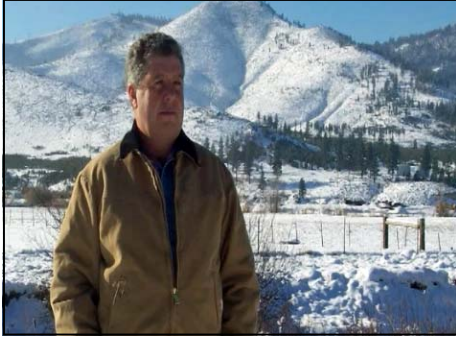


# Passion for the Land



*A Collaborative Project to help rural residents share stories about preserving community heritage while protecting agricultural lands & natural resources for future generations*

## Just a Farmer by Dave Goicoechea



I am just a farmer was my mantra. One day, while watching TV, a bunch of guys just like me recited the poem, "I Am Just a Farmer, Pure and Simple," and I thought, how truly the words described who I was and what I always wanted to be.

Then along came a lawyer who asked me, "You can't really make a living off that place, can you?" "I try." I said. Soon after, I learned my family farm was the focus of Our General Plan process. Lawyers and elected officials using the terms like Sphere of Influence, Annexation, Eminent Domain,

Municipal Services, and LAFCO were going to determine if we would be able to continue farming our land.

My family purchased our farm in 1990 and we've persistently worked the land, even though fires, floods, droughts, unfavorable market conditions and noxious weeds have sometimes impeded our progress. Land speculators looking to strike gold by getting farmers to cash out their land for subdivisions, politicians wanting a higher tax base, and uniformed citizens were about to take away the lifestyle we have chosen.

In preparing our defense we found that in 1998 the California legislature enacted the Farmland Security Zone Act which contracts with farmers & landowners to keep their property in agricultural production for at least 20 years. This legislation prohibits annexation without the landowner's permission. This law, the California Farm Bureau, and many supporters throughout our County, joined in protecting our farm through the legal onslaught that followed. After 14 months and a series of court appearances, we won the right to keep our land in agricultural production.

Now I am more than "JUST A FARMER."

After this experience, I was elected to the Sierra County Board of Supervisors. I'm working to preserve the custom and culture of a successful 150 year agricultural economy in Sierra Valley. I believe government policies and actions are necessary to respect not only the rights of individuals wishing to farm their land, but also, the rights of individuals who treasure open space and rural country living. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, developers, land use planners, ranchers, and government officials need to learn from past mistakes, work collectively to pursue common sense legislation and protect the ever dwindling agricultural lands for future generations.



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