

# Vertuccio Farms

Northeast Corner of Power Road and Rembrandt Avenue, Mesa, AZ

## *PAD Rezoning Narrative*

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*Submitted by:*



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*On behalf of:*

Mr. Cono Vertuccio and  
The Vertuccio Family Limited Partnership

## Contents

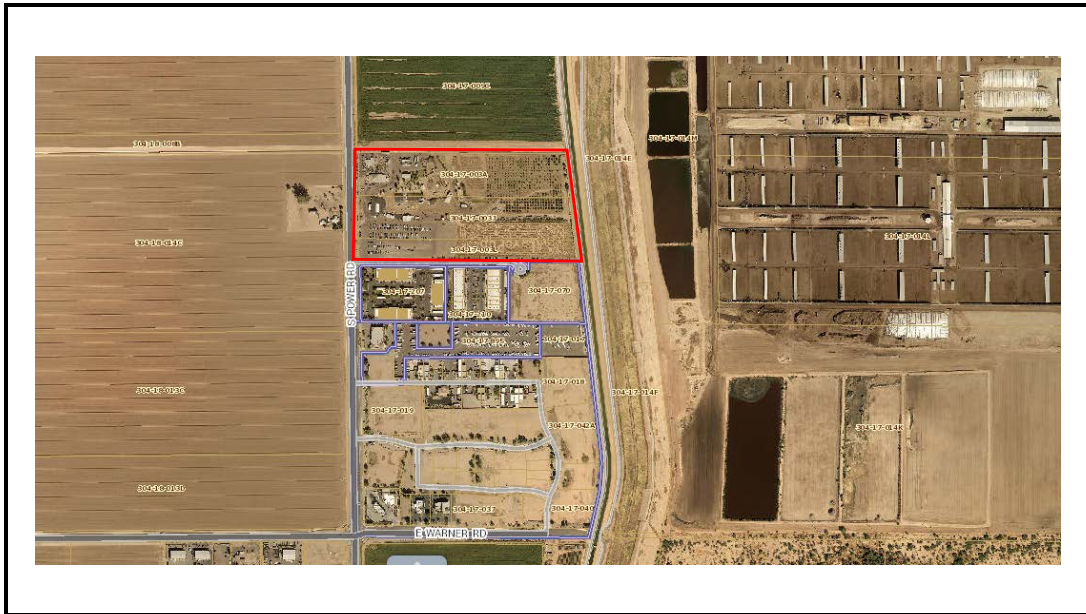
Introduction.....	3
Request.....	3
Existing Land Use Designation and Zoning Classification .....	4
Surrounding Land Uses and Zoning .....	4
Compliance with Mesa 2040 General Plan.....	5
Planned Area Development Overlay .....	5
Design Guidelines .....	7
Vertuccio Farms Uses .....	7
Proposed Site Improvements.....	8
Landscape .....	8
Parking.....	8
Signage .....	9
Lighting and Illumination Design .....	9
Circulation.....	10
About Vertuccio Farms .....	10
Historical Agricultural Use .....	11
Seasonal U-Pick Crops.....	11
Farm Stand.....	11
Fall Festival .....	11
Holiday Festival .....	12
Educational Field Trips and Birthday Parties .....	12
Operational Plan .....	12
Control Measures .....	12
Complaint Response Procedures.....	13
Conclusion .....	13
Appendix.....	13

## Introduction

Pew & Lake, PLC, on behalf of Mr. Cono Vertuccio and the Vertuccio Family Limited Partnership, is pleased to present this PAD Rezoning narrative and related materials to the City of Mesa. Vertuccio Farms, is one of the East Valley's premier destinations for agriculturally-based family entertainment. The approximately 25-acre site is located at 4011 South Power Road in Mesa. It is shown in Figure 1, below, and is comprised of five Maricopa County Assessor parcel numbers: 304-17-003A, 304-17-003H, 304-17-003J, 304-17-003K, and 304-17-003L.

The intent of this submittal is to provide for improved landscape areas along the property's Power Road and Rembrandt Avenue frontage and create a pad space north of the Farm Stand which can be used for parking or future retail. Additionally, rezoning to Light Industrial (LI) will prevent Vertuccio Farms from having to apply for annual Special Use Permits. The applicant intends to incorporate all improvements during one phase in 2020.

