

To whom it is of concern:

I have worked with Blaine Vice and his company, Soil Technologies, since the early 1990's, after meeting him at an event of the California Avocado Society. At the time, I was managing a 350 acre avocado and lemon grove in the Ventura County foothills above the Pt. Mugu Naval Base. We had a myriad of soil types and cultural problems affecting the production of the 20 year old trees, grown in heavy Silty Clay and Clay Loam soils. I could see that the 100 acres of new hillside plantings we had recently completed would also need very careful water and nutrient management. His explanation of the soil polymer use in landscaping and his adaptation of the idea to agriculture spurred my interest in working with him to address the problems I saw upcoming.

Knowing he was a graduate of the Cal Poly SLO soils program, I was confident that he knew what he was talking about with soil and water interactions, even when speaking of soil conditions not at all related to the soil types he was working with in and around the area he lived (Fallbrook). His offer to visit with some of the polymers impressed me, and we soon were employing Polymers in both shallower, lighter soils to increase water holding capacity while allowing the heavier soils were drying out. Through field work together we perfected the technology to inject them into the soil, and were seeing good results in stress and salinity management by the time I left in 2000.

Fast forward a couple of years, and I had assumed the job as a Ranch Manager of a 23,000 diversified property in Orange County, growing primarily lemons. While changing counties was a huge difference, the hillside soils I was looking to plant avocados in there were more similar to the Ventura County Soils I had farmed than to the San Diego/Riverside county soils less than 13 miles away. I called Blaine to review and consult on our soil and salinity challenges for the 50 acres we had recently planted. Since we had missed a pre plant opportunity to amend, my goal was to give needed amendments, and nutrients while young, preparing them for a life of high yields. Blaine's consultancy opened us to considering equipment and programs I previously thought too difficult to maintain. He recommended injections of Calcium, Potassium, and the switching up of our liquid N materials. Over time I have realized he has a solid understanding of organic amendments, and he continues to assist us with our mulch and compost recommendations, and more recently on products for our organic blocks, as we search for fertilizer and cultural options.

In 2006-7 he assisted me with a complete soil reconnaissance in narrowing a 400 acre zone to 50 acres, which was planted to avocados and lemons in 2009. The advance analysis and mapping allowed us to amend the selected areas prior to planting, and I feel has greatly contributed to the groves early production. It looks like these 3 year old groves are set up early with 4-5000# yields this season, in part a testament to the Blaine's framework of ideas and opinions.

His out of the box thinking and broad farming background keep Blaine in my first round of consultants, since he looks for practical solutions to difficult issues, all backed by a process of scientific inquiry. I have always found him ready to come and visit or offer his opinions as I need. I wish him well in his next round of production based adventures.

Derek Knobel

Vice President- Ranch Operations
Rancho Mission Viejo
PO Box 9, 28811 Ortega Hwy
San Juan Capistrano, CA 92675