

County prepared to boost wine industry

New policies designed to encourage the wine industry in Santa Cruz County won the approval of the Board of Supervisors last week.

The board unanimously adopted amendments to the county's General Plan agricultural policies that the supervisors hope will lead to the strengthening of an industry that already has a foothold in the county.

There are about 20 wineries in the county now and between 200 and 300 acres of vineyards. The production of the vineyards isn't nearly enough to supply the grapes needed by the wineries, so that most of the grapes used by the local wineries are imported.

Despite the fact that wine production in this county — about 250,000 gallons a year — is minuscule compared to that of such counties as Napa and Sonoma, Santa Cruz County wine has a national reputation for quality.

The new policies are designed to encourage both the development of vineyards and the establishment of small wineries. The policies will be implemented by specific regulations later.

The policies were developed over a period of two years by a Winery Policy Development Committee appointed by the Board of Supervisors

and assisted by the county's planning staff. The policies:

✓ "Recognize wine growing, including the growing and processing of grapes as an agricultural activity, and recognize Santa Cruz County as an area uniquely suited for the growing of premium quality wine grapes."

✓ "Encourage the establishment, and support the continued operation of wineries throughout the county."

✓ "Encourage the development of premium varietal wine grape vineyards on those lands within the county which, by virtue of their location and physical characteristics, are suited for grape production."