*Figure 1 - Aerial Map*



## Request

Our request to the City of Mesa is as follows:

1. Rezone of the entire 25-acre property from LI and LC to LI-PAD.
2. Site Plan Review and approval.

If approved, these requests will create consistency between the current use of the property and its zoning, as well as codify some of the "agritainment" uses on the property. Moreover, the Site Plan review will illustrate the planned installation of landscaping along Power Road and proposed treatment of the parking areas.

## Existing Land Use Designation and Zoning Classification

As shown in Figures 2 and 3 on the next page, the property is currently designated in the City of Mesa General Plan as Mixed Use Activity/Employment, and classified for zoning purposes as both Limited Commercial (LC) (for the first 300' from the property line adjacent to Power Road), and Light Industrial (LI).

Figure 2 - City of Mesa General Plan Land Use Map



Figure 3 - City of Mesa Zoning Map



## Surrounding Land Uses and Zoning

As shown in Figure 4 on the next page, the property is bound on the east by a RWCD canal, on the north and west by vacant agricultural property and on the south by office condominiums.



Figure 4 – Surrounding Uses

DIRECTION	EXISTING USE	ZONING	GENERAL PLAN DESIGNATION
North	Agricultural	LI/GI	Mixed Use Activity/Employment
South	Office Condominiums	LI	Mixed Use Activity/Employment
East	Canal; East Maricopa Floodway	RU-43 (Maricopa County)	None
West	Agricultural	General Commercial (Town of Gilbert)	General Commercial (Town of Gilbert)
Subject Property	Vertuccio Farms	LC/LI	Mixed Use Activity/Employment

## Compliance with Mesa 2040 General Plan

As noted previously, the site is designated as Mixed Use Activity/Employment District in the General Plan. The Mixed Use Activity designation typically applies to sites that are over 25 acres and contain retail components. Entertainment uses are also included in this district and the stated goal is that they be applied to “strong and viable centers of activity that attract people to unique shopping and entertainment experiences.” The size of Vertuccio Farms and its unique retail, recreation and entertainment offerings make it consistent with this General Plan designation and a component of a larger mixed use activity area that will eventually evolve in this vicinity.

The site is also located within the Gateway Economic Activity Area and District. Vertuccio Farms contributes to a high quality of life for Mesa residents by providing a unique agricultural entertainment experience. Providing unique entertainment options contributes to attracting a skilled workforce and retaining existing residents. Vertuccio Farms directly fulfills Economic Development Strategy S3 by creating an interesting and exciting cultural amenity (see Page 5-15 Mesa 2040 General Plan).

Vertuccio Farms is in the Inner Loop District under the Mesa Gateway Strategic Development Plan. The uses at Vertuccio Farms meet Goal 1 of the Strategic Plan because they do not impede the growth and development of the Airport. They are low impact uses with a small building footprint. Additionally, agricultural uses can be transformed into other uses easier than brick and mortar type uses. The site is within the AOA 3 area which doesn’t require use limitations beyond those in the base district. Vertuccio Farms also fulfills Goal 4 Sustainable Development by the very nature of the outdoor recreation use which interlays agricultural pursuits with recreation as detailed in the About Vertuccio Farms section below (see Page 27 Mesa Gateway Strategic Development Plan).

## Planned Area Development Overlay

A PAD is being sought for the site to deviate from certain development standards while ensuring high-quality design. The PAD is proposed to deviate from standards which conflict with the proposed site plan. On the next page, is a table which details certain known development standards which are adjusted under the PAD.

