



Farm Discovery at Live Earth

GROWING HEALTHY REALTIONSHPIS THROUGH FOOD, FARMING AND NATURE

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February 12, 2024

Farm Discovery at Live Earth
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Dear Nicholas Brown and the Agricultural Policy Advisory Commission,
Thank you for inviting comments on the Low-Impact Camping Ordinance. Farm Discovery appreciates Santa Cruz County's continued commitment to expanding opportunities for local agricultural operators. In that vein, I am writing to emphasize Farm Discovery's support for the inclusion of rural recreational uses like camping and to share feedback on the proposed development standards for those uses.

Farm Discovery is an education nonprofit empowering youth and families for health in food, farming, nature and community at Live Earth Farm in Watsonville. We work with Live Earth Farm – to increase access to the outdoors, teach nutrition and environmental stewardship and strengthen our local food system. We are interested in working with Hipcamp to make our educational spaces available to a broader community and in new ways.

In Santa Cruz County, rural recreational activities like camping-based agritourism and farmstays are already a critical source of revenue for farmers and ranchers; we are excited to see the County invest in accessible permitting options for compatible, incidental uses on appropriate agricultural properties.

Farm Discovery recommends and supports the implementation of a tiered permitting process for rural recreational uses; it makes sense to create a process that is proportional to the intensity of use and development on the property, and that affords farmers and ranchers the flexibility needed to determine which uses work best for them. The following are suggestions that would make these uses more accessible, ensure smaller producers are included and able to benefit from this ordinance, and align with state policy priorities for access to recreational opportunities.

Setbacks: Please consider setback requirements for camping areas and rural recreational uses that are reasonable and flexible enough for landowners to be able to welcome visitors to the parts of their properties not currently in agricultural production. The proposed 100 foot setback from property lines would severely limit a farmer's ability to host campers, and would almost certainly exclude smaller producers and non-conventional farmers from being able to benefit from these activities at all. There are many properties in the more rural areas of our county without another building within 100 feet of their own property line. Picture an out of the way corner of our farm right by the fence line. On the other side of the fence, there is no building or property use that would be impacted by a low impact camper for well over 200 feet.

Density Requirement and Parcel Size: If we agree that 1 campsite per acre, as proposed, is an appropriate density we would like to suggest we lower the minimum parcel size to 2 or 2.5 acres in order to be inclusive of small, operations or those whose operations depend on a mix of owned and leased parcels of smaller sizes. This

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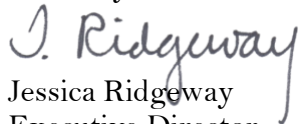
would consequently better include the smallest, most shoestring operations that could benefit most from the supplemental income. There are many properties of this size that fall within the proposed allowed zones. These properties could still meet the setback requirements as well.

Fees and Intensity of use: Farm Discovery's preferred approach is one that differentiates between types of camping areas. This distinct category for "low-impact camping areas" that caps the number of sites and introduces density requirements proportional to the size of the property would enable agricultural operators to host small, lower-impact camping areas without requiring the permits, infrastructure, and development more suitable for a larger-scale commercial camping operation with more permanent accommodations. We therefore recommend the application and fee structure take into account the very tight budget most farmers operate on and not be overly burdensome. The consequence of a complicated application and/or outsized fee would be lack of access to smaller, more marginalized producers. This proposed model would encourage the creation of smaller camping areas with minimal environmental and community impacts.

These proposed changes would make rural recreation more accessible and advance the stated goals of the Low Impact Camping Ordinance. They would also align with Governor Newsom's "Outdoors for All Strategy" which communicates the state's intention to work with counties, planning departments, and landowners to expand opportunities for outdoor recreation and low-impact camping on private lands, particularly agricultural properties.

We look forward to hearing the Agricultural Policy Advisory Commission's feedback on these ideas and are happy to partner with County Staff and community stakeholders throughout this process. Thank you for your work on this topic, and more broadly.

Sincerely,



Jessica Ridgeway
Executive Director

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