

## **It's possibly too good an idea to work**

By Bob Dunning

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Enterprise columnist

"Ikedas fruit stand seeks to expand," said Sunday's front-page, above-the-fold headline in Davis' Only Daily Newspaper.

"Ikedas," begins Jonathan Edwards' story, "could turn into a high-end grocery, bakery and burger joint in the next couple of years, according to its owner."

In other words, it could turn into a Davis version of Ikedas' immensely popular Auburn store that has been luring travelers off Interstate 80 for more than 30 years with its intriguing and thoroughly addictive mix of high-quality fruits and vegetables, vast array of unique specialty foods and cobblers that are to kill for.

"The possible redevelopment of Ikedas California Country Market would remake the 800- to 900-square-foot space into something akin to the family's original store in Auburn," Edwards continues. "Opened in the 1970s, the 10,000-square-foot operation is a fruit store, bakery, fast-food 'burger-bar' and a high-end grocery carrying meat, fish, chicken, beef, premium wines and microbrews."

He forgot to mention the very best homemade peanut butter cookies in North America. Also the cleanest bathrooms anywhere along the 3,000 miles of I-80 from San Francisco to the East Coast.

For many of us, no trip into the mountains or out across the desert is complete without a stop at Ikedas' Auburn store. And while many imitators have popped up over the years, no one does it better than these folks. And no one sells higher-quality or fresher produce. No one.

Put simply, there are at least a dozen reasons — all of them good — why Ikedas is legendary throughout Northern California. You don't get that popular, and remain that popular, by accident. The chance to have a similar store with similar offerings right here in Davis is an opportunity we should not pass up.

"Making the Davis site like the one in Auburn was the goal when the family opened the stand about eight years ago, said Glen Ikeda, who owns the stores with his brother, Steve," adds Edwards' story.

I know Glen Ikeda. Have talked to him on several occasions over the years. He's an engaging and enthusiastic guy who knows that while a rib steak comes from a cow, a beefsteak comes from a plant. He sells both.

I remember once asking if he might be willing to donate a few dozen of those aforementioned peanut butter cookies to a particularly large charity event in Davis. He immediately suggested that a few dozen wouldn't be nearly enough, and when I asked what he had in mind, he simply smiled and said "whatever you need."

Adds Edwards: "Ikeda said he wants to build it into a bona-fide grocery store and restaurant with bathrooms and a paved parking lot to replace the gravel lot. 'We're embarrassed that we can't improve it,' he said."

Yep, you guessed it. This story might not necessarily have a happy ending for Davis consumers.

"Zoning stands in his way. The five-acre property is zoned agriculture, which prohibits Ikeda's goals of opening a second 'burger bar,' a fast-food hamburger restaurant."

OK, let's get something straight here. While the Auburn store is famous for a lot of things, including its burgers, and while Ikeda's service is fast and friendly, their burgers are hardly the "fast-food" variety one associates with McDonald's, Burger King, Wendy's and all the rest of the dollar-lunch bunch.

It should be obvious to anyone who's seen it that the small Davis parcel Ikeda shares with the Massive East Area Water Tank is completely unsuitable for farming.

"So," according to Edwards, Glen Ikeda has "floated the idea of the redevelopment with Yolo County, which brought the idea to the city of Davis at their joint meeting last Friday. The expansion would need the approval of both government agencies," because the land, even though outside the Davis city limits, still falls within the city's sphere of influence.

Now, for a city that did backflips to get that massive chain grocery known as Trader Joe's to come to town, and a city that gave away the store to get Zipcar to come to town, you'd think our city fathers and mothers would immediately realize what a perfect fit Ikeda's unique culinary offerings are for the residents of this city.

Besides, we're not talking about a new business here. Not new at all. Ikeda has been here for eight fruitful years and merely wishes to expand.

Well, before you think this is a done deal, you'd better sit down.

"At Friday's meeting, Councilmember Sue Greenwald worried that a new burger place would take business away from similar fast-food restaurants already in the city."

Now, with all due respect to duly elected officials, to call Ikeda a "fast-food burger joint" is like calling Nugget a "florist" simply because it sells cut flowers.

But maybe Sue has never been to Auburn and seen what Ikedas is all about and what an outstanding addition it would be to the retail offerings in our humble hometown.

Added Greenwald: "It could really be a huge blow to us. It's the first thing they hit when they're hungry and come across the Bypass. If they're hungry, we'd like them to be eating at In-N-Out."

Or, more famously, let them eat cake.

In-N-Out, of course, was approved by our esteemed council members at the time despite the fact it would be in direct competition with the already established Murder Burger just across the street.

So here we have a sitting city councilwoman deciding where we ought to eat and what we ought to eat, and recommending a huge fast-food chain out of Southern California as her destination of choice for patriotic Davisites.

But using Sue's theory that existing businesses should never be challenged, one wonders if she was also opposed when Bistro 33 and Village Pizza & Grill and Mikuni and Yolo Berry Yogurt and a dozen other popular eateries came to town.

And if you think Trader Joe's won't eventually cut into Westlake IGA's bottom line, think again.

The truly interesting thing about Greenwald's position is that she's a member of the same City Council that had no problem spending 75,000 city dollars decorating that partially obscured water tank on the exact same parcel as Ikedas on the theory that it would pull people off the freeway and convince them to spend money in town.

Well, let Ikedas expand into an operation similar to its Auburn store and it'll attract a thousand times more out-of-towners than will any amount of artwork on a water tank.

Trust me on this.

County Supervisor Jim Provenza, who can always be counted on to add intelligence to a conversation, suggested a field trip to Auburn to see what an expanded Ikedas might look like. Now there's a splendid idea.

So splendid, in fact, I'll be happy to drive all our elected officials to Auburn to check out Ikedas just as long as Sue agrees to sit in the back seat and not tell me how to drive, and Jim agrees to buy us all as many peanut butter cookies as we can fit into two hands.

Do we have a deal?