Figure 5 – LI Development Standards Proposed Deviations

<b>Development Standards</b>	<b>MZO Requirements</b>	<b>Proposed PAD Deviations</b>
<b>Landscape</b>	Landscape Island required every 8 contiguous parking spaces a minimum of 15' in length and 8' in width (11-33-4)	Landscape Islands are not proposed based on the need to preserve the agricultural nature of the site and given the seasonal use of the site.
<b>Drive-thru Standards</b>	Provide 2-foot foundation base along exterior building where adjacent to drive-thru lane (11-31-18(B))	No foundation base is proposed for this 13'x20' structure but a 13 foot wide landscape median is proposed per Section 11-31-18(A)
	Physically separate drive-thru traffic lane from the non- drive-thru traffic area with a five foot (5') wide raised landscape median (11-31-18(A))	No median is proposed in order to minimize use of concrete and maintain the agricultural feel.
	Pick-up windows to be architecturally integrated into the building it serves. Provide awnings or architecturally integrated structures for weather protection (11-31-18(C))	No weather protection structure is proposed except for a slight overhang is provided with the existing fascia along the front of the structure.
	Provide 40-inch high screen walls adjacent to the public right-of-way (11-31-18(D))	No screen wall is proposed because screening is provided as alternative screening is provided elsewhere and additional walls will erode the agricultural design of the site.
<b>Parking</b>	Parking Area Screening (11-30-9(H))	Removal of the requirement that walls/berms screen parking and that only 40% of screening be densely planted landscape.
	Exceed the Maximum allowed parking spaces of 125% of the required number of parking spaces (11-32-3(C))	Allowance for up parking spaces above 125% of the required number is necessary to park the site during Fall and Holiday Festivals.
	Modification to parking lot layout of more than 200 spaces and pedestrian access (11-32-4(G)(2) & (3))	Approximately 300 spaces are located together in one cluster primarily as utilized during seasonal festivals. Walking paths are not provided based on the preservation of agricultural theming and seasonal use of the parking lot.
	Required parking spaces determined by use and area of building (11-32-3(A))	Agriculture based commercial entertainment parking Section 11-4-5 was utilized to determine parking requirements.
	Parking areas to be paved with asphalt or other material to withstand repeated vehicular traffic (11-32-2(C))	Areas used for garbage, fire, or regular vehicular circulation will be paved with asphalt including entry points to the site while the remaining areas will feature an all-weather/dust controlled driving surface such as ABC or an equivalent approved by the Mesa Engineering Department.
<b>Building Form Standards</b>	Standards as stated in Section 11-7-3(A) of the MZO	Open agriculture themed structures won't meet the building form standard. Any new enclosed structure would be required to meet the building form standards.

## Design Guidelines

The intent of this PAD is to create a district that provides creative, high-quality development and incorporates elements such as building design, site design, and amenities that create a unique and more sustainable alternative to conventional development. As part of the PAD application there are Design Guidelines included to demonstrate how the PAD will create an innovative and unique development for the Agriculture-based commercial entertainment development. The Design Guidelines are submitted to be reviewed by the City's Design Review Board (DRB) with a recommendation for City Council's consideration to be included as part of the PAD. For this development, as long as the buildings and structures comply with the Design Guidelines approved with the PAD as determined by the Planning Director, a separate design review by the City's DRB will not be required for each structure.

At this time, there is no proposal to add new buildings to the site but Design Guidelines have been attached to this proposal in order to guide future development. Future buildings and features are proposed to be designed consistent with the agricultural themes of the property. See the Design Guidelines included in this submittal for reference to proposed colors and materials palette if expansion of Vertuccio Farms ever occurred. The design guidelines are intended to provide a reference for Mesa planning staff to utilize in order to administratively approve future buildings constructed onsite.

While there are no new buildings or additions proposed at this time it is important to note the Farm Stand complies with the building form standards of MZO Section 11-7-3 (A). The Farm Stand is the only publically accessible building on site and it maintains a primary public entrance with signage and porch features that focus the public's attention on the entrance and the large porch incorporates a desirable shade element. The form of the farm stand includes columns and window trim detailing which provide for architectural interest and complement the covered porch.

## Vertuccio Farms Uses

Upon review of the Use Tables in the City of Mesa Zoning Ordinance, the current uses that have been historically established on the property and for which Special Use Permits have already been approved, in their particular locations on the property, are allowed in the LI Zoning District.

The existing uses on the property that are permitted in the LI district are: small-scale commercial recreation uses, coffee shops and cafes with drive-thru facilities, a general market, and general retail sales. The coffee shop and farm stand are allowed in this category, and the former home of the pottery shed (proposed for demolition) may be used ultimately as a small retail location.

As previously noted, the balance of the property is zoned in the LI district. The LI district provides for a full range of commercial activities including high-impact commercial uses, outdoor display and outdoor sale. As shown in *Table 11-7-2: Employment Districts*, some of the existing uses on the property that are permitted in the LI zoning district are: small and large scale commercial and recreation uses and general retail sales. The other uses in the LI portion of the property qualify as Outdoor Entertainment or Outdoor Activities as an accessory use and are also allowed in the LI district. Outdoor activities are defined in the Mesa Zoning Ordinance as "any type of live entertainment or recreational activity taking place in a location visible to public view and not within an enclosed building." At Vertuccio Farms, the outdoor activities are seasonal, and are accessory to the historical agricultural operations.

