



**Farm Trails Association  
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June 4, 2012

Supervisor Ron Briggs  
El Dorado County Board of Supervisors

Dear Ron:

The El Dorado County Farm Trails Association has been in existence about 22 years and got started with the good wishes of the Board of Supervisors as well as needed funding. The Board is very familiar with these events. Over the years the organization has been pretty successful, becoming financially self sufficient (for the most part) and acting as a venue to celebrate agriculture in our County. In January 2012, the EDCFTA directors discussed meeting with members of the Board of Supervisors.

In the past decade we have all found ourselves struggling with harder times; this seems to be the way of the world and something that must be dealt with as a challenge to our creativity, energy, and intelligence. The Farm Trails group is no different from the rest. Issues of identity, mission, funding, power in the political environment and needed service to our community of interest have all been in play. I have been a member of the EDCFTA since 2000 and have served on their Board of Directors during much of that time.

As these past events have unfolded it is increasingly apparent that the organization is in need of a renewed vision of its role in the life of agriculture in El Dorado County. It was formed to provide a voice for agriculture in the County as well as conducting outreach, marketing, farmers markets, publishing a "Farm Trails & Visitors Guide", and providing a clear, consistent and attractive signage system to help visitors find agricultural points of interest in the county, both large and small. Initially this system worked well and was met with widespread acceptance and support.

Over time the popularity of "Apple Hill" has led to the publication of a guide to points of interest in their area; the growth of viticulture (particularly in the South County but generally widespread on the West Slope) has led to the publication of a guide to their

area and the proliferation of additional signage to market their products and lead people to their establishments. The major agricultural "players" in the County seem to be "Apple Hill", the Wine grape growers/vineyards, Fruit Growers, and the Farm Trails Association. Recently the "Farm Trails Guide" became the "Visitors and Farm Trails Guide". The EDCFTA has been partnering with others in an attempt to provide the best service possible to our members.

Our membership has been somewhere between 100 and 150 over the years. Many of our members are engaged in what one Supervisor used to call "sub-agricultural" pursuits. I am one of those persons. The Lotus Bonsai Nursery and Gardens is on five acres where we live. Over the years we have continued to grow and have between 200 and 300 visitors a year. This is "small potatoes" to many farmers but to us it is a wonderful life that brings us and our clients a lot of pleasure. When people visit us they bring money; they want to find a place to stay, have dinner, drink spirits, and generally enjoy themselves.

This emerging market situation where the primacy of 'pure' agriculture slowly gives over some of its influence to what is popularly called 'agri-tourism' appears to be a widespread trend that is going to grow. I think that El Dorado County is uniquely situated to take advantage of this changing environment. There is clearly a continuum of activity from large scale growers who market their products in ton quantities and have no other activity on their land to small agriculture endeavors such as ours where products are taken to market by 'the piece' and we are basically selling living art to discerning buyers; many of whom live in the major urban centers and come here to escape the hubbub of the city.

We think it is important for the EDCFTA to visit the Board of Supervisors quarterly to discuss what is in harvest, items of interest to the agriculture community, and familiarize the Board with areas of concern that we are focusing on. As I recall this used to happen but is a practice that needs to be begun again as we attempt to find solutions to the complex problems facing us all. Thanks in advance for your good will and attention to this important issue.

Sincerely,



Scott Chadd  
Director

Cc: Wendell Smith, President, EDCFTA  
Maryann Argyres, Secretary, EDCFTA  
Seana Hartsell, EDCFTA Farmers Market Manager