

Got questions? Ask Andy

By John Lindblom

STAFF WRITER

In the course of an interview, the range of topics that Andy Beckstoffer can cover is unlimited. Witness the following:

• *The shifting of the center of the wine region from the Napa Valley to Mendocino County because of global warming.*

"That's just a lot of conversation. You have to look at it on a global basis. The state of California is too small a region to consider that some of it will have climate changes.

"If you talk about the effects on us here, as it gets generally warmer you're going to get more fog coming in, which makes the Napa Valley cooler. The temperature goes up, but it's night-time temperatures. Higher temperature at night does some good in terms of flavor development.

"The Vintners Association is now doing some serious surveying to accumulate data as to what's happening in climate change. Anything else is just pure speculation. Who knows? But the idea of the center changing from Napa to Mendocino is baloney."

• *The diminished economy's effect on the Valley.*

"Most of the vineyards here are pretty well capitalized, not just the wineries. But with the weak dollar our workers are going to have trouble getting credit. The people who work for me and the people who live here have all got to be affected by this. We don't have any problems borrowing the money we need; were in pretty good shape. But many people in the Valley are very much affected. Plus, with the weak dollar, you have Europeans coming in with very cheap dollars. So, just like you've seen elsewhere, you can expect that there's going to be more Europeans buying property here."

• *The differences in wine made from grapes grown in high vs. low elevations.*

"In the Napa Valley you're farming at about 100 feet above sea level. On Mt. Veeder and in Lake County we are farming at about 2,000 feet. When you get to that height the barometric pressures

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are different. In Lake County you don't have the fog, so you get longer days and also Lake County doesn't get the heat spikes that we do here. You have some very definite climatic situations at different elevations that you do not have on the Valley floor. It affects grape quality, but you don't want to say that one is a good quality and one is a bad quality — it's just a different grape."

• *The future for biodynamic growing in the United States.*

"I'm not into it, but I think biodynamics is the right direction. We should be looking at more environmentally sensitive and more natural ways of growing. We, ourselves, are becoming more environmentally sensitive all the time, using more natural fertilizers and pesticides. We've been doing that for a long time in Mendocino County with organic vineyards and we're converting all of our Lake County operations to organics. The difference between organic and not organic is probably just one chemical: Round-Up."

• *Why, despite the fact that he produces some of the best grapes, he elects to supply wineries — 50 of them at the moment — but not add winemaking to his operations.*

"Some people's goal is to create a great wine, but we've always been oriented to being good stewards of the land. I like farming, I like being around the land. The winery business from the point of view of management is not a logical extension of growing grapes. We buy vineyards as a real estate business and a farming business. We don't manufacture anything and were not interested in the marketing business. It's a totally different thing.

"Like I've said so often, just because you can grow wheat doesn't mean you can sell cereal. When they write my obituary or whatever the hell it is, we want to be seen as stewards of the land, not selling the best wine. We want to leave this place less at risk for future generations than we found it."

ST. HELENA STAR — December 4, 2008