

Subject: a few thoughts from Rocklands Farm concerning ZTA 18-03

Janis Glenn here, owner of Rocklands Farm and Winery. As a resident and great supporter of the Agricultural Reserve, and as a business owner that enjoys the benefit of what the Reserve has to offer, I feel that I have unique perspective on ZTA 18-03 that I would like to share with you.

My husband and I bought Rocklands Farm in 2003 with no intention of starting a farm that would eventually be open to the public. It was only when my young son Gregory graduated from Virginia Tech with the great desire to start a farm with some of his fellow graduates did Rocklands Farm begin. Since the inception in 2008, they have poured themselves into various aspects of farming.....growing organic vegetables, raising livestock, planting the vineyard and the eventual creation of the winery. I attribute most of our modest success to the fact that we are a working farm. Our customers come to Rocklands Farm to experience the "farm" and all it has to offer. I believe that this farming aspect to the alcohol production is critical, and shouldn't be "optional" in the ZTA.

People come to the farm hoping to engage their senses. They come for the taste of good food and wine, the sight of crops growing in the fields, and animals grazing on the hillside. They come for the smell of fresh mown grass and the scent of honeysuckle wafting through the wind. And quite surprisingly they come for the touch... men who run their hand across the vintage wood of the barn to appreciate the craftsmanship, and kids running barefoot in the grass is a joy to be seen. They love to hear the cacophony of the birds and the roar of the creek. Most every visitor walks away with their senses full of the joy of living the rural life.

I am sure that the intention of the ZTA is to bring more people out to the Agricultural Reserve to experience rural life and what farms have to offer. I am in favor of this, and welcome new wineries and other alcohol production facilities. I am sure that they can offer a positive experience to customers with regards to four of the senses; new tastes, new sights, new smells and touches. But the one area that is different than the rest is that of sound. And this is the area to which I would like to draw your attention.

Sound doesn't stay within property lines. It travels. And the part of the sound that travels the farthest is the pounding bassline. The annoying headache-causing bassline. Have you ever been at a stoplight when the car next to you is shaking from the music pounding inside? And all you can hear is the bass? This is when music stops being music, and becomes noise. Annoying and aggravating.

My wine tasting and my wedding business offers a peaceful tranquil spot for our guests. That is why they make the drive out here! As does Homestead Farms, Butler's Orchard, Soleado Lavender Farm, and a plethora of other businesses in the Agricultural Reserve. We can control our customers experience in every way EXCEPT with regards to sound, because sound can travel over my property line without my control. Quite simply, excess noise will put us out of business.

Here is my nightmare scenario: a neighboring farm on Montevideo Road puts in an alcohol production facility. They realize that the easiest way to bring in money is to host a festival 9 times per year (fully allowable under the terms of the ZTA). These festivals most always run both Saturday and Sunday, 11am to 6pm (a single event can be two days or more). They offer live music in a variety of styles.... Reggae, Caribbean, Salsa, Bluegrass. The musicians mostly play outside in the open air (think Wolf Trap). All of the music is amplified. Suddenly my venue is no longer peaceful and tranquil. We are not enjoying the "free music" from our neighbors. We are simply being blasted by noise of which I have no control. Noise from 11am to closing. Both weekend days.

When I started hosting weddings here on Rocklands Farm, my neighbor, Knight Kiplinger, let me know that he could hear the band and the DJ from inside his home, ONE MILE AWAY. His home is across my field, over Montevideo Road, across Dry Seneca Creek up a hill, across his 500 acres all the way to River Road. ONE MILE AWAY. When he let me know about this disturbance, I drove right away to his property line. I took out a piece of paper and wrote down all the songs that the DJ was playing, and I also wrote down the names of the bridal party as they were introduced by the DJ. This was at 9pm. On a Saturday. One mile away. (As a result of this I have made many alterations to the barn to reduce noise. I have purchased a decibel meter, and educate every musician about the Montgomery County Noise ordinance, and I monitor their music. I have also reinforced the walls and the windows of the barn to help keep the noise inside). My neighbor and I have had some very civil and neighborly conversations about noise and the Ag Reserve. We work together to be good neighbors. And this is music that is INSIDE the barn, not outside in the open air or under a tent. One warning; not everyone is a good neighbor, and there is no guarantee everyone starting an alcohol facility will want to be a good neighbor.

(Currently, the Department of Permitting Services has allowed wedding venues in the Ag Reserve to host unlimited weddings using tents. There is a great difference between bands playing inside a barn, and bands playing outside in the open air. ZTA 18-03 would add to this outdoor music situation in a large way.)

The main point is that noise bothers people. If you happen to be a member the festival or a guest at the wedding or the party, then music is fun and joyful and helps you celebrate. But if you are a near-by resident, or a neighboring business, then music becomes noise, and that noise not only becomes bothersome, it becomes irritating, and then it becomes unbearable. As a business owner, I know that I would lose my peace-seeking customers with a Reggae Festival going on down the road. As a resident, I know that I would not enjoy living here any longer with this type of noise going on from my neighbor's property.

I believe this is the unintended consequence of ZTA 18-03. You are allowing any alcohol producing facility to have 9 festivals per year, which in reality means 18 weekend days per year (as most festivals have a 2 day duration). Most farm businesses are only open during the "good season" (May – October, 6 months, 24 weekends). So 75% of the weekend time that open venue can have loud music festivals! These festivals are very lucrative, so it will be very tempting to have as many as possible.

Here is what Rocklands Farm hosts with regards to events:

Most (80%) of our weddings are small events (130 guests or less). Some go up to 150 guests, but rarely, if ever have they gone over 200 guests. Rocklands Farm hosts Live Music every Friday night from 6pm to 9pm (during our working hours) and the musicians either play inside our Tasting Room, or on the patio directly outside the door. This music is provided free of charge for our guests, so these music nights don't really count as an "event" as they are not ticketed. Many of the musicians play acoustic instruments. We carefully select our musicians and purposely avoid heavy metal/Blue Oyster Cult type music. In addition, we host four outdoor music events ("Barnside Acoustics") each year on the Sunday afternoon before a National Holiday (Memorial Day, 4th of July, Labor Day, and what used to be called Columbus Day). Largest attendance was about 150 guests. Musicians have always played within the four walls of the barn, never outside. Most are acoustic in nature, some amplified. These concerts are free to our customers, so again, not sure how they fall into the "event" category as we do not sell tickets for entry.

I think it might be a useful exercise for your committee to rent a DJ, put them on a truck, and have them come to your neighborhood. In fact, I'll pay for the DJ and the truck. Have them play at the usual level that they have for a wedding or a festival. Have them play during the day, or in the evening. Experience what that level of sound is like, and see if you think you and your family would enjoy having that next door. Have the truck drive down the road, and see how far away it has to go for your peaceful evening to be peaceful again! Or better yet, we can set up a tent here in the Ag Reserve, and have that music playing, and you can drive around and see how far that music can go. I think you will be shocked at the result.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to share my thoughts. In summary, I am in favor of alcohol production in the Ag Reserve, but I think you need to put some limits on the number and the scale of events allowed by the ZTA. And you need to include more than "optional" farming as a requirement for these facilities to maintain not only the integrity of the Agricultural Reserve, but to increase the customer experience who expect the "farm experience".

Respectfully,

Janis Glenn

Rocklands Farm and Winery