

Retailers review new dime deposit

By Casey Hens
staff writer

Although a dime deposit on Michigan wine coolers would not become law until 1989, Farmington-area store owners and managers are looking at how it may affect them.

One supermarket chain spokesman called recently passed state legislation "unfortunate." He said his company would be hit in the pocketbook — eventually causing a grocery increase to shoppers.

"It's kind of a non-event, at least for now," said Gilbert Borman, of Borman's Inc., parent company of the recently opened Farmer Jack Supermarket at the Crossroads Center at Nine Mile and Farmington roads in Farmington.

"We're taking a wait-and-see attitude," he said, adding his company will lobby for changes before the bill becomes law in June 1989.

Following approval by the state House, the state Senate passed a bill placing a 10-cent deposit on wine coolers, canned cocktails, soda pop and beer, including generic beer, which now has a five-cent deposit.

The Senate also approved a companion bill giving wine cooler wholesalers exclusive sales territories. Similar territories were set up for beer and beverage wholesalers be-

fore Michigan's bottle deposit law took effect in 1976.

WHEN SIGNED by Gov. James Blanchard — a bottle deposit proposition — the bills will become law.

One Farmington Hills party store manager said the change would probably be felt most by wine cooler distributors who don't presently sell beverages in returnable bottles and cans.

"I don't think it will affect us as much as the distributors," said Todd King, manager of Bosco's Wine Liquor and Deli, a party store on Orchard Lake Road near 12 Mile. "Their trucks are not geared to pick up — just to deliver. This won't be a big change for us, we're ready to store the bottles now."

In Borman's stores, bottle storage, employee handling expenses and continued sanitary problems with returnable bottles are concerns, although he doubts any additional employees will be needed for the 1989 change.

Farmer Jack stores presently have full-time staffs to handle the bottle return departments at individual stores.

Food prices to the consumer will increase because of the additional expense incurred from bottle handling, Borman predicted. Comparing the company's small business tax with bottle return expense, Borman said the company pays "slightly more" for bottle returns, making the 10-cent bottle department a large corporate expense. He said he could not predict how much that volume may increase with the added wine coolers.

THE FARMINGTON store, which opened in 1985, was built with special bottle-handling capabilities, Borman said. Many of the older Farmer Jack stores had to be updated at a "considerable cost," when Michigan's bottle bill passed 10 years ago. "It's like having one of your hands chained to your feet," he said.

The Farmer Jack stores currently take back twice as many bottles as they sell, he added. The Michigan Food Dealers Association has complained that many deposit containers purchased at party stores and other outlets are returned at grocery stores, causing them more of an expense.

King said his party store receives back about as many bottles as it sells.

The MFDA also called for a handling fee of two cents per container for grocers, some of whom spend millions on equipment and wages

"In almost every other state with a bottle deposit law, grocers are paid a handling fee," according to an MFDA spokesman. "After the election, the association will seek a handling fee, a tax credit or some type of recognition" for the costs re-

tailers incur."

The MFDA said the handling fee could come from \$48 million in cans and bottles that are never redeemed. Local A & P managers said they could not comment on the bottle return legislation.



This cartoon portrays a conservationist view deposit legislation will eventually cost consumers more.



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