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LOCAL

# Asheville breweries see rising costs, predict supply chain issue as Trump's tariffs loom

Tony Kovach
Asheville Citizen Times

In Mike Benning on Scenter Alert Channel, quality art, tariffs
Mike Benning, owner of Scenter Alert Channel, discusses his business, quality art, tariffs on Friday's Trump tariffs, which will hit Asheville breweries and craft artisans, and the state's craft beer industry.

**Key Points**

- Tariffs may increase the price of aluminum and other packaging materials, ingredients and building supplies, impacting breweries and trickling down to customers.
- Tariffs impact pricing but everything so far, " said Adam Charnock, co-founder of Mi Wire Brewing. "They're concerning, it's making it harder to be a small brewery."

Adam Charnock, co-founder of Mi Wire Brewing, and Ryan Hoffman, co-founder of Mi Wire Brewing, in Asheville, Friday, April 4, 2025. Mi Wire Brewing is a member of the Asheville Craft Brewers Guild.

Charnock and other local brewery owners and the uncertainty of how, when, and to what extent tariffs would impact their businesses has made it impossible to plan. Although they anticipate prices will increase further, they cannot other higher costs.

Andrew Zinn, co-owner and brewer of Lowfer Brewing in Weaverville, said that unpredictability was the "scariest" and "most frustrating" part of the ordeal.

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For local breweries, the tariffs add to the financial toll of other recent events, such as Tropical Storm Helene, the COVID-19 pandemic and inflation.

Tariffs could spike the price of aluminum and other packaging materials, ingredients and building supplies, impacting breweries and trickling down to customers.

"Tariffs impact pricing but everything so far, " said Adam Charnock, co-founder of Mi Wire Brewing. "They're concerning, it's making it harder to be a small brewery."

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Andrew Zinn, co-owner and brewer of Lowfer Brewing in Weaverville, said that unpredictability was the "scariest" and "most frustrating" part of the ordeal.

"It's hard to know anything because everything is in limbo and everything is constantly changing and evolving," Zinn said. "Things are too dynamic to plan and anticipate."

## The cost of a canned beer

Leah Wong, Asheville, family owner and CEO of Highland Brewing, may be facing some steeper prices, despite the risk that consumers will not be willing to pay more.

She said aluminum cans were most concerning, as the Asheville-based brewery's headwater distribution consists of 80% canned and 20% bottled beer.

Leah Wong, owner and CEO of Asheville-based Highland Brewing, in the taproom, in Asheville, April 4, 2025. Highland Brewing is a member of the Asheville Craft Brewers Guild.

Aluminum and the 17% aluminum cost increase earlier this year, bottle tariffs, resulted in the brewery paying 5% more for cans.

She predicted that the 25% tariff imposed on aluminum could hike the price of cans and caps of bottled beers, and the cost would be passed down to breweries. She said there would be no way to get around paying the increase or reducing aluminum use.

"We don't have a choice," Adkiters said. "We can't just put beer in bottles because that's not what consumers want."

Adkiters and Highland's beer prices reflect the price changes of larger companies, like Miller and Budweiser. However, there is a limit to what customers will pay.

"There's a lot of instability right now, and beer has always been an accessible luxury," Adkiters said. "We can't just charge another dollar or two on a six pack."

Leah Wong, owner and CEO of Asheville-based Highland Brewing, in the taproom, in Asheville, April 4, 2025. Highland Brewing is a member of the Asheville Craft Brewers Guild.

On April 6, Charnock said the cost of cans had increased about a penny more — or 25 units per can — than the previous month, which quickly ate up other production and packing on a grand scale.

"That may not sound like a lot, but we don't make much money where we sell a can of beer," Charnock said.

Adam Charnock, co-founder of Mi Wire Brewing, in Asheville, April 4, 2025. Mi Wire Brewing is a member of the Asheville Craft Brewers Guild.

Mi Wire, founded in Asheville in 2013, has taprooms across North Carolina, Kentucky, Ohio and Tennessee, including in Biltmore Village and Mi Wire's Wedge Brewing district in Asheville. It has a nine-step distribution arm.

Charnock said that although Mi Wire purchases cans from a U.S. supplier, he doesn't know if that company sourced aluminum from another country, which may cause prices for the cans to increase further. He expects costs to skyrocket if tariffs are enacted and is bracing for a possible double-digit increase.

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Charnock said there weren't any areas where the company could cut back to reduce its budget. Yet, he was adamant that beer prices would not increase due to the tariffs.

