



Gaw Van Male attorney talks trademarks

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Katja Loeffelholz, an attorney at Napa's Gaw Van Male, recently presented a talk on "Trademarking Your Vineyard" to the Suisun Valley Grape Growers Association. She is a registered attorney with the United States Patent and Trademark Office.

The presentation focused on the requirements and protections of trademarks, and how trademarks can benefit grape growers and vineyard owners, as well as wineries and winery owners. Much like a brand and name identify a wine, and hold value as a result, the unique qualities of a vineyard may be branded and protected, too. Trademarks are one of the categories of "intellectual property," which also include copyrights, patents, and trade secrets.

The Suisun Valley Grape Growers is an increasing active membership of owners in the 25-year old Suisun Valley appellation of Solano County. The AVA covers 15,000 acres adjacent to Napa County. Founded in 1972, Gaw Van Male is one of the top business law firms in the North Bay region. It has offices in Napa Valley and Solano County and employs 25 attorneys and 40 staff members.

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SUISUN VALLEY GRAPE GROWERS ASSOCIATION[™]



"Only 3 to 5 percent of the grapes that are crushed here are used for Suisun Valley wines," said Ron Lanza, vice president of Wooden Valley Winery & Vineyards, which was established by his grandfather in 1955. "The Lanza family only uses 10 percent of the grapes we grow. We would like to go in the other direction. Eldorado County is an 80 percent end user, but they have about 20 wineries."

What does the grape drain mean economically? With about 96 percent of the grape output leaving Solano County, the loss would be between about \$50 million and \$170 million a year based on retail prices, depending on the class of wine, according to King. And that doesn't include sales tax and jobs. Based on wholesale prices, the loss would be between about \$33 million and \$114 million.

One way to help alleviate the grape drain is to attract more winemakers. And a way to attract more winemakers is to change the agricultural zoning in Suisun Valley from the current minimum 40-acre parcels to 20-acre parcels, something that both the Suisun Valley Fund Advisory Committee and the grape growers association have proposed be incorporated into the General Plan update.

The county expects to complete the draft of the General Plan by March, with public hearings in May and hearings before the Solano County Board of Supervisors in July. Some elements will have to go before the voters at a yet-to-be-determined election date after that.

Meanwhile, another major goal, which is expected to be achieved with the addition of more wineries, is to make Suisun Valley a tourist destination.

"There are tours and tastings at Jelly Belly, Budweiser ... a couple of chocolate rooms have tasting rooms. There are olive oil tasting rooms. Fairfield can position itself as a winery town, if it so pleased," said King.