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John Bargetto checks the legs of a wine at the Bargetto Winery tasting room in Soquel in 2008. The Bargetto family was named Farmer of the Year by the Santa Cruz County Farm Bureau.

Soquel winemakers honored

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Bargetto family named Farmer of the Year

By DONNA JONES

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SOQUEL — John Bargetto is smiling a lot these days. And why wouldn't he? June's been good to the Bargetto family, which operates the county's oldest winery on North Main Street.

Last week, the Bargetto Winery's 2007 pinot noir was named the state's best at the California State Fair, and now is in the running for a coveted Golden Bear, awarded to the top red and white wines in the state. Thursday, the family was

honored closer to home as the Santa Cruz County Farm Bureau's 2010 Farmer of the Year.

"We're on a roll," said Bargetto, vice president in charge of vineyard production. "Tonight, we're honored and humbled as farmer of the year. We've been at it for a long time."

A century, to be precise. Bargetto's grandfather John and his brother Philip, immigrants from Castelnuovo in the Piedmont region of northern Italy, established the original family winery in San Francisco in 1910, and moved production to Soquel in 1917.

John, along with brother Martin, who serves as president, and sister Loretta Bargetto Mujal, who keeps an eye on the

books, represent the third generation to run the family business.

In the past two decades, Bargetto has focused on Santa Cruz Mountain varietals, such as pinot noir and merlot, which garnered top honors at the state fair last year, and, like this year's winner, was produced from grapes grown at Bargetto's Regan Vineyard. Established in 1991, Regan was the first commercial vineyard in Corralitos.

"The back-to-back awards goes to overall how fine the wines are in this region," Bargetto said. "The (2006) merlot last year, and now this year the pinot noir. Not Napa, not Sonoma, not Santa

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Barbara, the Santa Cruz Mountains. It raises all the boats."

But the Bargetto family isn't only working to boost the local winemaking community. For decades, the family has contributed to the community at large — one of the reasons for its recognition by the Farm Bureau.

Lawrence Bargetto, winery president from 1964 to 1982, helped found the Soquel Creek Water District and the main Soquel bridge was named in his honor.

The business supports five chambers of commerce and numerous county nonprofit agencies. For the past nine years, the company has donated a portion of proceeds from its LA VITA wine to a charity. This year, Court Appointed Special Advocates is the recipient.

"It goes back to our family ethic ... with the community sense we were brought up with," Bargetto said. "I don't know if it's Italian or if it's being from a small town where you can make a difference, but it's that sense that we play a role in the community beyond just running a business."