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Supervisors Back Growers In Wine Label Controversy

Supervisors indicated Tuesday they gladly will unite with valley vintners and grape growers to head off an effort by federal authorities to change wine bottle label appellations that could effectively erase "Napa Valley" from all local viticultural products.

Andrew Beckstoffer, vice president of the Napa Valley Grape Growers Association, told supervisors Tuesday morning the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (BATF) has proposed to limit appellations to counties and states. He said if geographic appellations are to be applied, such would be the province of some new state agency.

The local grape growers group opposes state intervention in appellation, with Beckstoffer stating Tuesday he

does not believe either agricultural or alcoholic beverage control officials in Sacramento relish taking on new duties.

BATF has complained that a number of applications for wine bottle appellation overlap and are confusing. Therefore, the federal agency says it plans to wash its hands of specific appellation and stick to broad geographic ones. This, BATF said it would do, unless local input aids in the definition of appellation areas.

Beckstoffer said that the Napa Valley is one of the four greatest wine producing areas in the world — the others being Bordeaux, Burdundy and the Rhineland.

"We are the appellation area in the United States and as such we should take the lead in

this," he added. "We feel it is a popular issue. We're also afraid if the state gets involved the labels could read only California."

He said he believes the Napa Valley Vintners Association supports his association's stand, "but they'll have to speak for themselves."

"It's important to have early input," Supervisor Dowell Martz noted.

"I suggest we take an active role," Chairman John Tuteur said, "including appearing in the hearings (BATF will hold on this issue, either here, in San Francisco or Washington, D.C.)."

"I believe it would be impressive to the Washington bureaucrats to see the

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★ Labels

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politicians and the public love their industry and want some protection."

"The Napa Valley Grape Growers Association proposes and urges that the people of Napa County be allowed to define Napa Valley and advise the federal government (BATF) directly," Beckstoffer said. We see no need for increasing the state bureaucracy ... (and urge) the federal government retain its control of appellation of origin matters by means of a precise set of criteria which insures unfiltered advice from the local industry."

Supervisors agreed to take an active part in the fight to retain the Napa Valley appellation.

"It's protection for the consumers of wine as well," Supervisor Ginny Simms pointed out.