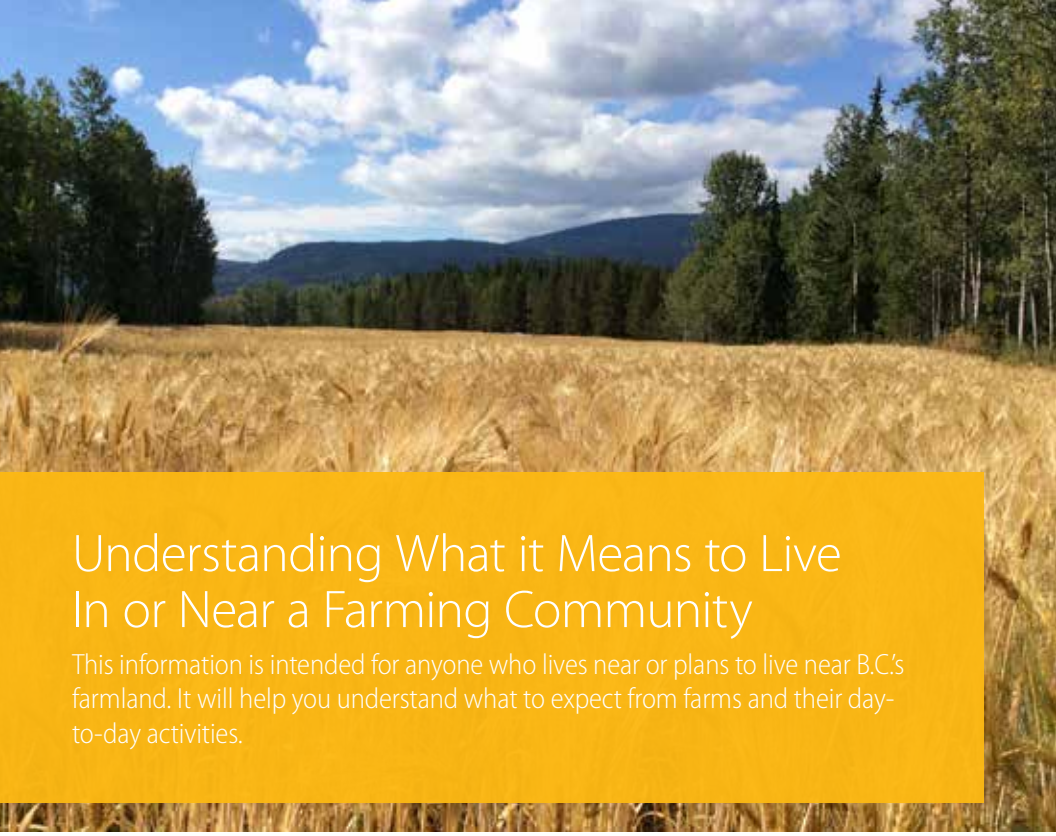
The Countryside and You

UNDERSTANDING WHAT IT MEANS TO LIVE IN OR NEAR A FARMING COMMUNITY

BRITISH COLUMBIA

Ministry of Agriculture and Food

ALC



Understanding What it Means to Live In or Near a Farming Community

This information is intended for anyone who lives near or plans to live near B.C.'s farmland. It will help you understand what to expect from farms and their day-to-day activities.

British Columbia's farming communities are wonderful places to live and work. The scenery, rural lifestyle, and availability of fresh, local food are only a few of the many benefits of living near B.C.'s farms, ranches and orchards. In fact, some of these features may have played a role in your decision to move closer to a farming community.

It is important to acknowledge that farming is a livelihood and a business. B.C. has over 15,000 working farms that are dynamic, diverse and support a thriving industry. B.C.'s agriculture and food industry employs about 80,000 British Columbians, produces more than 200 different commodities, and generates billions of dollars in economic activity every year. The food products produced in B.C. are known worldwide for their quality, safety, and affordability.

Farm businesses share the land, air, ground water and surface water with our local communities. Farm practices can affect the community, and community issues and actions can affect the farm. Farming is similar to other industries in that it can come with disturbances such as odour, noise, dust and can be a source of other nuisances. The proximity of farms, and non-farm rural and urban residences creates the potential for complaints regarding farm practices. Most farmers do their best to be good neighbours and reduce the negative impact of their operations on surrounding residents, but there may

be situations where disturbance or nuisance is unavoidable.