## Proposed Site Improvements

As shown on the Landscape Plan provided with this application, the Property Owner is proposing to update landscaping on the property along the Power Road frontage. The goal of the landscaping is to provide a finished edge treatment to the property and provide a more welcoming experience for visitors to the property. In addition to the number of trees and shrubs required by the zoning ordinance, a new post-and-rail fence will be installed that will advance the rural, agricultural theme of the farm. All other existing fencing on the site will remain including chain link fencing and limited areas with barbed wire which protects the farm from intrusion and is placed in safe locations away from patron movement. The improvements along the frontage will also be installed to provide required retention for the property as shown on the provided Preliminary Grading and Drainage Plan.

### Landscape

Dense landscaping is proposed along Power Road highlighted by use of the fan west ash tree and grass. Standard landscape setbacks are met on both Power Road (15' to arterial road) and Rembrandt Avenue (20' to local street). Additional landscape is provided on Power Road creating an attractive landscape strip along the property frontage. See Landscape Plan for further detail.

### Parking

There are two primary parking areas on the site as illustrated in red on Figure 6 below. The smaller area is on the north side of the property and accommodates 52 cars. This area is largely used for daily employee parking and for visitors to the Farm Stand retail. The retail area requires 13 spaces (4,862 SF retail divided by 375 SF). The north side parking is also available for overflow parking.

The larger parking area is on the southwest corner of the property and can accommodate approximately 300 vehicles. There is approximately 52,789 SF of designated entertainment areas including sun shade pavilions, animal corrals, garden areas, play equipment areas and associated storage buildings on-site. Square footage of these areas was used to calculate the parking requirement for the agricultural entertainment use at 1 stall per 1,000 SF. The 1 per 1,000 SF of designated entertainment areas requirement is the same as required for Agriculture-based Entertainment in MZO Section 11-4-5. Vertuccio Farms is the prototypical agricultural entertainment option and classifying it as agritainment for parking purposes is more appropriate than treating it as a typical outdoor recreation area. Therefore a parking requirement of 53 stalls is required with over 300 spaces provided.

Combining the excess parking on the north with the southwest parking, there are approximately 352 parking spaces which meets the Vertuccio Farms need even at peak Fall Festival times. The provided parking also exceeds the MZO requirement of 66 total spaces for the site.

Parking surfaces around the year round Farm Stand will be asphalt while the seasonally used entertainment areas will contain an all-weather/dust controlled driving surface such as ABC or an equivalent approved by the Mesa Engineering Department. This surface in combination with the asphalt curtains at driveways will prevent track out of materials. The site seeks to maintain a unique agricultural composition which would be eroded if asphalt parking and concrete driveways were provided throughout the parking areas.



Figure 6 – Parking Areas



## Signage

Signage on site will comply with City of Mesa standards. According to MCDOT, Power Road at this section is maintained by Maricopa County and the City of Mesa limit begins 55 feet east of the Power Road section line. It is anticipated that some manner of signage will be provided to advertise the various prices of the produce for sale at the indoor Farmer's Market. These signs would be similar to those found at most farm stands in rural areas, an example being illustrated in Figure 7 below. City of Mesa sign approvals will be sought at a later date.

Figure 7 - Signage



## Lighting and Illumination Design

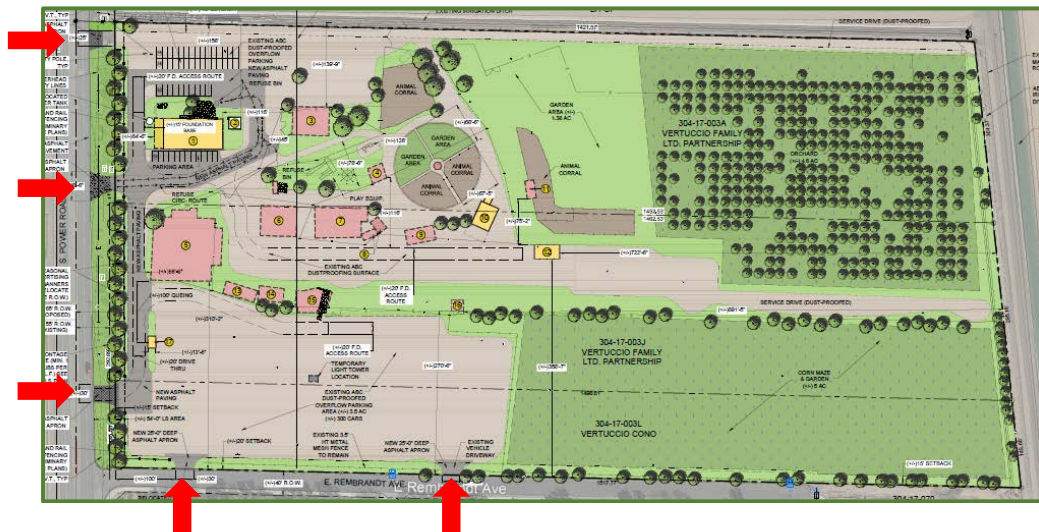
During the Fall and Holiday Festivals, events will continue until as late as 10 pm. Buildings and parking lots will comply with MZO Section 11-30-5. Parking lot lighting is provided during the Fall and Holiday Festivals using a

