

Zeitschrift: Swiss review : the magazine for the Swiss abroad
Herausgeber: Organisation of the Swiss Abroad
Band: 49 (2022)
Heft: 4

Artikel: Migros to remain alcohol-free
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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-1051874>

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Migros to remain alcohol-free

Migros supermarkets and restaurants have never sold wine, beer or spirits. Nor will they, after a resounding majority of cooperative members – almost 80 per cent – decided to uphold the retailer's ban on alcohol sales.

THEODORA PETER

“Oui” and “Non” (yes and no) are the names of two beer brands that were created – one with alcohol, one without – to commemorate the landmark vote. It was an emphatic verdict. All ten regional Migros cooperatives said “Non”. The no to alcohol sales attracted up to 80 per cent of the vote in some cases. It was less clear-cut in the winegrowing cantons of Valais (60 per cent), Ticino (55 per cent), Geneva (65 per cent) and Vaud (69 per cent). Over 630,000 people around the country – or around 29 per cent of a total of 2.2 million registered cooperative members – took part in the plebiscite.

Alcohol available online

Colloquially referred to as “the orange giant”, complete with its abbreviated orange logo, the letter M, Migros has deliberately not sold alcohol for almost 95 years. Migros founder Gottfried Duttweiler (1888–1962) had this self-imposed prohibition inserted into the cooperative's articles of association in 1928. Although he had a penchant for wine and cigars, Duttweiler decided against selling these lucrative legal drugs – tobacco as well as alcohol – in the interests of public health. But Migros has long been circumventing its own ban by selling beer, wine and spirits via its official online shop, in Migrolino stores at railway and petrol stations, and at subsidiary Denner. This will not change.

Nevertheless, anti-addiction groups like the Blue Cross are relieved at the decision to uphold the voluntary abstinence in supermarkets. Otherwise, dry alcoholics are always in danger of relapsing when they walk past alco-



A referendum result becomes a brand. The alcohol-free ‘Non’ beer will soon be on Migros shelves. If the majority had voted yes, Migros would have added a ‘Oui’ beer with alcohol to its range. However, only 24.7% of the votes were in favour. Image provided

hol-laden shelves, and a no-alcohol policy constitutes a shot in the arm for disease prevention, they say.

Integrity more important than making money

The Group for M Values, spearheaded by former Migros CEO Herbert Bolliger, also campaigned against the alcohol ban being lifted. Bolliger, 69, expressed his delight at how clear the outcome of the vote was. “It sends an unequivocal message that certain values are more important than making money,” he said, adding that

non-alcoholic beverages also sell well and are currently in vogue. Indeed, the alcohol-free beer market is positively booming in Switzerland. “Non”, Migros’s new own-brand beer, will arrive on supermarket shelves in 2023.

In the words of current Migros boss Fabrice Zumbrunnen, alcohol is now off the agenda “for at least another generation”. Delegates of the Federation of Migros Cooperatives put it on the agenda a year ago, arguing that beer, wine and spirits could help grow sales. This ultimately proved very much a minority view.