

# BOYCOTT BACKLASH IN SAN FRANCISCO

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**LEAD:** The United Farm Workers' boycott of table grapes has led to a tit-for-tat dispute here: after politicians here endorsed Cesar Chavez's union, farm industry groups canceled convention bookings and a rural county in central California urged its residents to spend their money elsewhere.

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At issue is a recent resolution by the San Francisco Board of Supervisors to endorse the union's boycott of grapes sprayed with pesticides. The resolution, signed last week by Mayor Art Agnos, calls for the city to cancel its annual purchase of about \$4,500 worth of grapes for jails and hospitals and forbids any similar expenditure in the future.

Although more than a dozen communities around the country have adopted similar resolutions, this one has prompted a particular flurry of outraged statements and convention cancellations. Agricultural groups have decided that San Francisco is the most effective place to fight back because of the city's dependence on tourism. Why Pick on Kalamazoo? "Where I can have impact, I will," said Bruce Obbink, president of the California Table Grape Commission, which does advertising and promotion for the \$190 million-a-year industry, the state's largest employer of farm workers. "There's no point boycotting Oakland or Kalamazoo."

Both those cities have passed similar resolutions, but neither has the high visibility of San Francisco.

These are difficult economic times for San Francisco, which has been staggered by a \$180 million budget deficit, a costly array of social problems and a loss of business and prestige to Los Angeles. So when the Convention and Visitors Bureau declared that the resolution would cost the city \$60 million over the next dozen years, business leaders and editorial writers were quick to charge that liberal politicians with timeworn ideas were jeopardizing the city's well-being.

"We can't afford to lose any kind of business in this city," said Dale Hess, a spokesman for the Convention and Visitors Bureau.

Mayor Agnos contests the bureau's estimates, which include projected losses of business from groups that were not actually booked to come here. Three groups have canceled so far, with their combined business worth \$18.7 million: the American Farm Bureau, with 8,000 conventioners

booked for 1991; the Produce Marketing Association, with 8,000 booked for 1992, and the United Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Association, with 6,000 booked for 1995. A Matter of Mentality

But critics of the resolution are not persuaded by Mr. Agnos's arithmetic. "It's not just a few conventions canceling," said John L. Molinari, who ran against the Mayor last year and was one of the two supervisors to vote against the resolution. "It sends out an economic message - a chilling message - that something is not right in San Francisco."

Mr. Agnos is widely perceived here as less than friendly to the business community, in contrast to his predecessor, Dianne Feinstein. In 1985, Mayor Feinstein vetoed a Board of Supervisors resolution that endorsed the grape boycott. Until then the board had been passing such resolutions with regularity, to the consternation of agriculture groups.

This is a steadfast union city and a longtime bastion of support for the United Farm Workers, a declining union with fewer than half the contracts and workers it had at its peak. Even the two supervisors who opposed the recent resolution are supporters of the union and its grape boycott. Mr. Molinari said he neither buys nor eats table grapes. Willie Kennedy, who cast the other negative vote, fasted last summer in solidarity with Mr. Chavez and said she berates people in her neighborhood supermarket who buy grapes. 'Bunch of Damn Liberals'

Such fervor makes San Francisco anathema to some of its agrarian neighbors. Take Madera County in the San Joaquin Valley, where grapes are a \$117 million-a-year business. Last week, in what it called a retaliatory measure, the Madera County Board of Supervisors unanimously approved a resolution urging the 90,000 residents to stop driving the 125 miles to shop, dine or otherwise spend money in San Francisco

"Agriculture is our lifeblood," said Supervisor Rick Jensen, who sponsored the Madera County resolution. "It's what side of the fence you're on." For Mr. Jensen, the boycott will mean missing a half dozen Giants baseball games each year. For Frank Wilton, another resident of Madera, it will mean skipping the rodeo at the Cow Palace. For Morgan Johnson, a local grape grower, it will mean New Year's Eve in Monterey instead of San Francisco.

"That's what they deserve," said Mario DiSilva, who runs the Madera Valley Inn, once the only building in the county with an elevator. "Do you mean to tell me those idiots up there know more about pesticides than the inspectors do? Bunch of damn liberals is what they are."