

At vintners' request, county moves to regulate wineries

SANTA CRUZ — Santa Cruz County — with its cool climate and rich soil — is considered one of the prime wine-producing areas in the state.

Up until Prohibition, some 35 wineries operated here, according to Jim Bargetto, one of the owners of Bargetto Winery in Soquel.

But the dawn of that era of teetotalism wiped out most of the wineries locally. However in the past decade, a renewed consumer interest in wine has prompted a revitalization of wine production here.

Now, the county has some 20 wineries operating, said Bargetto. More than half of them have been established in the last decade, he said.

To encourage that trend, local vintners and other concerned residents formed a

Winery Policy Development Committee two years ago to draw up the rules and regulations they wanted to govern their industry.

Now the fruits of their labor are about to become law.

Tuesday afternoon the Board of Supervisors will hold a public hearing on the winery policies drawn up by the committee.

The regulations cover zoning and agricultural designations for wineries in four categories: under 1,000 gallons annual yield, over 1,000 gallons and under 20,000 gallons yearly, over 20,000 gallons and under 50,000 gallons and over 50,000 gallons a year.

The regulations address issues such as hours of operations for tasting rooms,

parking spaces for winery visitors, location of signs advertising commercial winery enterprises and residue disposal.

Assistant county planner Betty Cost said the rules are designed to encourage production of high-quality grapes and wines. Generally, she said, these include the Cabernet Sauvignon, Johannisberg Riesling and Pinot Noir wines.

Bargetto said local vintners "had a concern on how wineries could be built, or established, in the county."

He expects that with the permit process the committee has established, it will be easier to do just that.

The public hearing is scheduled to begin at 1:30 p.m. in the Board Chamber, Room 525 of the County Center.