Farm-related activities that you may encounter include the use of noisy machinery and aircraft, bird scaring devices, evening and nighttime lighting, spreading of manure and spraying of crops to protect them from pests and enhance production. Farming requires long hours, and the typical workday starts early and continues after dark. Such practices have evolved over generations, continue to evolve in response to new technologies and research or changes in markets, and are a necessary aspect of farming everywhere.

Normal farm practices are generally protected by B.C.'s Farm Practices Protection (Right to Farm) Act (FPPA). This provincial law ensures that a farmer's operations are not liable to nuisance lawsuits if the operator is using "normal farm practices1" and complying with legislation such as the Environmental Management Act, the *Integrated Pest Management Act*, the Public Health Act and other land use regulations. Within the ALR, the FPPA also protects farmers from local government nuisance bylaws, which may attempt to, directly or indirectly, prohibit farm activities. The FPPA provides farmers protection from unwarranted nuisance complaints, and provides a balanced approach to resolving concerns about farm operations for people living near farms. Although most farmers adhere to normal farm practices, there are exceptions. This legislation also provides a process to resolve complaints, so neighbours need not suffer from poor farming activities.

B.C. has an Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR) that preserves the limited area of agricultural land in the province and encourages farming of that land. The ALR is only 5% of the provincial land base. It is an irreplaceable resource. Within the ALR, farming is the priority land use. When purchasing land, you should confirm whether the parcel is within the ALR. Non-agricultural uses in the ALR are restricted and may only be conducted if approved by the Agricultural Land Commission (ALC). If you are considering purchasing or currently own land within the ALR, please review the information contained on the ALC's website or contact the ALC prior to carrying out non-farm related land use activity, development, placement of fill or removal of soil, or construction to determine if the use is permitted or requires an application to the ALC.

Cultivating compatible relationships between farms and non-farming neighbours can be a challenge. Like any relationship this requires time, and sometimes compromise, but it is worth the effort to live without conflict. You may discover that you have more in common with your neighbors than you thought.

1 Normal farm practice is defined as "an activity that is conducted by a farm business in a manner consistent with proper and accepted customs and standards as established and followed by similar farm businesses under similar circumstances…"

Farming Activities in the Countryside

If you are new to an agricultural area or a new farming operation moves into your community, this document may be useful to explain or clarify farming activities that you may expect to encounter. Several typical farm practices are described in alphabetical order. If you have additional questions or concerns, a list of agencies and organizations is provided that may be able to help you.


JOHN DEERE

AIRCRAFT

Aircraft can be used for several crucial farming activities in B.C. They are occasionally used by grain producers to seed, fertilize, or apply select pesticides to vast areas. Across B.C., ranchers use helicopters to find lost cattle or drive herds back to the home ranch before winter sets in. In areas with soft fruit production such as cherries, helicopters are used to blow moisture off the crop following rainfall to prevent the fruit from splitting and causing large economic losses for the farmer. Tree fruit producers also use helicopters to mix warm air aloft with colder air near the ground to mitigate against frost damage at critical periods.

Farmers are increasingly relying on the use of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) or drones to carry out some seeding and fertilizer applications. UAVs are also used for on-farm imagery, scouting and record-keeping. Currently, there is no agricultural pesticide that is registered for applications with a UAV, but registrants are working to get products registered for use with UAVs and a UAV applicators certificate will be available in the future.

The advantage of using aircraft is that many farming activities are extremely time-sensitive and some farms cover large and remote areas. Aircraft are also crucial during times of high soil moisture when ground-based equipment cannot operate due to the potential for soil damage. It is important to realize that aircraft time is expensive, and farmers do not tend to use it unless it is absolutely necessary.

