

Dear Councilmembers,

I am writing to you today in my role as a small-scale pastured livestock producer in the Agricultural Reserve. My husband and I have had the privilege of living and farming in the Reserve for the past decade. Our farming operation benefits greatly from the foresight of the folks in the County who wisely set up zoning and other protections to maintain working farms so close to the nation's capital and such an incredible, diverse customer base. The Reserve has been, ever since, under constant threat of death by a thousand cuts, which is partly why such intense resistance springs up every time a change to the zoning code is introduced.

However, I am writing today in support not of ZTA 23-09 as it is currently constituted, which from my perspective is too reliant on the definition of accessory to the accessory use of agritourism, but in support of the idea of overnight stays in the Ag Reserve, on working farms with careful parameters around that definition, with the intent of engaging and educating more of this incredible, diverse population that surrounds the beautiful lands of the reserve. No matter the decision on this specific ZTA, I urge the council to put significant and nuanced thought and discussion into the matter of the need to support a diversified and robust agricultural economy in the Reserve, one that includes commodity row crops, equine farms, small- and mid-scale specialty crop, vegetable, and livestock producers, and their ancillary and supporting services (feed producers and sales, mechanics, etc.). Part of this discussion needs to include a redefining of the term 'accessory to farming', as well as a frank conversation about the ways that income streams like on-farm stays can contribute to the long-term profitability and resilience of small- and mid-scale farms. I know of at least one small farm, for example, which could afford to have a second generation join the first on the farm if they were able to generate some additional income from an on-farm stay arrangement.

On our farm, we have often dreamed about the possibility of building a mobile shepherd's hut where folks from the more urban sections of our county could wake up the way we are fortunate to do every day - to the sounds of the birds and the wind in the trees. They could eat a simple breakfast of eggs from our chickens and vegetables from the garden, and could visit the sheep and pigs on a self-guided stroll around the farm or sign up for an additional guided tour. We've also envisioned being able to host campouts of Scout troops or families who want to spend the night around a campfire with the sounds of owls and wake to the crowing of the rooster and the chug chug of the tractor engine on its way to bring water to the animals. This would serve the dual purpose of generating income for our farm operation while also creating a new, and critically important, way for citizens of our county to connect with the Ag Reserve.

Too often, those of us who are lucky enough to live in the Ag Reserve are too quick to reject potential expansions of its uses. These expansions, with careful guardrails, don't have to be the beginning of a slippery slope to the eventual loss of working farms the way some have represented them. In fact, they may be just the opposite - ways for farms to stay in business, bring in the next generation, and engage county residents in new ways. We need those residents to be engaged -- deeply engaged -- in order to

ensure the continued protection of the Reserve, with all its benefits for water quality, climate, and quality of life for the next generation.

I urge you to consider this ZTA as an opportunity to open a dialogue about how to support and incentivize an even more diverse, robust, resilient agricultural economy in the Agricultural Reserve, one that is not separate from but profoundly interwoven with the rest of the county economy. Whether or not this particular ZTA is tabled or amended, I thank Councilmember Fani-Gonzalez for raising this important issue, and look forward to additional conversation around it in the future.

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