

**Testimony of W. Andrew Beckstoffer before the**  
**Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry**

**September 9, 2009**

My name is Andrew Beckstoffer. I live in St. Helena, a small agricultural town in the Napa Valley of California. Our family farms winegrapes, a specialty crop. Thank you so very much for the opportunity to testify before this distinguished Committee of the United States Senate regarding climate change.

There are almost 24,000 grape growers in the United States. The full economic impact of US wine, grapes, and grape products on the American economy is estimated at \$162 billion. Grapes are the highest value fruit crop in the nation and the sixth largest crop overall. Grapes are grown in more than 40 states, and they account for about 30% of the value of all fruits grown in the United States. Grapes are a significant part of the Specialty Crop segment of the U.S. Agricultural economy. Specialty Crops represent approximately 50% of the farm gate value of total plant agricultural production while occupying only about 3% of the nation's harvested cropland.

It is widely documented by medical journals that wine is good for your heart. I truly hope that is so. For sure, grapes, peaches, pears, carrots, lettuce, tomatoes, and all fruits and vegetables are specialty crops that provide essential nutrition to the American people. That is where their real importance lies.

The Napa Valley is widely known as a premium winegrape growing region. What is not so widely known is while some 9% of Napa County's land mass is devoted to vineyards, over 10% of the county's land is protected by some sort of open space conservation arrangement. Conservation and environmental sensitivity are hallmarks of our lives in the wine region. The increased tax incentives on conservation easements that Congress provided in the 2006 legislation has made a major contribution to our ability to conserve agricultural lands. In our small valley, over 1,650 acres have been placed under Conservation Easements since 2006, including 330 of our own. These are major incentives which expire this year. I hope that you will extend them beyond 2009.

Something else beyond nutrition and conservation is important to me. President John Kennedy said that any generation will be less known for the wars they won than for their contribution to the cultural heritage. Over the past 30 years California's fine wines have equaled in quality and often exceeded the finest wines of Europe in critical tastings. The world must now consider the American contribution to this cultural arena along with our technical, economic and military might. Winegrapes are a Specialty Crop with unique national significance.

In considering my testimony before you today I was struck by four major concerns.

FIRST, in the most recent National Farm Bill, Specialty Crop concerns received \$3 billion, just one percent of the \$289 billion approval. Specialty crops represent the most agricultural worker jobs, and produce much of America's nutrition. Somehow, considering the vast economic and nutritional value of specialty crops, I do not feel that they got a fair share in the Farm Bill. My point here is not to revisit the Farm Bill but to urge that Specialty Crops receive fair consideration as you enact Climate Change legislation.

SECOND, Specialty Crops growers are generally relatively small farmers. Our family is the largest family vineyard owner in the Napa Valley and on the North Coast of California. In total acreage we list behind only two large international wineries. On any statistic involving all farms, however, we are small farmers. That is the case with most Specialty Crop producers. We are scattered politically and geographically and do not have the organization or capacity to compete with the large program crops for adequate consideration in major legislation, such as that involving Climate Change. Without your special indulgence and careful consideration, much of this nation's nutrition engine will suffer.

THIRD, it has been widely reported that many car dealers have opted out of the "Cash for Clunkers" program because of the heavy documentation requirement on their limited staffs. We have a similarly limited staff. I would hope that the reporting requirements of any Climate change program would be held to the minimum.

FOURTH, USDA's Economic Research Service reports that between the years 1997 and 2002 some 8 million acres of America's farmland have been lost to agriculture due in good part to urbanization and economic pressures. In California, our population of 37 million is estimated to double in 25 years to 70 million people. This is nearly 25% of the entire population of our country today! In that short period of time, it is reported that California could lose as much land to development as we did from the gold rush of 1849 to the year 2000!

In the beautiful Napa Valley, some 60 miles from San Francisco, there is tremendous urban pressure. It is my view that winegrape vineyards here are the long-term highest and best economic use of the land. For that reason we have been able to preserve our vineyard lands. This is true in varying degrees in all agricultural lands near urban areas. These lands in many cases are relatively small Specialty Crop lands. It is widely anticipated that state and federal carbon reduction programs will increase costs for energy, fertilizer, pest management tools and other inputs as well as transportation. If winegrape growers and agriculture are not excluded from any carbon emissions cap while being able to receive credits for offsets provided, these unaddressed increased costs will result in the loss of an additional increment of agricultural lands.

