

RESTARTING PRODUCTION

After hiccup, Whiskey Acres continues making hand sanitizer

By **DEREK BARICHELLO**
dbarichello@shawmedia.com,
and **KELSEY RETTKE**
krettke@shawmedia.com

Jamie Walters, co-owner of Whiskey Acres Distilling Co. in DeKalb, said Monday that after a few hiccups with ever-changing federal regulations on hand sanitizer manufacturing, production has restarted.

“The [Food and Drug Administration] and [Tax and Trade Bureau] keep changing the rules every two or three days, so it’s been real hard for us distillers to keep up,” Walters said.

U.S. Rep. Adam Kinzinger said Sunday that at a time when companies such as whiskey distilleries are stepping up to help their fellow Americans during the COVID-19 outbreak, federal agencies are putting up roadblocks.

The FDA issued a policy for distilleries making alcohol-based hand sanitizer in response to the lack of supply. The agency stated it will not “take any action against alcohol production firms” provided, among other things, the alcohol used is not less than 94.9% ethanol by volume, the water used in the active pharmaceutical ingredient is sterile and the alcohol is “denatured.”

Whiskey Acres announced March 19 it planned to make hand sanitizer as the coronavirus pandemic led stores across the nation to run dry of the vital item.

“Since we started, they sent us emergency authorizations and the recipe to follow,” Walters said. “Then they changed the rules, changed it again, and the problem was the recipes they approved contained two chemicals, which none of us could find.”

The distillery’s whiskey operations and visitors center are closed through the rest of month, and the idea was to put that downtime to use.

“They were told to follow the [World Health Organization] guidelines on hand sanitizer,” Kinzinger said in a Fox News interview Saturday. “They did this. About four days ago, the FDA said ‘no, no, no, you have to put the denaturing chemical agent in it,’ which basically makes it taste bitter, so it’s not drank.”

Pure alcohol can be toxic. The FDA has said these denaturing chemicals, which make the sanitizer unpleasant to eat or drink, will help prevent children from accidentally consuming it.

Kinzinger said Whiskey Acres can’t find these denaturing chemicals.

“They need about five gallons of



Photo provided

Whiskey Acres Distilling Co., 11504 Keslinger Road, DeKalb, was approved March 18 by the U.S. Tax and Trade Bureau and the Food and Drug Administration to convert the distillery to make hand sanitizer, using a special formula approved and passed on from the World Health Organization.

this,” Kinzinger said. “The only way they can buy it is by a truckload. They cannot make hand sanitizer.”

Kinzinger tweeted Sunday: “This is not the time to change the rules & prevent great distilleries like @WhiskeyAcres in #IL16 from providing a product so urgently needed.”

Walters said Kinzinger wrote a letter directly to Vice President Mike Pence’s office.

“They gave it prompt attention, and the FDA came back and withdrew the requirement for one of the chemicals,” Walters said.

After halting production over the weekend, Whiskey Acres is back up and running and on track to produce 1,000 gallons a week, with the hopes to soon be able to produce that amount daily. They’ve already distributed the first batch through the DeKalb County Health Department to area hospitals, first responders and other organizations in need. They’ll soon be able to distribute bottles to Hy-Vee as well.

“The community has been extremely supportive,” Walters said. “It’s really



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Mark Busch - mbusch@shawmedia.com

satisfied the need not only in our community, but the larger region. And also, if things continue, we’ll be able to generate revenue to pay our employees and keep business functioning for the foreseeable future.”

Other distilleries, such as Star Union Spirits in Peru, have said they will start producing hand sanitizer to help with

the lack of supply. Star Union Spirits aims to produce hand sanitizer for hospitals, police, fire departments, first responders and other safety-net organizations across LaSalle County.

“Our goal is to produce as much as we can for the organizations in greatest need,” according to news release from the company.