temporary fuel powered light tower placed in the middle of the large parking lot. Lighting used throughout the farm is designed to promote safe passage of patrons, pedestrians, and vehicles while also displaying the agricultural themes. There are no abutting residential users.

## Circulation

As shown in the diagram below, there are currently three points of access to the property from Power Road and two from Rembrandt Avenue. Typically, visitors are either visiting the large, southern parking lot, or visiting the smaller parking lot near the retail buildings. During large events, there are personnel on the site directing visitors to the designated parking areas, similar to parking at a sporting event. Parking rows are delineated with bollards and pennant strings.

Figure 8 – Entrance Locations



## About Vertuccio Farms

Vertuccio Farms started farming at this location in Mesa in 1993. Initial crops at the farm were melons, tomatoes, corn and citrus. In 1994, the Vertuccio family began its “u-pick” peach operation in which patrons are invited to explore the orchard, pick peaches and pay a by-the-pound price. In 1998, the family introduced the Farm Stand and Corn Maze and Christmas tree sales began on the site. At present, there are five separate endeavors on the property. They are: seasonal U-Pick crops; a year-round Farm Stand, a Fall Festival; a Holiday Festival; and periodic field trips and birthday parties.



Figure 9 – Vertuccio Farms Context Photos



The operational details of the Vertuccio Farms are discussed below:

### Historical Agricultural Use

The property began and continues to be used for agricultural purposes. As shown on the Site Plan and Landscape Plans provided, large portions of the property remain dedicated to the planting and cultivation of seasonal crops.

### Seasonal U-Pick Crops

Much of the property is devoted to fruit bearing trees, mostly different varieties of peaches. The orchard is shown on the Site Plan provided with the submittal. When the fruit is in season, customers are invited to the property to pick fruit and pay a by-the-pound price for their fruit. The U-Pick operation typically runs from Mid-May through June. The hours are from 6am to 2pm, Monday through Sunday and there are two employees required to run this activity on the property.

### Farm Stand

The Farm Stand is the primary retail operation on the property. It is shown in yellow at the front of the property, within the portion of the property currently zoned LC. This farm stand sells produce grown on the property, or brought in from other local growers. The Farm Stand is open year-round, from 9am to 6pm, Monday through Saturday, and from 10am to 4pm on Sundays. During the week, five employees work at the stand in various shifts. Previously, there was a retail space on the northwestern corner of the property devoted to pottery and plant sales. This temporary structure is proposed to be removed from the property. There is a small Coffee Stand that has been placed near Power Road.

### Fall Festival

In 1998, Vertuccio Farms planted their first corn maze. Operated in conjunction with a Fall Festival, the Corn Maze/Fall Festival is an outdoor activity that runs for five weeks from the beginning of October to the first part of November, depending on the weather. This event has become quite popular with the public. The Vertuccio Farms motto is "Affordable, Family Fun". Every year the corn maze features a different theme, and the Fall Festival has grown to feature a wagon ride that circles the orchard, a barrel train that circles the garden, an inflatable jump pad and air pillow, a big slide and tube rollers, and a mini zip line. There are also pumpkins and kettle corn for sale, and a couple of food trucks serve food on site. The Fall Festival runs from 9am to 9pm, Monday through Friday, from 9am to 10pm on Friday and Saturdays, and from 10am to 6pm on Sundays. Twenty employees are on the property at any given time during the Fall Festival.