BURNING

Farmers may use open burning as a management tool to control crop residues, dispose of diseased crop material, and to clear land. In grass seed production, burning can be used to control weeds. On pasture, residue and brush can be burned to improve grazing areas. If you have health issues with smoke, ask the farmer to let you know when extensive burning is planned so you can take precautions or stay indoors. Open burning may be allowed when wildfire risk is low, and burns can be conducted responsibly. Information about open burning rules, smoke sensitivity zones and a ventilation index is available from the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy. Local government authorities may also have open burning restrictions or requirements in place

COMPOSTING

Composting is a controlled biological process in which micro-organisms convert organic materials such as manure, or yard or food waste into a soil-like material. It is the same process that breaks down organic debris in nature. Agriculture is well-suited for composting due the nature of farm waste, availability of land and benefits of compost to soil health. Furthermore, composting improves manure handling and reduces environmental risks. These many benefits are often important to improve the sustainability of both farm operations and their surrounding community.

Composting will almost always emit some odours that are considered by some as unpleasant. The odours are the result of the natural decomposition process and are more frequently associated with certain raw materials such as those with a high-nitrogen content like chicken manure. They are often more noticeable during certain activities at the beginning of the composting process (pile building, first turns of the pile) and under unfavorable conditions. However, they are usually short-lived (see also the Odour section).

Agricultural compost production is regulated under the Code of Practice for Agriculture Environmental Management (AEM Code) which is a Minister's regulation under the Environmental Management Act. Composting of non-agricultural organic waste (for example residential food or yard waste) may also be found on farmland but is the exception and allowed only under very specific conditions regulated under the Organic Matter Recycling Regulation (OMRR) and the Agricultural Land Reserve Use Regulation.

DUST

Tillage, cultivation, and harvesting are examples of farming activities that can generate significant amounts of dust. If the soil is dry during these activities, even the slightest breeze can produce dust. Harvesting of hay, grain, and corn silage in particular can generate large amounts of dust. To ensure dust is minimized, farmers often try to cultivate when the soil is not too dry and when the wind is very light. This has greatly reduced the amount of dust created and dust movement in areas close to urban lands.

Wind erosion of soil can also be an issue. Farmers do not want to lose soil and can take steps to reduce soil erosion from natural causes by maintaining crop residue cover, installing windbreaks and hedgerows, utilizing cover-crops, and changing management practices. Soil erosion over winter can be minimized or eliminated through planting cover crops in the fall.

Exhaust fans on poultry and livestock farms can be another source of dust. Newer fans and exhaust systems tend to be larger and circulate more air; dust will travel further as a result. Farmers may attempt to capture dust with vegetative buffers, but this may not be possible or effective in all cases. If you are building a house on, or adjacent to, an agricultural property, you are encouraged to construct it close to the front of the lot and away from any existing barns; barns are usually placed on the back of properties, and therefore, placing houses on the front of lots is very effective in minimizing your exposure to dust from exhaust fans.

Although steps are taken to minimize dust generation, there are instances when it is unavoidable; farming activities sometimes must be performed promptly to complete operations on schedule or to avoid inclement weather.

FARM VEHICLES

As B.C.'s population grows, our roads and highways become busier. This is particularly true in historically agricultural communities that have seen rapid urban and rural growth in recent years. Increased traffic can be especially restrictive for farm vehicles, which are often large, difficult to manoeuvre, and travel slowly. Farmers have few alternatives to using public roads when transferring equipment from field to field, so it is important that residents in rural communities practice patience and mutual respect when travelling around farm vehicles to keep everyone safe.

To increase awareness and reduce traffic problems caused by slow moving farm vehicles, many communities provide signage to indicate that farm traffic is in the area. Residents should keep an eye out for these notices and drive with caution and attention. Large farm equipment must swing wide to make turns, have significant blind spots, and are not able to travel at fast speeds. There may be a higher frequency of road use by farm vehicles at certain times of the year. Anticipate delays in your commute during these higher volume periods and plan for plenty of time to get to your destination.

IRRIGATION

As our climate changes, irrigation is becoming crucial on many more of B.C.'s farms to ensure adequate yield and high-quality crops. Farmers must acquire the necessary authorizations to legally access, store, and use water from surface and groundwater sources (including rivers, streams, lakes, and aquifers) for irrigation. If water is supplied by an irrigation district, water improvement district or municipal system, the farm does not need authorization as the purveyor is responsible for the licence.

