

FIVE WIVES FINDS TAKERS IN UTAH, BUT THE VODKA IS NOT PALATABLE IN IDAHO



Fives Wives Vodka may be appealing to its drinkers, but regulators have found its name offensive and in bad taste and said that it cannot be stocked or sold, or special ordered at stores operated by the state of Idaho. The vodka is produced by Ogden's Own Distillery in Utah. The label on the bottle carries a picture of five women, with cats in their crouches covering their genitals, in costumes in tune with what women wore in times when polygamy was prevalent. The system was later abandoned by the church, more than a century ago. The Mormon Church is based in Utah. Five Wives Vodka has been marketed in Utah since December without too much hostility from the local populace, according to the distillery. But the brand, owing to its rather blatant allusion to polygamy -- is perhaps too much for liquor regulators in next door Idaho. Jeff Anderson Idaho State Liquor Division administrator said that the brand is offensive to Mormons, who make up over 25 percent of Idaho's population. Regulators in Idaho informed Elite Spirits Distributor, via a letter, that the brand's concept is "offensive to a prominent segment of our population and will not be carried." "The bottom line is, we represent everybody," Anderson added Tuesday. "It's masterful marketing on their part. But it doesn't play here." Anderson also made it clear that the name was not the only reason why the drink was banned. He said that the market was overcrowded and he did not believe there was room for another brand. In the letter there is no suggestion or insinuation that the Mormons objected to it. However, Steve Conlin, director of marketing and a partner at Ogden's Own, a micro-distiller in Ogden, said in a statement, "I can only assume it's the Mormons they are referring to." But "that makes little sense is they allow Polygamy Porter from Wasatch Beers of Utah to be sold. We're a little dumbfounded by it all." Mr. Conlin told Ad Age that the distillery is considering a lawsuit, calling the state's action "a blatant violation of commercial speech that is covered by the First Amendment." He said, "If you're practicing polygamy, then maybe you are going to be offended." But "Mormons are not supposed to be practicing polygamy." We have a product that has sold nearly 1,000 cases in six months in Utah," Conlin said. "If the reaction is because of a religious concern, we think they are extremely misguided." Mr. Conlin accepted that the name could be misinterpreted as hinting at polygamy, but said that it could have other meanings also, "The person who came up with name, she really liked the idea of five wives sitting around having a drink. There really is no pointed meaning to it and everyone can bring what they want to it ... it's not about making fun of Mormons at all. Quite simply it's a name that seemed to fit." Ogden's Own Distillery is cashing in on the rejection and has started a media campaign and sale of "Free the Five Wives" T-shirts.