



## FREE RUN JUICE

ALAN GOLDFARB

# What does Beckstoffer's Land Trust donation mean?

**O**nly 94 percent left to go. That must not seem like such a daunting number to Joel Tranmer today, and the rest of his colleagues at the Land Trust of Napa County.

Not after Andy Beckstoffer, the Valley's largest grape grower, begins donating in perpetuity, 900 of his 1,000 acres as conservation easements to the Trust.

That will mean that 33,000 acres of the county's 505,000 acres (or 6 percent) now has been put in trust to the 27-year-old organization. Beckstoffer's vineyard holdings, forever more, cannot be turned into housing development or winery property.

Beckstoffer will gradually donate the easements "parcel-by-parcel," beginning with his 40-acre Vineyard X near Brix Restaurant on highway 29 in Yountville.

Why would someone such as Beckstoffer offer up his land in such a manner? After all, one might surmise, the gesture couldn't have been totally altruistic, considering the tax advantages.

"At this point in my career, all or part of the 'third wave' of families who came here in the late 1960s and early '70s, are thinking about what to do with the rest of their lives," Beckstoffer explained to me. "I want to make sure the land stays in agriculture and in open space, and I want to give back to the community."

Beckstoffer, a grower without a wine brand, said he also donated the easement so that those growers that came before him — such as the Lewellings and the Stelling — will have a place in Napa history.

"No one knows they were here," he said. "This is a way to establish your roots."

But what about those tax advantages?

"There are serious tax advantages here. I don't know what those tax benefits are. ... But it's serious money.

"You don't do this for the tax advantage, but it helps ease the pain. And it's not all pain. You get some major league help from feeling good. ... No, it's not all altruistic," he admitted. "It's a way of establishing some roots for your family."

What he means is that he'll now be able to pass on his land holdings to his heirs, who won't have to take on a tax burden, which would be astronomical under normal inheritance circumstances.

Beckstoffer insisted he did not know how much savings that might be, when I asked him.

"I know there's a cost, but you don't take them down to the penny," he answered.

"What we didn't want to do, is have anybody else want to develop it."

Tranmer, too, acknowledged that there are tax advantages to those who donate land to the Trust, but he told me, "I think people do it for the right reasons. There are some tax advantages, but I haven't met anybody who has done it for those reasons."

Tranmer, who has been described by Beckstoffer as one of the "real environmentalists, long before the days of Chris Malan," believes that with Beckstoffer in the fold, others will follow suit.

"Andy, being the single largest grower in the county, is very important. People listen to him. He's really setting an example."

Beckstoffer hopes that's the case as well.

"Hopefully, it'll motivate other people to do something for the community," he said.

Beckstoffer wants it known that environmental issues are important to him, despite what others might believe.

"We're as concerned for this environment as people who scream about putting initiatives on the ballot," he explained. "This is real stuff, in terms of preserving it (the land).

He added that he hopes the environmentalists will appreciate what he has done.

"I hope this engenders a little trust," he said. "We all have the same goals, but nobody trusts anybody."

Beckstoffer insists that what he is doing "is not a great thing. But I hope others will think about it. We're at a stage of life, you need to take care of your family, and to give back to the community."



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