Irrigation systems are designed to match crop needs and peak flow rate (i.e., water withdraw rate) based on soil and local climate conditions and their functioning varies by technology:

- *Sprinkler systems are typically operated based on the amount of water remaining in the soil. During the peak of the season (summer), irrigation cycles may be more operated more frequently to keep up with the weather. In fact, sprinkler systems are generally designed to operate 24/7 to match the maximum crop demand during the hottest and driest time of the season (July and August) and obtain peak flow rate.*

This helps maintain a steady stream withdrawal, minimizing impacts on fish and aquatic lives, cost effectiveness of irrigation systems, and crop health.

- *Drip systems used on horticultural crops are more efficient and can reduce water use by 30 – 40% and may operate 14 to 18 hours per day during peak conditions.*

Noise from pumps and sprinklers can be expected during the normal growing season from early May to the end of September. In addition, sprinkler systems are used for frost protection and can operate from February through May, and September through November.

LIGHTING

Lighting on farms is used for a variety of reasons including security, safety, and extension of working hours. This can be particularly critical during periods of planting and harvesting. Lighting is also used for specialized purposes such as crop production in the greenhouse industry. Light can be used as a predator deterrent in livestock operations. For some vegetable and flower producers, lighting is used for transplant, propagation, and other floriculture activities. Lights may also be needed on tractors and harvesting equipment for nighttime field work during busy times of the year. Depending on the operation and the time of year, lights could be on for 24 hours a day. Livestock

To help regulate the movements of livestock and to reduce incidents of animals being at large, laws have been developed to govern where livestock can roam. Livestock at large refers to livestock that stray from confinement or restraint and from the limits of the owner. The Livestock Act defines "Livestock Districts" and "Pound Districts" and the conditions under which livestock may be at large. The online Livestock and Pound District map may be accessed to find out if your property is within a Livestock or Pound District. If you own property within a Livestock District, you are responsible for fencing your property should you wish to keep livestock out. In a Pound District or an area outside of a Livestock District and Pound District, it is the livestock owner's responsibility to fence in their animals.

The Livestock Act specifically states that:

- *livestock does not include swine. Swine are never allowed to be at large.*
- *a livestock owner may allow livestock to be at large within a Livestock District. On Crown land a formal Range Agreement from the Ministry of Forests is required.*
- *a livestock owner may not allow livestock to be at large within a Pound District.*
- *a livestock owner is liable for damage caused by livestock while the livestock are at large in situations or circumstances as specified within the Livestock Act.*
- *enclosed land is an area surrounded by a barrier sufficient to exclude or contain livestock.*

Unless both owners agree to a unique fencing arrangement, the *Trespass Act* requires that owners of adjoining land in rural areas are liable to the other for half of any cost reasonably incurred for constructing, maintaining, and repairing lawful fences and any natural boundary between adjoining properties. The definition of a lawful fence is found in the Trespass Regulation of the *Trespass Act*. Local governments may develop bylaws that establish reasonable setbacks from neighbouring property for livestock operations. The Ministry of Forests and Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure have their own requirements related to fencing adjacent to their jurisdiction.

NOISE

Farming sounds may be generated from a range of mobile or stationary machinery, processing facilities, farm workers and livestock. Fieldwork may be required outside daylight hours to complete operations on schedule or to avoid inclement weather. Spraying equipment may be operated at any time to minimize the risk of spray drift, or to have the greatest impact on pest and weed control. Some field operations require the use of equipment 24 hours a day for short periods of time because the window is often narrow to achieve optimal results. Livestock may become loud at certain times of the day, when weaning is occurring, or when they are moved into more confined areas at certain times of the year. Some activities, such as chicken catching, are less stressful for the animals if performed during hours of darkness.

Stationary equipment may also be operated for extended periods of time for the production, storage, processing, or marketing of farm products. This equipment includes wind machines, power generators, bird scaring devices, feeding equipment, and refrigeration units.

Prevailing wind and water bodies can convey noise for greater distances. Consider these factors when purchasing property and realize that if you are down wind or across a water body from a farm you may experience greater noise levels. Low ambient noise can also increase the perception of noise from a farming operation. During quieter times of the day or night, you may hear more noise from a farming operation.

ODOURS

Farms generate a variety of smells depending on the type of operation and the time of year.

Concerns about farm odours are common among new residents in farming areas. Some odours result from animal housing, waste storage, manure spreading, some crop production (e.g. cannabis), crop residue decomposition, and composting. These are all acceptable farm practices. Odours from farms do not typically pose a health threat.

