are tougher, smarter, faster and better looking than most people.

WARNING: The consumption of alcohol may lead you to think people are laughing WITH you.

WARNING: The consumption of alcohol may cause pregnancy.

WARNING: The consumption of alcohol may be a major factor in getting your butt kicked.

WARNING: the crumsumpten of alocohol may Mack you tink you kan tpye reel gode.