

# Opinion & Letters

## The best way to preserve ag and Napa County

By **ANDY BECKSTOFFER**

As a grapegrower and resident of Napa County for 35 years, I am very concerned about the latest challenge to the County's General Plan, the current version of which was adopted only last year after a three-year update and review process involving county government, paid consultants and public input. The winery definition ordinance contained in the general plan was not modified in the latest update and has remained unchanged for 20 years.

The latest assault on the general plan comes from those who would like to modify the WDO to provide economic stimulus to wineries and the catering industry by allowing wineries to put on social and promotional events that are currently restricted by the WDO.

Agricultural preservation is very important to me. Our family owns significant vineyard acreage in the Napa Valley and sells grapes to more than 60 different wineries here. Although we don't make wine, no one is more concerned about the health and welfare of Napa Valley wineries and the Napa wine business. We are, however, not willing to endanger agricultural preservation in pursuit of that concern. We as managers can and must find better ways to provide industry growth without sacrificing agriculture protection. Further, we believe that for the Agricultural Preserve to be sustained, we need an economically viable Napa County and not just a healthy grape and wine business. We need to remember that the voters live in the cities.

So often, when we consider county concerns we consider only the Napa Valley (the grape and wine part) and not the entire Napa County. The preservation of agriculture in the Napa Valley is best served by an economically viable Napa County, including not only the vineyards and wineries but also the businesses in the cities.

During the development of the current Winery Definition Ordinance in 1989, there was a draft ordinance produced by the county staff. That draft WDO was then analyzed in an Environmental impact report required by the county. The draft WDO allowed all of the promotional and cultural events that are again being sought in the current request for changes. The final environmental report stated that this activity was "inconsistent with the Napa County General Plan Land Use Element." That Land Use Element as stated in the Napa County General Plan of June 2009 has as its first two goals:

- "Preserve existing agricultural land uses and plan for agriculture and related activities as the primary land uses in Napa County."
- "Concentrate urban uses in the county's existing cities and town and urbanized areas."

The general plan is designed to protect not only agriculture but also the businesses of the cities of Napa, American Canyon and the Upvalley cities.

In this current action, the hospitality industry is being represented by a group of caterers and event planners concerned about their winery business. Do they represent the real interests of the

hotels and inns and restaurants and the major hospitality industry of Napa County and their employees? If they are successful in opening up the wineries to all sorts of hospitality events, what happens to the businesses in the cities and the viability of the overall county? The cities of Napa and American Canyon can no longer depend on the likes of Rough Rider, Napa Pipe and Mare Island for their economic health.

If the current economic difficulties of the caterers allows more urban uses in the agricultural preserve, what about the struggling restaurants and inns in the county and small grape growers? Why can't the restaurants add a few more seats? The inns add a few more rooms? The small grapegrower turn his home into a B&B? Where does it all end?

The current controversy is about more than weddings at wineries. It is about the long-term economic structure and jobs location in the county. The major hospitality industry and the small businessmen of the cities of Napa, American Canyon, Yountville, St. Helena and Calistoga need to be involved and represented in this WDO controversy. We need a balanced view including the concerns of the people and businesses of the cities of Napa County. That is the best way to preserve Napa Valley and its agriculture.

(Beckstoffer is a grapegrower who lives in Napa County.)