



## Winery Event Policy Update



### **Purpose**

In Sonoma County the wine industry contributes an estimated \$14 billion annually in local economic value and provides over 54,000 jobs. Nearly 60,000 acres of grapes produce a crop valued at \$600 million with a total retail value estimated at \$7.6 billion. Wine-related tourism is the largest sector of the Sonoma County economy generating more than \$1.25 billion in 2012. Agriculture is also a critical driver in preserving open space and rural character.

The wine industry has increasingly shifted the mode of wine marketing to focus on direct to consumer sales. This shift has driven an increase in wine functions and events that bring customers to agricultural areas for wine release parties, winemaker dinners, open house and industry-wide events and other gatherings that have, in some situations, resulted in neighborhood impacts and potential land use conflicts. The County Permit and Resource Management Department is working with stakeholders to review existing policies and zoning provisions with the ultimate goal of:

- Developing county-wide standards for promotional activities and events on agricultural lands balancing wine industry needs while protecting neighborhood character; and
- Address land use compatibility issues due to potential overconcentration of events in some areas, particularly Sonoma Valley, Dry Creek Valley, and Westside Road.

### **County Permit Required**

Prior to 1989, County zoning regulations allowed agricultural cultivation by right and retail sales and tasting rooms with a use permit, but did not allow events or promotional activities. In 1989, the Agricultural Resources Element was added to the General Plan, which included a change in policy allowing agricultural promotional activities on agricultural lands where compatible with long-term agricultural use of the land. These policies were implemented in the 1993 zoning code update, which allows sales and promotion of agricultural products with a use permit, as well as occasional cultural events with a zoning permit. The Director's Working Group has been convened to further define appropriate standards for permitting events and promotional activities.

## General Plan Policies

The goal of these General Plan policies is to preserve agricultural lands and balance the competing interests while maintaining the rural character of the area.



**Policy AR-6a:** Permit visitor serving uses in agricultural categories that promote agricultural production in the County, such as tasting rooms, sales and promotion of products grown or processed in the County, educational activities and tours, incidental sales of items related to local area agricultural products, and promotional events that support and are secondary and incidental to local agricultural production. Limit recreational uses to the "Land Extensive Agriculture" and "Diverse Agriculture" categories, specifically to bed and breakfast inns and campgrounds of 30 or fewer sites.

## Current Agricultural Promotional Event Permitting Process

The current process for permitting agricultural promotional events has been the subject of ongoing community discussion and has triggered controversy as individual winery and tasting room use permit applications are considered by the Planning Commission and the Board of Supervisors.

Regulations addressing agricultural promotional activities and establishing guidelines for areas of potential overconcentration will provide more clarity, consistency and certainty to the permitting process and will serve to address several emerging issues including:

- Ambiguities in definition of event types, allowed activities, and permit thresholds
- Large number of events conducted without permits
- Need for increased monitoring of use permit conditions
- Potential overconcentration of events in some areas causing adverse impacts

The Director's Working Group has been convened to provide input and guidance on potential regulation of event activities and policies to address areas of overconcentration. The Working Group is scheduled to meet from June through October 2015. Any proposed new standards will be presented to the public and decision makers as outlined in the table below.



Opportunities for Public Participation	Timeframe (tentative)
<i>Working Group Meetings</i>	<i>June -October 2015</i>
<i>Public Workshop</i>	<i>November 2015</i>
<i>Planning Commission Meeting(s) on proposed policy options</i>	<i>January 2016</i>
<i>Board of Supervisors Hearing(s) on recommended changes</i>	<i>March 2016</i>

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