

April 12, 2012

Supervisor Doreen Farr
Chair, Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors
105 East Anapamu Street
Santa Barbara, CA 93101

Re: Las Varas Ranch Project/Board Hearing Date April 17, 2012

Dear Honorable Supervisors:

I am the ranch manager for the Las Varas and Edwards Ranches. These ranches have a long and rich history in productive agriculture, combining both citrus and avocado orchards and a high quality herd of cows and calves that graze the portions of the ranch not devoted to orchards.

I would like to clear up some misconceptions. We, out of respect of the trails advocates, concerned environmentalists, and County staff, allowed numerous site visits where opponents proposed to put the Coastal Trail. They had no quarrel with the three trails that the project description offers for dedication, but they wanted additional trails.

We allowed these site visits, not to negotiate a new location for the Coastal Trail, but to demonstrate to them why it is infeasible to build and maintain a public trail in any of the locations they proposed. We tried to explain our legitimate concerns for retaining agricultural viability on these working ranches. The trail advocates and environmentalists expressed complete disregard for agricultural viability. They just assumed that we would manage to deal with the disruption that their trails would cause.

There are numerous reasons for not locating a trail in any of the proposed locations. These include native grasses, pristine coastal sage scrub, wetland indicator plants, highly erosive soils, steepness of grade, bluff erosion, California red legged frog habitat, Monarch butterfly habitat, wetlands, riparian habitat, privacy and security issues for existing residential structures, as well as future residential housing, numerous bridges across creeks, drainages, railroad tracks and wetlands, and no viable way to get to a feasible trail head parking area at the west end.

My primary purpose in writing this letter to you, though, is to address the agricultural issues. Introduction of the public into agricultural lands, particularly larger, more remote properties such as Las Varas and Edwards Ranches, exposes the agricultural operation to a wide range of risks that urban residents simply can't appreciate. Trails proximate to orchards can introduce disease, invasive species and pests into the orchard. People can be incredibly aggressive about cutting or climbing even the best fencing to steal fruit, equipment, and even copper wiring. Vandalism is another problem when the unsupervised public enters rural lands.

Our cattle operation on the ranch is a cow-calf operation that uses rotational grazing. Because of the varying microclimates on these ranches, and the extensive pasture fencing, we are able to maximize the use of available forage without overgrazing by moving the herd from one relatively small pasture to another. This not only "rests" the pasture but gives the vegetation in

the cooler areas longer to grow before it goes to seed. Range cows are not domestic pets. When people on foot and dogs approach, the cows perceive them as the same kind of threat as a coyote or other predator. Their response either is aggression or flight. Either one stresses the animals and reduces weight gain. The presence of perceived predators can cause a calf to run into or through a fence. Because the pastures are relatively small, any public trails near the pastures expose the cattle to stress and interrupts their grazing. It doesn't matter whether they can see the people and their dogs – cattle have excellent hearing and smell. Range cattle survive because they are semi-wild and able to protect themselves and their calves.

Cows and calves are particularly vulnerable to disturbance during and shortly after calving. The cows are extremely nervous during this time. To better protect them from coyotes, mountain lions, and other predators, we use all of the pastures south of Highway 101 for calving. All of the public trails proposed by people other than the ranch owners go through or right past our calving pastures. A cow disturbed during calving will jump up to run off for her own protection, but that can result in injury or death to the calf and severe injury to the cow. Calves are curious and will eat virtually anything. If a calf ingests any plastic, it will die. People frequently leave plastic behind and the wind carries it into nearby pastures so this kind of death is not uncommon. By the time we realize that the calf is sick, it too late to save.

The Dohenys were comfortable siting the trails where they did because the location will minimize potential conflict with the agricultural operation. The vertical trail is adjacent to an orchard so ranch staff will have to patrol the fencing regularly to ensure that it remains intact and we may require more weed control than usual, but the Dohenys were willing to assume these added burdens because this vertical trail provides such an amazing experience to the public.

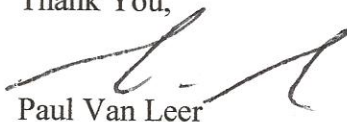
The lateral trail north of Highway 101 also will require fencing, both on the short distance where it is adjacent to the orchard and along the pasture, but these pastures are larger and more open. We use them when the calves are older and less likely to spook and run into a fence, or become separated from their mothers by running through the fence. There is much less conflict between the public and the cattle operation with this trail than with any proposed by the opposition.

Attached are exhibits demonstrating just how much productive pasture the grazing operation would lose with these alternative trail proposals.

So let me be clear:

The Dohenys will not fund any additional environmental review, or accept any alternative trail. The only acceptable trails are the ones included in the project description that have been studied in the EIR.

Thank You,



Paul Van Leer