

Grape boycott joins the 'high-tech' age

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SANTA CRUZ — For the better part of three decades, Cesar Chavez, his United Farm Workers and their famous black-on-red eagle have been associated with grape boycotts, long marches and personal confrontations with opponents.

But times change and today, in the midst of a national tour to publicize the union's latest boycott against table grapes, Chavez and the UFW are giving their resurrected boycott a distinctively modern twist as they conduct what Chavez calls the "high-tech boycott."

With the help of "creative consult-

ants" in San Francisco, Los Angeles and Sacramento, Chavez said the UFW is using strategies and methods normally associated with business and politicians, not boycotts.

These strategies include the use of computers to collect data and prepare mass mailings, along with demographic studies to determine which stores to boycott and where a picket line will have the greatest exposure and support.

"Times change," Chavez shrugged in explaining why he and the UFW have decided to change tactics. "In the '60s people were out in the streets. Now they are not. We adapt to whatever the environment is. Everything we do (now) is designed to (coordinate) with the high-tech boycott."

"The country's in a different mood," added Arturo Rodriguez, a member of the UFW's Board of Directors and the man in charge of this latest grape boycott. "Back in the '60s it was, how do you say, chic to be out on the streets. Now it is not. People don't respond (today), they don't have the time or the energy to be on the picket lines every day and we have to come with a different way to address them."

The march of Chavez and about 75 UFW members and supporters around the grounds of a local Alpha Beta store this morning was a perfect example of the changes Chavez is implementing this time around.

This store, like others in San Francisco, Los Angeles, Boston, Detroit, and San Diego, where Chavez will appear tomorrow, was selected for "picketing" based on its area's demographics and response to the mass mailings prepared by the

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Chavez

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UFW, not because it is seen as a worse offender than others of the rights of farm workers, Chavez said.

Even the location of the picket line, on a sidewalk in front of the 900 block of Soquel instead of in front of the store itself, was selected more for its visibility than for its effectiveness in hindering customer traffic into the store, Chavez said while walking the picket line.

"It's pretty exciting, it opens up our capabilities considerably wider because we do not need the picket lines," Chavez said of the new approach. "These type of events are more for solidarity, the media and the human factor."

He said a statewide survey and demographic study was conducted of all Alpha Beta stores and letters were mailed to the areas in which they were situated asking residents to boycott table grapes until the estimated 75,000 workers in the table grape industry are allowed to vote on unionization.

He estimated the union has sent 2.5 million letters across the country since last November asking for support and the highest response rate, 8.5 percent, came from Santa Cruz. Chavez said his marketing advisors have told him that a 1 percent

response rate is excellent.

An indication of that support came in the form of Mayor Mardi Worhouth who issued a proclamation making today UFW and grape boycott day in the city and condemning the state Agriculture Labor Relations Board, which she and Chavez claim has been politicized and will no longer give farm workers "a fair hearing" for their claims against growers.

In the past six months, Chavez has been traveling the country seeking support and he said he has received such assurances from the governor of Massachusetts, the mayor of Boston and the Detroit City Council, and numerous others.

He will meet next week with Sen. Edward Kennedy, D-Mass. and several other senators in Washington D.C. where they will voice support for the boycott during a press conference, Chavez said.

Rodriguez, although having no specific data, said the boycott is also starting to have an impact on the grape industry, which he said is the biggest agricultural industry in the state.

He said grape prices have dropped \$2 to \$4 a lug (the unit in which they are sold and equivalent to about 23 pounds) in the Coachella Valley.