



# BENNETT VALLEY VOICE

VOLUME 1 NUMBER 2

BENNETT VALLEY HOMEOWNERS ASSOCIATION

MARCH, 1978



## GRAPES IN THE VALLEY

Dave Steiner

The history of the Bennett Valley/Sonoma Mountain area as a wine-growing region is somewhat hard to precisely trace, but old-timers in the area have assured me that at one time there were about two thousand acres of vineyards in the immediate vicinity. In addition, the past 75 years have seen the rise and fall of several wineries, including Branger and DeTurk on Bennett Valley Road, Bottasso on lower Sonoma Mountain Road, and Sheik Brothers on Enterprise Road. Home winemaking has flourished here throughout the history of white man's presence, but what has happened to the commercial wine-growing industry in Bennett Valley and where is it going?

Two major outside influences proved catastrophic for the area's growers and winemakers: the root louse *phylloxera* wiped out the first plantings of Sonoma County in the late 19th century along with virtually every other vineyard in California and Europe making viticulture impossible until the advent of native American resistant rootstock and perfection of grafting techniques. The second catastrophe came with Prohibition which assured the almost complete destruction of the industry. All that remained was a tiny market for home winemakers and sacramental wines.

Until the last ten years, winegrowing in this area was difficult because of competition in the "bulk and jug wine" market, increasingly dominated by corporate giants like Gallo with total control of every aspect of their high volume, "economies of scale" industry. Past practices of local winemakers have been characterized by the blending of

local wines with lesser cheap bulk wines to cut costs. The net result was that quality local wines were blended away and lost, along with the recognition they deserved. This scenario is not difficult to understand in light of the nature of the wine market of the time: wine was just wine, differentiated one from the other, if at all, by such simplifications as red or white, sweet "sauterne" or dry "chablis", and the cheaper the better so long as it was palatable. A market so undemanding was naturally unwilling to pay the increased production costs of fine wines.

With the past ten years' rise in the popularity of wine has come an exponential increase in public awareness and a consequent willingness to pay for wines of the highest quality. The excellent character of Bennett Valley wines fulfills the exacting quality standards of an increasingly sophisticated market. The very qualities of our climate and soils which make other kinds of agriculture (i.e. forage production) less competitive with crops of regions with hot temperatures and more fertile soils, render them ideally suited for the production of fine wine grapes. Grapes of the highest quality are not grown in the richest soils, but rather on well-drained soils of moderate to lower fertility, most often found on hillsides like our own. And our climate is second to none as the cooling influences of both the bay and ocean moderate the warmth of our sunny days, delaying ripening and fostering maximum development of the flavor and aroma necessary for the best wines. In addition, the highland areas (4 - 5 hundred feet) tend to be frost-free

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## WELCOME TO 30 NEW MEMBERS!

During February we had such a great response to the maiden issue of the **VOICE** that we hope other residents who are interested in our Valley will join the growing B.V.H.A. membership.

Your continued support is needed to maintain open communication in the Valley. If you're not a member now, what better time to join.

One year's membership is only \$5.00 which can be sent to the return address on this newsletter. Your membership entitles you to join with others to make one loud voice in regard to our neighborhood and to continue receiving the **BENNETT VALLEY VOICE**.

Come on — \$5.00 is a bargain and we need each other. **JOIN NOW!!**



## IT'S HAPPENING AT THE GRANGE

Two big events coming up in April for all to share.

On April 3, the Grange's Committee of Women's Activities will hold their annual rummage sale at the LaRose Hotel, 5th & Wilson, Santa Rosa from 9:00 — 4:00.

To donate rummage for the sale call Evelyn Kesler at 546-9630.

The second April event will be the annual spring spaghetti "feed", April 29, served family-style starting at 6:30 at the Hall on Grange Road. It's a family affair with adult tickets at \$2.75, children between 5 and 12 at \$1.50, and children under 4 can eat for free.

Don't miss seeing your neighbors and tasting Perina Pisenti's delicious sauce!

