



Caravvas

FARM AND GARDEN

# Graves Farm and Garden



My name is Andrew Graves. I own and operate my family farm 5 miles south of Roswell, NM, alongside my father Buzz, my mother Ronda, and my two brothers Daniel and Zach. I am a 4th generation farmer. My great grandfather Thomas Graves came to New Mexico in 1916 with his entire family. Bu 1932, working alongside his wife and children, he saved up enough money to buy the farm he worked on. That is the very land I step out my front door onto every single morning.

## Introduction



Throughout the years my family has farmed alfalfa, corn, wheat, baily, oats, and cotton, all the usual crops that farmers in our valley grow. My father decided in 1981 to start selling some of the produce that he grew for his family to the public. Fresh Green Chile of course was at the top of the list. He built a Chile Roaster and sold “Fire Roasted Green Chile” out of his front yard, and so began Graves Farm and Garden. He turned his garage into a store, and sold many varieties of vegetables as well. In 1995, my mother started tours where the local school would come out and pick their own pumpkin, and visit the petting zoo. This started my family’s adventure down the Agri-tourism path.



## **In the Beginning**

During my senior year in high school my Ag teacher approached me about building a Corn Maze that the FFA students could run to raise money, but at the time I wasn't interested.

Two years later, in 2007, my family went through one of numerous financial hardships. I don't know if you follow the prices of commodities for the state of New Mexico, but it's not good and hasn't been for quite some time now.

We were desperate for money, so I built our first Corn Maze along with a "Farm Festival" offering many types of farm based games for children as well as a hay ride to the pumpkin patch.

## Our Operation



To date we have a 40 acre garden, and roadside store. We do educational field trips for the schools. Last year we had 4000 children visit our farm though field trips, 3500 people on the day of the "Farm Festival" and 8000 people went through the maze. Last year we expanded and included a "Zombie Paintball Shoot".

## Our Operation



I employ up to 50 people 6 months out of the year, and 10 people year round. Over the last 9 years I have been extremely involved with all four of my local FFA Clubs. They come out and learn how a real farm is run, and they do most of the labor needed in building and running the Corn Maze. At the end of each year I cut them a donation check which pays for traveling costs for competitions. Last year I wrote a check for \$3,000 to each school that was involved.

## Our Operation



I have been told countless times that we are a blessing to our community. If not for these type of comments I would have stopped a long time ago. You see, I do not make a lot of money off of Agri-tourism. In fact this will be the 9th year we have been doing Agri-tourism to the max, but three years ago was the first year we made a profit. I will say this, agri-tourism benefits my store where we sell our vegetables and Green Chile. The "Farm Festival" is great for our community because it is good old-fashioned clean fun, and people love coming to my farm!

## Issues that Arise

The reason I have come before you today is to address some of the issues my family has faced over the last 20 years while operating in Agri-tourism.

Now we have been extremely blessed over the years and to date we have never had a lawsuit filed against us. However, we have had our share of accidents. Some examples include someone stepping on a nail, a twisted ankle, and a smashed finger. Nothing too serious in terms of injury, but we take them very seriously.

On six accounts I have paid out of my own pocket for medical bills from someone (visitor) getting hurt on my farm. I have always followed up with that person until the day they were fully healed. Maybe that's the reason we have never been sued, I will never know for sure.

I want to add that we carry a 2 million dollar insurance policy on any persons whom step foot on to my property. We have always had insurance and we always will.



So here is my issue: I have around 15,000 people visit my farm per year, and there is nothing in place to protect me and my family from a frivolous lawsuit, other than my insurance company. If I get so many frivolous lawsuits let's say 5 for example, my insurance company will drop me. Now, please note that I consider myself an honest man. If someone gets hurt on my farm and it was my fault, I would be more than happy to do what I need to do to take care of them. This is one of the main reasons I pay \$45,000 dollars a year for insurance.



We have gone the extra mile to try and keep our customers safe. All of my staff and I are extremely careful, very aware, and well trained in keeping our guests safe. If someone comes to my farm and gets hurt due to something I neglected, quite frankly, I shouldn't have even had people visiting my farm. If I am not capable of keeping them safe, in my eyes I would deserved to be sued. However, this is not why I'm here.



I sit here before you because I am afraid of losing my farm to someone who is looking for a “Cash Out” paycheck. If I get sued, and it’s over my insurance policy’s umbrella and it’s my fault so be it, I deserve to lose my farm. But, if I get sued and it’s not my fault, and it’s a frivolous lawsuit that is over my policy’s umbrella, we all know the insurance company would rather settle that out of court. I am a struggling farmer and if any money was to come out of my pocket it would be the end of my farm.

You see, because I am a farmer my business is directly attached to me and my family’s personal life. I would lose the farm that generations of my family have poured blood, sweat and tears into for almost a hundred years. I would lose my home, my brother’s home, my parents’ home, my grandmother’s home, and all of our income. We wouldn’t be able to feed our children and my family’s entire way of life would be in jeopardy... all because someone was trying to take advantage of the system.





I do believe all of Agri-tourism businesses in the state feel the same way. I mean, who in their right mind would take a chance like that? So, I would ask the chair to help protect me and my family from the people in this world who would do such a thing. I ask for help in moving a piece of legislation that would keep someone from taking advantage of me and my family. I run a working and operating farm, there is no asphalt, no walkways, and the ground is unlevelled. The pumpkin patch is full of strong vines you can trip and fall on accident if you are not careful, it's far from Disneyland but remember people get hurt there too. There is a risk when coming to my farm, you could fall and break an ankle in the pumpkin patch or get poked in the eye by a corn leaf. Things of this nature are called inherent risk and come along with farm. I ask the people who come to my farm to be responsible for their actions in regards to these very things. I don't believe it is right that my and my entire family's livelihood hangs in the balance of something I can not control.

I would also like to note that a bill has been presented before for this very subject. I believe it didn't pass because it was too vague and included too many different types of businesses. Perhaps the legislation needs to be more specific and define what Agri-tourism businesses are. Also, I know many other states have already passed bills very similar to the one I am talking about. The man I do my "event insurance" with mainly works with Agri-tourism businesses and knows the specifics of these states agri-tourism legislation. I think we could fashion one specific piece of legislation to address the state of New Mexico's needs. Thank you



Caravos

FARM AND GARDEN