



August 15, 2023

This week, our community witnessed an agricultural project appeal at the Board of Supervisors and the public testimony that subsequently ensued.

As a public policy based organization, the Napa County Farm Bureau represents over 1,000 members in Napa County. While we do not comment on individual projects, we pay close attention to the effects that public policy decisions at the Board of Supervisors have on our members and comment on the implications that decisions will have on the overall public policy landscape in Napa County.

Unfortunately, this week was an example of a pervasive, serious issue in Napa County's public policy discourse—evidence-based logic versus unreasonable emotion that is not fully grounded in fact.

In Napa County, it is becoming increasingly imperative that our public debate regarding agriculture is firmly rooted in scientific and factual evidence rather than emotional appeals devoid of substantive support.

This is one of the primary reasons that agriculture in Napa County is under threat.

Emotional appeals, political posturing, and unsubstantiated claims have become all too common in public meetings. This approach not only undermines the credibility of the decisions we make but also jeopardizes the long-term viability of our agricultural practices.

We are routinely told by a small, vocal minority that a number of agricultural projects in Napa County must be stopped or severely restricted with impassioned pleas that lack any credible scientific or realistic evidence. It is evident that many of these groups and individuals do not want any vineyard planted anywhere anymore in Napa County, a position that is absolutely contrary to not only the General Plan—which defines agriculture as “the best and highest use of the land”—but to a person's right to have beneficial use of their land.

Since the inception of the Agricultural Preserve in 1968, Napa County chose to protect agriculture through policies and data that supported a strong and viable agricultural economy. However, we continue to witness that these select groups and individuals are able to unduly influence decision-making without defensible arguments or accepted scientific data.

This has consistently created a serious issue in Napa County because it breeds an atmosphere that undeservedly puts current and future projects into question when there is an absence of fact-based decision making.

Any individual or business that desires to plant a vineyard in Napa County is put through an extremely rigorous process and is required to comply with complex, mandated regulations—regulations that were even updated to ensure environmental protections. This often requires years of time, money and experts in order to attempt to become successful with the vineyard application while ensuring the

proper environmental safeguards. Notably, Napa County has some of the most stringent environmental regulations in the state.

While dissent is a fundamental aspect of a healthy democracy, it is essential that it is grounded in accurate information. Too often, we have seen that a few individuals who oppose the establishment of vineyards based on personal opinions or unverified concerns can inadvertently obstruct the progress of responsible farmers who have fully and completely adhered to county regulations. When applicants follow every rule and regulation they've been asked to follow and fully comply with the process, it is inequitable to criticize the applicant instead of the application process itself.

It is a troubling trend that has emerged within our community – the exploitation of sound agricultural projects being used as weapons to shamelessly advance political agendas and promote individuals for political office. Such behavior undermines the principles of ethical and intellectually honest discourse.

The distortion of legitimate and compliant agricultural projects to serve as tools for political advancement is not only unconscionable but also disrespectful to the countless hours of effort invested by individuals who are genuinely committed to responsible agricultural practices in Napa County.

This current climate is not promising for agriculture and has now created an environment where many people are reluctant to contribute to the agricultural success of Napa County out of fear of groundless and unwarranted attacks on the applicant themselves rather than the regulatory process they are asked to complete.

We are highly disappointed with the outcome of the Board of Supervisors' decision which has now chosen to set a very dangerous precedent for the future of agriculture in Napa County. Picking and choosing regulations and other "criteria" to support a particular viewpoint, without acknowledging that the involved parties have fully complied with regulations, is indeed inexcusable.

The Napa County Farm Bureau encourages the Board of Supervisors to make fact-based decisions on agricultural projects that fully comply with regulations and not give in to the persistent, baseless attacks by a vocal minority that wants to obstruct an established regulatory process to serve their personal agendas.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this important matter.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Peter Nissen', with a large, stylized initial 'P'.

Peter Nissen
President
Napa County Farm Bureau