

State Farm Bureau asked to boycott Santa Cruz

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SANTA CRUZ — On Thursday the mayor of Santa Cruz asked the city to boycott non-union grape producers. Saturday night, farmers struck back asking the 100,000-member state Farm Bureau to boycott Santa Cruz.

The announcement came during the county Farm Bureau's annual dinner Saturday night when it was announced that the board of directors had unanimously voted to send letters seeking the boycott.

The argument began when Mayor Mardi Wormhoudt, continuing a tradition that has seen her issue proclamations on topics ranging from Shakespeare to Prisoners of

War, proclaimed July 25 United Farm Workers day and asked the city's 40,000 residents to refrain from buying non-union grapes to support the UFW's year-long boycott.

The occasion of her proclamation was a visit by UFW President Cesar Chavez and about 75 others who picketed in front of a local supermarket last Thursday. They were joined on the picket line by Wormhoudt, who later issued the boycott call.

This so incensed local farmers that Sherry Mehl, president of the Santa Cruz County Farm Bureau, said the group will mail letters to farm bureaus and an estimated 700 other private agribusiness groups in the state notifying them of the mayor's action and asking that none

of their convention or tourist dollars be spent in the city until the proclamation is rescinded.

"I don't think this does anything to make Santa Cruz look good," Mehl said. "A mayor should do everything to make her city look good and if that is not the case maybe she shouldn't be mayor."

Wormhoudt said that if people disagree with her position the "remedy is the ballot box." She adds, however, that she believes she is representing the general feeling of the community and what she called its "deservedly humanistic" bent in issuing the proclamation.

Mehl, who lives outside the city limits, said she plans to go before the City Council at its next meeting, scheduled for September, to ask that it rescind the proclamation or face the farmer's economic boycott.

For her part, Wormhoudt calls the controversy "a tempest in a teapot." She adds that proclamations are, and have been, issued by herself and other city mayors at their discretion as symbolic gestures. The City Council, she said, has no authority to rescind or overturn a proclamation.

"This is a moral issue and I don't want to turn it into a matter of dollars and cents," Wormhoudt said.

"No, I'm not concerned (about the repercussions) because I think there's a lot of support for the farm workers in Santa Cruz," Wormhoudt said. "I don't care about the figures. There are times you have to speak out on issues that affect people's lives."

Mehl, however, believes the mayor should be concerned about the economic impact and added that she questioned whether the mayor's proclamation was a "responsible" act.

Please see Page A2

Farm Bureau boycott

Continued from Page A1

"I think she is going to be surprised, I think we could have an economic impact," Mehl said in response to Wormhoudt's contention that the city doesn't receive a significant amount of farmers' convention or tourist business.

Mehl said this economic boycott is similar to the one farmers and other agricultural interests have imposed on the city of San Francisco for the past 17 years.

Two weeks ago San Francisco's Board of Supervisors passed a resolution supporting the table grape boycott but Mayor Diane Feinstein vetoed the proposal.

"I strongly believe that, as elected officials, we share a responsibility to maximize job opportunities for (our people) ... We must weigh the impact of any resolution we may adopt, carefully measuring its direct effect here ... against its intended result elsewhere," Feinstein wrote by way of explanation for her veto.

Since 1980, it is estimated that San Francisco has lost \$17.5 million in business revenues and \$600,000 in hotel tax revenues caused by the pull-out of farm convention business. That boycott occurred as a result of two resolutions, one in 1968 favoring a grape boycott and one in 1979 calling for a lettuce and banana boycott passed by San Francisco's supervisors.

By comparison the potential impact on Santa Cruz appears minimal, but could reach several hundred thousand dollars if the farmers are successful in persuading others to join them.

Joe Flood, director of the Convention and Visitor's Bureau, said in the past 12 months Santa Cruz has played host to four agriculture-related conventions with a total attendance of approximately 975.

Flood said each convention visitor to the city spends about \$226 per two-night visit, bringing to \$220,350 the potential spending agriculturalists have done in the city in the past year.

This is in addition to the unknown number of tourists with an agricultural background who may make pleasure trips to Santa Cruz. Mehl, while having no specific figures, said this could also be a significant number.

Another consideration are the 1,200 local farmers and growers who belong to the county Farm Bureau, especially if they should decide not to shop or visit Santa Cruz because of the proclamation.

Apart from the economic matters, Mehl also questioned why, if the issue was so pressing, it was not brought before the full council for consideration as a resolution, which

carries more political weight, instead of being aired on a street corner in Santa Cruz.

Wormhoudt responded by saying it was a matter of timing. The council met on Tuesday night but only five members were present and it would have required four votes to pass such a resolution.

Wanting to present Chavez with some symbolic gesture, Wormhoudt

said, and believing she it would be difficult could to get such a resolution passed, the mayor decided to exercise her prerogative and issue the proclamation.

"I would do it again, I would do it tomorrow," Wormhoudt said. "There are probably more farm workers in the city than there are growers."