

Producing and selling fermented drinks in Tasmania

Introduction

The fermented soft drink industry has grown strongly in recent years with many more craft manufacturers entering the market.

This is true in Tasmania and around Australia.

This fact sheet is a guide to help businesses, local government and the public understand more about fermented drinks.

This does not cover alcoholic fermented drinks.

What is a fermented drink?

A fermented or brewed soft drink is defined by the Australian New Zealand Food Standards Code Standard 2.6.2-2 to mean a food that:

- (a) Is prepared by a fermentation process from water with sugar and one or more of:
 - i. fruit extractives or infusions, or
 - ii. vegetable extractives or infusions, and
- (b) Contains no more than 1.15% alcohol by volume (ABV).

Examples of fermented drink

Common fermented beverages include:

- Ginger beer
- Kombucha
- Kefir (water or dairy based)

Several other products may be available including ayran, kvass, boza (or bosa).

Is there alcohol in these drinks?

Yes, there can be. The way these drinks are made will produce small amounts of alcohol (ethanol).

Where does the alcohol come from?

During fermentation, yeasts convert sugars into ethanol. The ethanol is then converted into acetic acid by bacteria.

This primary fermentation step may be followed by a secondary fermentation step that produces carbon dioxide gas, giving the final product effervescent properties.

Secondary fermentation, which occurs in the bottle, can be difficult to control.

In a well-controlled process, most of the ethanol produced during primary fermentation is converted into acid.

If there is inadequate control, then there may be a higher than expected ethanol content or ethanol may continue to be produced after the drink is bottled.

The alcohol content of brewed soft drinks may increase over the product's shelf life.

This may mean product sold at retail may unintentionally contain greater than 0.5% ABV.

How much alcohol is ok?

To meet the definition of brewed soft drink under the Code, no more than 1.15% alcohol can be present.

An ethanol content of greater than 0.5% will need to meet additional strict labelling requirements as described in Standard 2.7.1.

Any beverage with greater than 0.5% alcohol is classed as liquor under the Tasmanian *Liquor Licensing Act*.

A business selling any drink with greater than 0.5% alcohol needs a liquor license.

Is alcohol in my soft drink a problem?

Yes, it is, especially if the alcohol isn't declared on the label and the product is misrepresented as being non-alcoholic.

Drinking alcohol is not recommended for:

- people taking certain medications (due to interactions between the medicine and alcohol)
- health reasons, as is the case for pregnant and breastfeeding women and for children
- consumers with alcohol dependency who are seeking to not consume alcohol
- for people with religious, moral or ethical stance against the consumption of alcohol
- consumers seeking to avoid driving while under the influence of alcohol.

How can I check how much alcohol is in my product?

Several methods exist for checking alcohol content in fermented drinks:

- gas chromatography
- near infra-red spectrometry
- distillation followed by gravimetric measurement
- any other method that consistently produces a similar result by a documented testing process where results are compared to those from an NATA accredited laboratory.

What can I do to get things right?

- Identify the alcohol strength limit you must adhere to and ensure your product does not exceed this predetermined limit.
- Label you product properly.
- You must be able to show you can control secondary fermentation.
- Ensure your production process and formulation is followed accurately.
- If fermentation can continue post-manufacture:
 - store and transport your product at 5°C or less
 - ensure storage instructions are legible and prominent
 - ensure alcohol production does not continue throughout the shelf life of the product.

The Food Standards Code can be found at www.foodstandards.gov.au/code/

Email Public Health Services at public.health@dhhs.tas.gov.au or call 1800 671 738 for further information.

Released March 2018