

Coronavirus Update: Napa Wineries Go Virtual To Weather Pandemic's Economic Storm

By [Andrea Nakano](#) April 24, 2020

NAPA (CBS SF) — Although Napa County started lifting certain restrictions such as landscape work and outings to golf courses this week, its major industry is still taking a big hit.

According to researchers from the University of Pacific, the unemployment rate in Napa County is expected to hit 22 percent next month. That's because the tourism industry is at a stand still as wineries remain closed.

To survive the pandemic's economic slowdown, some wineries are trying to adjust to a new way of doing business.

At Alpha Omega in Rutherford, wine tasting rooms look bare without a single visitor in sight. The normal packed patio on a toasty Spring day has nothing but empty chairs. The winery is operating with minimal staff but unlike other places in the valley, Alpha Omega has been able to keep all of their full-time employees.

"There's only one business metric that makes sense right now that's most important and that's how many jobs can we maintain," said Jeff Knowles, the COO of Alpha Omega. "That's been our primary focus."

To meet the goal, Alpha Omega has started to take most of its operations online. It debuted its live Instagram show called Live at 5 on Wednesdays and Fridays to connect with their customers over a glass of wine.

Tastings have entered the virtual realm as wines are sent before the scheduled live sessions. Employees were quickly retrained to fill their new roles and the new online programs have taken off.

“Wine is something that brings people together and makes people happy and in a time like this, that’s very important,” said Barrett Spiegel an Alpha Omega Brand Ambassador.

Like many other businesses facing hardships during this time, wineries also hope they will be able to open their doors soon. But the silver lining maybe that they’ve found a way to keep connecting with their customers from around the world.

“We will come out changed but stronger but I think this is another avenue that never goes away now,” Knowles said.

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