

## EDITORIAL

### Preserving ag land is made easier

Our congratulations to Andy Beckstoffer and his family for preserving part of the famed To Kalon Vineyard last week.

Beckstoffer is the latest in a series of landowners who have decided to preserve prime agricultural land by signing conservation easements with the Land Trust of Napa County.

Since the Land Trust was formed in 1976, it has permanently protected nearly 50,000 acres — approximately one tenth of Napa County — thanks to the generosity of dozens of people who have given land or the money needed to buy it.

The protected land includes 20,000 acres covered by conservation easements with private landowners, including nearly 10,000 acres of privately owned vineyards.

The conservation easement will allow Beckstoffer and his family and their heirs to grow and sell grapes. In return for not developing the land, the family will get significant tax benefits.

The new federal law, which was signed by President George W. Bush on Aug. 17 and is effective through 2007, allows qualifying farmers and ranchers to deduct up to 100 percent of their adjusted gross income and to carry over their deductions for as many as 15 years. Congressman Mike Thompson (D-St. Helena), who is a vineyard owner himself, pushed this law with the additional deductions through the House and Senate.

The famed To Kalon Vineyard was first planted in 1868 by Hamilton Crabb. Currently Beckstoffer owns 89 acres, Mondavi owns 250 acres and UC Davis owns the remaining 20 acres of the origi-

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nal 359-acre vineyard. It is good, historic land to protect from development and during the ceremony last week, Beckstoffer challenged his friends, neighbors and fellow vineyard owners to put conservation easements on their land.

By looking forward, past his own life and past the lives of his children and grandchildren, Beckstoffer and other grapegrowers who have signed conservation easements are making sure the Napa Valley of the future remains an agricultural valley — that when people work here and visit here they will

see vineyards, not housing developments, subdivisions or factories belching smoke. The grapegrower has put two other vineyards into conservation easements and has plans to put conservation easements on all 10 of his Napa Valley vineyards. For this, he should be honored and thanked.

But there's a hitch to preserving land. The new law, with its generous tax benefits, is only good for the rest of this year and next. That means if you want to get this done and take the tax benefits, you'd best do it now. We urge you to do so.

Contact John Hoffnagle, the executive director of the Land Trust, at 252-0435 to set up a conservation easement.