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Land

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To Kalon Vineyard gets protection as ag land

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Part of the first vineyard in the Napa Valley, the famed To Kalon Vineyard, will be preserved for future generations.

On Tuesday morning Andy Beckstoffer, owner of the vineyard, presented a conservation easement for the 89-acre parcel to John Hoffnagle, executive director of the Land Trust of Napa County. During the presentation Beckstoffer said, "In 1868, Hamilton Crabb planted the first vineyard here. We're now finishing what he started with our stewardship of the land and a conservation easement that promises to preserve this property to agriculture forever."

Joining Beckstoffer and Hoffnagle was Congressman

Mike Thompson (D-St. Helena), who spearheaded efforts in Congress to pass new tax provisions for conservation easements. Congress passed the bill on Aug. 5 and President George W. Bush signed it on Aug. 17. The bill increases tax deductions available to farmers, ranchers and other landowners who donate their property for conservation purposes. The landowners continue to own and manage the land, but give up development rights.

To Beckstoffer, the newly enacted tax incentives, which allow landowners to write off 100 percent of their income over 16 years, will allow more land to be protected in the future than in the past. He said, "For us, it's not enough to grow great grapes. You have to

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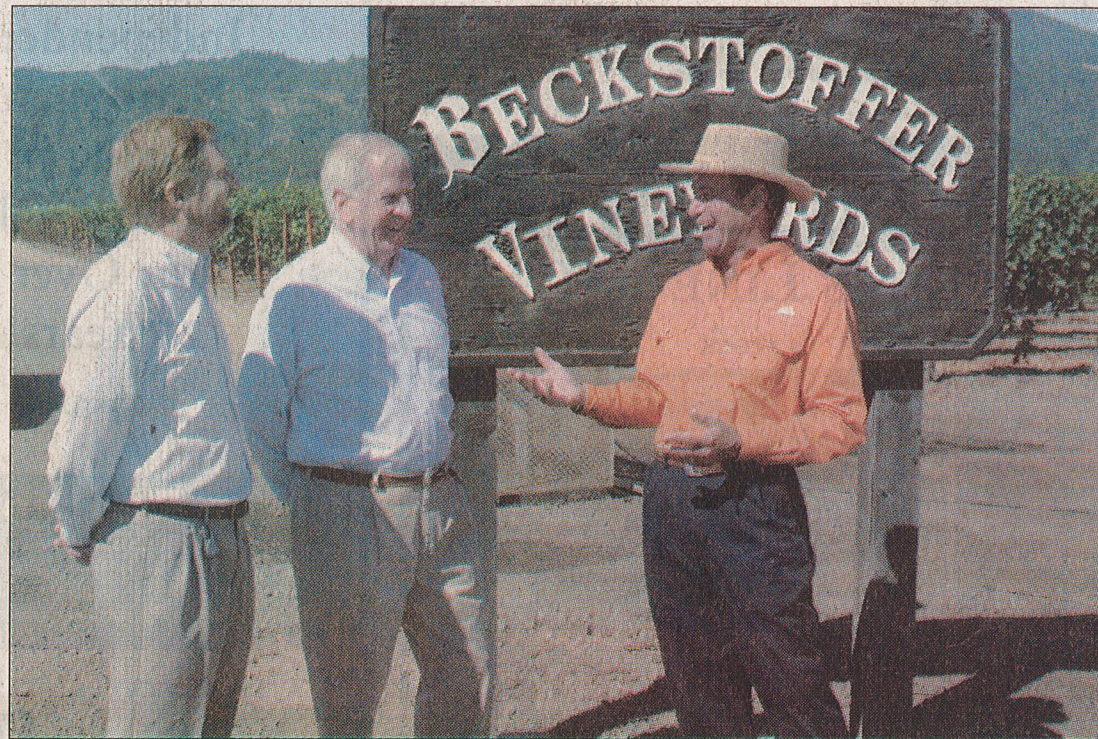


Photo by David Stoneberg

John Hoffnagle, executive director of the Land Trust of Napa County, left, was delighted to accept a portion of the To Kalon Vineyard as a conservation easement Tuesday morning at the Oakville vineyard. As a member of the U.S. House's Ways and Means Committee, Congressman Mike Thompson (D-St. Helena), center, spearheaded efforts to pass new legislation to help landowners, like Andy Beckstoffer, right, protect their land for future generations.

take care of your people and the environment and you have to preserve the land. I hope the donation of To Kalon will motivate my friends and neighbors to put their prime vineyard land in conservation easements."

Hoffnagle called the new bill "a significant boost for our conservation efforts and a landmark achievement." But, he added, the tax incentives and the bill are only good for 2006-07. "It's a test run for the next 16 months. We have to show this is going to provide a significant protection for land," he said. "The Land Trust is thrilled to be a part of that effort."

Currently 10 percent or about 20,000 acres of Napa County is preserved through conservation easements through The Land Trust, but most of it is not prime vineyard land. Hoffnagle said the agency's goal is to protect an additional 1,000 acres of prime ag land by the year 2010, but added, 5,000 to 10,000 acres is entirely possible. "The benefits are profound," he said.

Thompson, who was on his way to Missouri to campaign for a fellow Democrat, spoke briefly during the morning ceremony. "I believe conservation easements are one of the most important tools we have for ensuring our farmland is protected from uncontrolled development. Today, we have taken an important step toward better protecting our economy, our environment and our rural communities."

The 89-acre To Kalon Vineyard is the third vineyard that Beckstoffer has put into conservation easements; the others are his 44-acre Carneros Creek Vineyard and his 40-acre Beckstoffer Vineyard X. He said his goal is to put all 10 of his Napa Valley vineyards into conservation easements.

Besides Beckstoffer Vineyard's parcel, Mondavi owns 250 acres of the original 359-acre To Kalon Vineyard and UC Davis owns the remaining 20 acres.