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### WINE (continued from front page)

during the spring, thus eliminating the need for costly frost protection systems.

Our production drops from the 7–15 tons-per-acre enjoyed by central valley growers to the 2–5 ton-per-acre range. The reduced production and increased per-acre cost is justified by the higher per-ton price, even when the grower must sell his grapes as grapes, and cannot crush them himself. Several small "chateau-style" wineries in Sonoma Valley whose concern has been production of wines indigenous to the locale have shown increasing interest in Bennett Valley/Sonoma Mountain grapes and, equally important, a commensurate willingness to pay premium prices for premium fruit. Two such wineries are in the formative stages in Bennett Valley (considered for federally-regulated labelling purposes, part of the Sonoma Valley) now and can be expected to crush in 1978 or 1979.

The prospects for both vineyards and wineries in Bennett Valley seem good, if land use patterns and policies continue to be favorable.



### WHAT DO YOU KNOW — YOU ONLY LIVE HERE!

Do you feel your thoughts on what should happen to land use in Bennett Valley are going unheard? Now is the time to speak up.

If you can't go to the Bennett Valley Special Study meetings, jot down your ideas and concerns and mail them to the B.V.H.A. return address. We will see that your responses get into the appropriate hands.

If you don't speak up now, don't complain later.



### BENNETT VALLEY SPECIAL STUDY MEETINGS

On February 21 the first of four scheduled Special Study meetings with the county planning department and Citizens Advisory Committee was held. Toby Ross, with the planning department acted as chairman. Carol Whitmire also on the county staff was present. The Citizens Advisory Committee consists of Tamara Boulton, Patrick Campbell, Verley Gregersen, Fred Hazlett, Barbara Mayberry, Paul Mowbray, George Nicholas, Peggy Ann Nostrant, Sandra Steiner, Cheryl Tolin and Warren Watkins.

The role of the advisory committee was explained by Ross. In his opinion, that role should be one of liaison between staff and Bennett Valley residents. Background information was given and staff stated that they would handle all technical aspects of the study.

An overview of issues and alternative policies was discussed in light of current land uses and the effects (or lack thereof) of the 1972 special study.

At the second meeting held March 7, land use alternatives were discussed. County planning staff presented three land-use maps — one concerning traffic flow, one on development and one on natural resources.

Discussion was kept pretty much between staff and the citizen group allowing for brief questions at the end.

In the meantime, the citizens group has met on their own to discuss the problems and county presentations allowing for more informed responses to county staff.

The next joint meeting will be April 4 at Yulupa School, 2250 Mesquite Dr. at 7:30.

### BENNETT VALLEY'S FUTURE

Lee Morton

As a resident and a builder/developer, I feel that with proper planning, Bennett Valley can develop and still retain the rural atmosphere we all enjoy.

I would like to see the Valley develop more homesites than are now available, but not to the point of overpopulation which is, in my opinion, the development of the Valley floor in a hap-hazard manner causing good farming land (grapes, pasture, etc.) to be turned into homesites purely for the ease of development.

I feel the hills that are proven unsuitable for agriculture should be developed. Careful planning in these areas would help to assure that homes blend into the natural terrain and landscape.

Sonoma County's new subdivision ordinance can and should be used to assure that new developments can be incorporated into the area without undue visual interference. The building department and sanitation department can help by assuring the use of new building systems and disposal ideas. I feel this would go a long way toward the feasible use of those lands which are not useful for agriculture.

It would be unreasonable to expect those with large parcels of land to farm them at a loss or leave them open just so we can enjoy the scenery. It should be made economically possible (lower taxes, etc.) for the farmer to operate on those lands which will support a crop. We must also encourage the developer with a conscience to make use of those other areas in the Valley which are suitable to housing.

Development can never be stopped totally, and perhaps it is unfair to close the doors to others now that we are here. However, with proper planning now, I feel a good balance of new housing and agriculture can occur that the majority of residents will approve.