Zinn said that when Lowfer opened in 2021, prices were padded to account for inflation and avoid constant changes to consumer beer pricing.

Adkiters said an aluminum exception from tariffs would help ease the pain.

"The U.S. cannot immediately start making cans," Adkiters said. "We don't mine for bauxite. We don't make aluminum in the U.S. on any large scale, so it would take years for that to come around. That's too long of a haul."

Leah Wong, owner and CEO of Asheville-based Highland Brewing, in the taproom, in Asheville, April 4, 2025. Highland Brewing is a member of the Asheville Craft Brewers Guild.

## More than aluminum: cardboard, glass and grain tariffs?

It's more than aluminum prices that brewers owners are watching.

Charnock said the brewery uses cardboard made in the U.S., but if the pulp used to make it is imported from another country, that could add another cost increase.

Shipmaster cans of beer, April 4, 2025, at Mi Wire Brewing in Asheville. Jack Bell | Asheville Citizen Times

Mi Wire's barley is partly sourced from the upper Midwest, but some is imported from Canada and Germany, which could be affected by tariffs.

Zinn said up-tariffs of its malt is local or domestic, but many breweries and meadmaxes source ingredients from Canada. He said glassware is primarily sourced from Canada.

Zinn said he was concerned about tariffs driving up the price of imported wine sold at the brewery.

Tariffs on building materials may also become more costly, making it difficult or impossible for businesses to open or grow.

Shipmaster cans of beer, April 4, 2025, at Mi Wire Brewing in Asheville. Jack Bell | Asheville Citizen Times

Lowfer Brewing in, in Weaverville December 22, 2021. (Photo Michael Gecker/Citizen Times)

Adkiters and development plans for Highland's go into property in East Asheville could be stalled.

Construction on Lowfer's back deck expansion may be paused, too.

"By the time we're ready to pull the trigger on it, lumber prices are likely to be pretty high," Zinn said.

## Tariffs on top of Tropical Storm Helene

The tariffs would put an extra strain on Western North Carolina breweries as they recover from Tropical Storm Helene and the COVID-19 pandemic before that, on top of ongoing inflation.

"Any one of these alone would be a huge navigational challenge," Charnock said. "We're rolling with the punches every day and trying to focus on getting better every day."

Charnock said Mi Wire was putting on a good public face but that the internal impact was still felt more than six months after the storm. Mi Wire's brewery and distribution center in the River Arts District was dominated when the French Broad River rose to a record 24.67 feet and its taproom in Biltmore Village flooded when the Swannanoa River rose to a historic 27.55 feet.

"We are looking at every aspect of our business now and trying to figure out what parts we can continue to grow and invest in, and which parts aren't."

Forthcoming tariffs have made a volatile market that much more challenging to manage.

"It changes every day and it's unpredictable," Charnock said. "When it is going to end? I have no idea."

## Beer drinking trends

Zinn said the brewing industry is in a dump, due to changing nationwide drinking habits and trends, and the tariff and market pressures individual businesses in the highly competitive market.

"Our industry is a luxury item," Zinn said. "If tariffs have a wider impact, there are going to be fewer people taking vacations, fewer people happily justifying a five-dry spend for a couple of beers and a time out."

Highland also has felt the impact of fewer beer drinkers, which Adkiters said became a smaller demographic as some have decreased or abstained from alcohol consumption for health, lifestyle, or other reasons after the pandemic.

Adkiters said supply chain issues and revenue loss add to the company's dilemma, but higher sales volume could solve Highland's issues.

"We're worried. We're bad so many hits," Adkiters said. "That's a lot of hits for any business to take, and I would ask people to drink [Highland]. Put Enough into their choices at the grocery store, bars and restaurants and support the companies they believe in."

*Tiana Kowalik is the food and dining reporter for the Asheville Citizen Times, part of the USA Today Network. Tips, comments, questions? Email tkowalik@citizentimes.com or follow @TiananKowalik on Instagram.*

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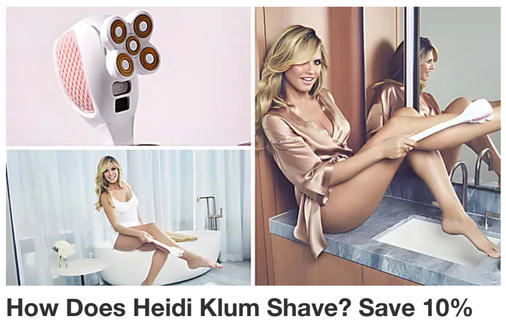

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