Further, it is my understanding that agriculture, through plant and soil sequestration, has been identified as a priority area for "cap and trade" offsets. If the profitability of agriculture is further decreased through increased costs and competition from foreign wines made with cheap labor and government supports, that will serve to limit the availability and expansion of agriculture as an important component of any "cap and trade" program.

The winegrape quality and standards in the Napa Valley are in no immediate or short-term danger from Climate Control activity. Certainly regional statistics on average degree days do not tell the Napa Valley story. For example, 1988 and 2005 were two of the warmest years on record in California. Because of the influence of the fog brought on by our proximity to the San Francisco Bay and the coast, these were two of the coolest growing seasons in the Napa Valley. This does not mean that we are not being affected or that there will be no long-term effect. We deal in vintage years, each of which

seems to be different. However, something is changing overall.

For example, we are experiencing more heat spikes. Generally speaking, heat and sunlight bring beneficial effects to grape ripening and maturity. We prepare our trellises and canopy management to accept and accentuate this. When heat spikes occur, they damage the grapes, and thus we must prepare our trellises to avoid sunlight and heat—in direct contradiction to our main objective of heat and sunlight accumulation.

The nights are getting warmer. The secret of producing great winegrapes involves achieving a chemical balance between sugar, acid, and pH. Sugar is accumulated during the sunlight hours, acid by the cool nighttime temperatures, and pH at both times. Climate change is increasing our nighttime temperatures, which at this time has an unknown effect on grape balance and quality. We need research to show these effects and the interaction of our different vineyard management systems. I understand that much of the carbon sequestration research has been done on annual crops. Our vines with a 20 to 40 year lifespan have a significantly different carbon footprint, and their relationship to annual crops should be analyzed.

Another area where Climate change is beginning to affect us is pest infestation. The disruption in the ecosystem is producing new pests and mutations and vine diseases that we do not yet understand. This could have a major effect on our ability to limit pesticides.

For reasons of economics, fruit quality, and soil and water conservation, we have, over the past many years, drastically reduced our tractor usage in the vineyards. In the 1980s Napa Valley vineyards were infested with a devastating root disease. In the 1990s we replanted almost the entire valley with new vines and techniques designed to improve grape quality, reduce vine and soil manipulation, and improve conservation of natural resources. At Beckstoffer Vineyards we use only about 50 pounds per acre of nitrogen fertilizer per year. This is far less than most crops. We limit our irrigation practices for reasons of fruit quality and use efficient drip irrigation when we do irrigate. We make extensive use of cover crops to host beneficial insects and limit pesticides as well as reduce tillage to limit

moisture evaporation. We in the winegrape business have for many years been adapting practices that sequester carbon. Hopefully, these early practices will be recognized in any potential carbon market or offset program.

Most of what we have been doing and currently do to reduce greenhouse gases is done to achieve fruit quality, to improve soil and water conservation, and for economic reasons. Only a very foolish farmer, without consideration of future generations, would not seek to save his soil and his water. As concern for Climate Change intensifies, our adherences to those practices and our curiosity about how to improve them increases.

California winegrape growers are national leaders in utilizing and promoting sustainable practices.

We at Beckstoffer Vineyards have participated along with 1,500 other growers representing 68.3% of the total 523,000 California winegrape acres in the California Sustainable Winegrowing program. This program provides self assessment of sustainable practices that are environmentally sound, socially acceptable and economically feasible, and offers concrete suggestions of how to improve. We are also in the process of converting two-thirds of our vineyard acreage to Certified Organic status.

Finally, it is my belief that we as Americans made great progress in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Amazing things were done in the fields of transportation, communications, armament, technology and agriculture. We should be congratulated! But in doing so, in many cases, we dried up or polluted our water, eroded our soils, and fouled our air.

Your hearings today are an obvious recognition of these facts. In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century we must continue to make progress, but preservation, conservation and environmental sensitivity must be a new requirement. We in the winegrape business are anxious to play under those rules. Given our scattered political voice and historic small share of economic and policy incentives, however, we do need your careful consideration and indulgence as you prepare a policy for Climate Change. I thank you again for

allowing me to testify today, and for your interest in the winegrape industry. I look forward to your help in allowing us to sustain our contribution to the national health and welfare.

Washington DC testimony 1sept09