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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors
Recognize Importance of Wine Industry to County Economy**

The Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors recognized the importance of wine grape vineyards and wine making to the County's economy with a special resolution presented during the Board's Oct. 28 meeting in Santa Maria.

An information video also highlighting vineyard operations and wine making is now airing on the County's government access cable TV station, Channel 20.

Agriculture is a key economic driver for Santa Barbara County, with farming and ranching activities collectively generating more than \$2 billion to the local economy, according to the Santa Barbara County Agricultural Commissioner's Office.

The resolution was sponsored by Fourth District Supervisor Joni Gray and was presented to Kevin Merrill, vineyard manager for Mesa Vineyard Management in Santa Maria.

"Winemaking and vineyards are a cornerstone of the County's agriculture industry generating more than \$100 million each year in wine grapes alone," Supervisor Gray said. "Even in these challenging economic times when it seems everything is hurting, agriculture remains a bright spot for us."

Merrill told the Board that the County has about 21,000 acres of active vineyard that supports winemaking operations for about 100 local wineries. The vineyards and wineries together employ several thousand people and attract wine enthusiasts from around the world.

"We have ideal conditions here to make world-class wines," Merrill said. "We've got the right combination of soil, weather and location that is unique to only a few places in the world."

During the past month, many of the County's vineyard owners and operators have been harvesting their grapes, including Merrill, who told the Board he had just finished his harvest about a day before accepting the special resolution. The next phase for the harvested grapes is "the crush" when the juice is extracted from the grapes.

Wine making here in Santa Barbara County can trace its origins back to the days of the Spanish Missions, more than 200 years ago, but the modern wine industry really dates back to the early 1970s, Third District Supervisor Brooks Firestone noted.

Firestone is among a small group of the pioneer modern wine makers who first began growing wine grapes in the central and north county areas that also includes Nielson Vineyard and Louis Lucas, now Lucas & Lewellen.

"Santa Barbara County's wine industry is a true American Success story," Firestone added.

For more information about agriculture in Santa Barbara County, annual crop reports and related details, go to www.CountyofSB.org/agcomm or the Santa Barbara County Farm Bureau at www.sbcfb.com. The County TV Channel 20 wine video can be viewed online at http://sbcounty.granicus.com/ViewPublisher.php?view_id=5.

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