### Holiday Festival

Christmas trees have been sold on the site since 1998. Beginning with the 2018 Christmas season, the farm features a large, lighted Christmas tree, and a farm-themed walk through Christmas Light display. Similar to the light display at the Phoenix Zoo, the property was decorated with large cutouts, a nativity scene, and brightly lit displays featuring thousands of LED, computer-controlled lights that were choreographed to holiday music. In keeping with the “affordable family fun” motto, the farm provided families with a wonderful holiday experience in a wholesome, affordable venue. The holiday season at Vertuccio Farms opens immediately after Thanksgiving and runs until just after the New Year. The light display is open daily from 5:30pm to 10pm, weather-permitting, and six employees are on the premises each night.

### Educational Field Trips and Birthday Parties

Since 2007, Vertuccio Farms has been hosting periodic elementary school field trips. The focus of these field trips is to educate children on where their food comes from. The “pizza farm” on the property is circular and divided into 8 sections, or slices, just like a pizza. Each slice features a different crop that is commonly found in pizza like wheat, basil, tomatoes, etc. From October through November, school children visit the site and they often report that it is one of their favorite field trips of the school year. Similarly, children can have their birthday parties at Vertuccio Farms and bring small groups to hear the same presentation made for the field trips. These events are contained in the garden area of the property. Field trips and birthday parties are conducted between February and April and are held between the hours of 9am to Noon, Monday through Friday. Two employees are required for these events.

### Operational Plan

Vertuccio Farms operates a use which is compatible with the surrounding area and ownership desires to ensure ongoing compatibility with adjacent uses by providing measures to control deleterious levels of dust, vectors, litter, noise, light, etc. The measures detailed below, add to the justifications for PAD modifications to development standards.

#### Control Measures

Dust will be controlled on-site by utilizing a combination of asphalt paving, an all-weather/dust controlled driving surface such as ABC or an equivalent approved by the Mesa Engineering Department., and vegetation. Asphalt paving is being added to retail parking areas, garbage collection routes, fire department access routes, the coffee stand drive-thru, and driveway egress points. An all-weather/dust controlled driving surface such as ABC or an equivalent approved by the Mesa Engineering Department will be provided in other parking and walking areas. Vegetation including landscaping grass and crop fields make up the balance of the site. Water trucks can be utilized to control dust if necessary.

Garbage cans are provided throughout the entertainment area, in retail areas, and at the coffee stand. Private garbage collection through Republic Services is regularly serviced via the garbage collection route identified on the site plan.

The large 25 acre site ensures that noise made from music speakers and patrons dissipates. Use of music is aligned with City of Mesa noise ordinance standards.

Light effects from the farm are minimal. Lighting is placed in the entertainment areas to ensure safe navigation of patrons. Use of light is aligned with City of Mesa light ordinance standards. Including MZO Section 11-30-5.

Building height and light tower heights do not deviate from standards allowed in the LI zoning district and Airport Overflight Area 3. Sight vectors including sight visibility triangles for driveways are to Mesa standards as shown on the site plan. No new buildings are proposed at this time therefore any other vector changes are not anticipated but if additional buildings are added in the future then they will need to comply with City of Mesa building and zoning standards.

### Complaint Response Procedures

The following Complaint Response Procedures will be followed if violation of the Control Measures outlined in the Operational Plan occur. Contact should first be made to the Vertuccio Farms manager who is responsible for the operation of the facility:

#### Contact

Mr. Cono Vertuccio

Phone: 480-650-6606

Email: conov42@gmail.com).

Contact with the City of Mesa Code Compliance department can also be made:

#### Contact

Ryan Russell, Code Compliance Administrator

55 N. Center St.

Phone: 480-644-2061

Investigation into the subject matter of the complaint will be made by the Vertuccio Farms manager and City of Mesa Code Compliance Administrator or their assignee. Action to remedy found violations should be made and follow-up with the complainant will be made within a reasonable time period.

### Conclusion

Vertuccio Farms has been providing wholesome, affordable, family fun at this location for nearly 20 years in the City of Mesa. With this application for Rezoning and Site Plan approval, the Property Owner will be allowed to continue the operation of Vertuccio Farms, including the seasonal events and activities, without the need for multiple and successive Use Permits. The property owner is looking forward to working with City of Mesa staff to codify the uses already established on the property.

### Appendix

#### A) Vertuccio Farms Design Guidelines