

Readers Speak Out

Napa Valley Vintners Support Immigration Reform

By Peter McCrea

Awareness about the important role of immigrants—not only to the agriculture and wine industry, but to our community as a whole—continues to grow.

The Napa Valley Vintners (NVV) and NVV winery members have a longstanding commitment to farm labor issues and are committed to continuing our work with partners in agriculture, business, nonprofits and the government to address the challenges of immigration policy.

At the federal level, the NVV supports the Agricultural Job Opportunities, Benefits and Security Act of 2007 (also known as AgJOBS). AgJOBS creates a means for individuals who've made a substantial commitment to agricultural work in the United States but don't have valid documentation to earn adjustment to legal status by meeting specific agricultural work requirements.

AgJOBS will provide not only reform, but a stable, experienced and legal agricultural workforce. It will also extend basic protections and create better working conditions to more workers.

Attempts to pass this meaningful—and workable—federal immigration legislation have been ongoing for several years, and the NVV has been supportive of the bill since its earliest introduction in 2003, again in 2005 and now in its current form as the AgJOBS Act of 2007.

AgJOBS is also supported by a wide array of national organizations, such as the American Farm Bureau Federation, U.S. Chamber of Commerce, United Farm Workers, United Food and Commercial Workers Union, National Immigration Forum, National Council of Churches and countless other state, regional and local groups. It's a testament to the legislation's significance.

Locally, the NVV is involved in a variety of farm labor issues. In 2001, local vineyard landowners voted to tax themselves per acre to pay for the maintenance and operation of county-run farmworker housing facilities. The NVV led the effort to pass Measure L in 2002, which changed local zoning laws so farmworker housing could be built on agricultural land.

Through proceeds from the annual Auction Napa Valley, the NVV has donated nearly \$4 million to affordable housing projects and programs in Napa County, including farmworker housing.

NVV funding goes beyond housing, and the NVV supports local nonprofits such as Legal Aid and Greater Napa Fair Housing, which advocate and mediate on behalf of immigrants; family empowerment and education programs

like those run through the Von Brant Family Resource Center; and health organizations that provide services regardless of immigration status like Clinic Olé, Sister Ann Dental Clinic, Healthy Moms and Babies, and Napa Emergency Women's Services (all located in the NVV-funded Napa Valley Vintners Community Health Center).

Recently, the NVV worked with others in our community, including the City of St. Helena's Multicultural Committee and St. Helena city officials, to develop a best practices checklist for anyone who employs farmworkers and to increase awareness within our membership about legal and social guidelines for using farm labor contractors.

Aside from the support—financial and otherwise—provided for immigrants from the NVV and our community, it should also be noted that immigrants provide a return to the community and our economy. At a recent immigration dialogue hosted by Legal Aid of Napa Valley and co-sponsored by the NVV, immigrants' role in our community and society was discussed. While a reliable workforce is essential to the area's economic viability, beyond that,

immigrants as consumers provide economic benefits. Our local economy is boosted by the presence of an immigrant population—who purchase homes, cars and appliances, support vendors, and become loyal consumers to businesses sensitive to their needs. Most immigrants who live here are a part of the fabric of our community and wish to create a life here with their families and friends. Many have been living here legally for years and are second-, third- or fourth-generation families.

The NVV will continue to monitor and support comprehensive immigration reform like AgJOBS. And we will ensure that the interests of our members and our community are served at local and state levels, as well as through our continued support of local organizations, programs and efforts that serve immigrants—and the entire community as a whole.

Peter McCrea is president of the Napa Valley Vintners (NVV). Now in its seventh decade, the NVV trade association is the sole organization responsible for promoting and protecting the Napa Valley Appellation as a winegrowing region second to none in the world. Respect for our history reinforces the NVV's commitment to the preservation and enhancement of the Valley's land, wine and community for future generations. NVV addresses the shared interests of nearly 300 members and aspires to be the essential organization for all Napa Valley vintners.



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