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Decision could affect vintners in Florida, but not anytime soon

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MANATEE - Even if the U.S. Supreme Court were to immediately rule on the constitutionality of interstate wine shipments, Florida wine lovers would probably not be able to order directly from their favorite out-of-state vintners right away, experts say.

Florida consumer wine shipment litigation is pending, according to the Coalition for Free Trade, a non-profit legal foundation in California working to legalize interstate consumer wine shipment. But the Supreme Court's ruling could have an impact on the decision that will be reached in the Florida case, said Richard Blau, an alcoholic beverage law attorney in Tampa.

"Any decision reached by the U.S. Supreme Court will likely provide guidance on reconciling the competing interests between free market's fair access to interstate markets, as guaranteed by the Commerce Clause, versus the states' rights to regulate alcohol for the health, safety and protection of its citizens as embodied by the 21st Amendment," Blau said.

After the high court rules, whenever that is, action won't take place overnight.

"It will probably be a long time until something happens unless the Florida state regulators or Florida legislature takes some action based upon the decision," said T. Raymond Williams, a Washington D.C.-based attorney specializing in alcoholic beverage law.