Odours from animal housing facilities and waste storage facilities can occur year-round. The spreading of manure can generate strong odours, which can occur at any time, but usually ranges from spring to early fall. In some areas, manure spreading can take place several times a year. Manure storage and use on cropland must be done in accordance with the requirements of the Code of Practice for Agricultural Environmental Management under the Environmental Management Act. Manure spreading is not typically done during periods of high rainfall or on snow-covered ground, and is prohibited

in high precipitation areas between November 1st and February 1st.

Odours from composting generally occur only when the activity is taking place. Some farmers compost year-round while others only compost a few months of the year. Vegetable material remaining after harvest may also generate odours in the fall and can be noticeable for up to a month, depending on weather conditions.

PESTS AND PESTICIDES

Pest and disease can sometimes have a disastrous effect on crops and the livelihood of farmers. Pesticides are costly and applied only when necessary to manage pests and diseases.

Weather conditions can influence the timing of pesticide application, which usually occurs early in the morning or late in the evening. This helps minimize drift onto adjacent land and protects beneficial insects and plants.

Farmers are increasingly using new technologies and methods to minimize or, in some cases eliminate, the use of pesticides. In fact, many producers utilize Integrated Pest Management (IPM). IPM involves 6 steps: Prevention, Identification, Monitoring, Action threshold, Management options and Evaluation. The management options include Biological, Cultural, Mechanical, Behavioural and Chemical controls. The use of all these options help reduce or eliminate the need for pesticides. With this system, beneficial insects are used to eliminate and control harmful pests. Sterile Insect Release programs in some areas of the province have reduced pest populations and have significantly reduced the amount of pesticide used.

When farmers use pesticides to prevent pests, they adhere to strict laws such as the federal Pest Control Products Act, and act in accordance with strict guidelines developed by manufacturers and governments. The federal government regulates which pesticides can be registered for use for specific crops in Canada. The Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy regulates the use of pesticides in BC.

Additionally, residents in fruit-producing areas should understand that controlling pests and disease on your back-yard fruit trees is critical to the industry; untreated trees can result in increased proliferation of pests and significant losses for commercial orchards, and negatively impact area-wide pest management programs.

SPRAY DRIFT

Spray drift from dormant oils, nutrients or pesticide application with turbo misters can be a nuisance if even slight winds arise. Vegetative buffers or hedges are often a good landscaping solution where spray drift is a concern. Spray drift is now regulated under the *Integrated Pest Management Act* and applicators must take all reasonable precautions to avoid unreasonable drift across property boundary.

WATER MANAGEMENT

Ditches

Proper drainage is an important part of many successful farms. In areas with wet climates, drainage systems are used to remove excess water from the surface and subsurface of the soil to ensure the health, production, and marketability of many crops. Ditches may include modified streams and stream channels, which are natural watercourses regulated under the Water Sustainability Act (WSA), or drainage features (generally exempted from regulation under the WSA). Depending on the characteristics and use, conducting work in ditches may require approval through Fisheries and Oceans Canada and/or the Ministry of Forests (e.g., through a Changes in and About a Stream approval or water licence). Farmers are generally aware of the importance of biodiversity in maintaining water quality and work hard to prevent any negative impacts of agricultural activities on the aquatic environment.

Streams and Aquifers

In B.C., streams and aquifers are under the stewardship of the Province to ensure they are properly managed and protected for future generations. Usually, ownership of property next to or surrounding a stream does not confer ownership or stewardship of the stream. The main source of legislation regulating streams, aquifers and associated water resources in B.C. is the WSA. This legislation outlines, among other topics, requirements for using stream water or groundwater, drilling wells, or other works for diversion and use of water (including changes to streams and stream channels). Many farmers have water licences that authorize them to use surface water or groundwater for irrigation, livestock watering, or modify stream channels. Farmers must adhere to the terms and conditions of their water licences.

Water Storage

As many agricultural activities are carried out in the growing season when natural water sources are typically experiencing reduced flows, some farms have water storage facilities such as dugouts, cisterns, and dams/reservoirs. Water licences issued with a storage component typically allow the licensee to draw water from a stream or aquifer during the wet season for use in the dry season, thereby reducing impacts to watercourses.

WILDLIFE

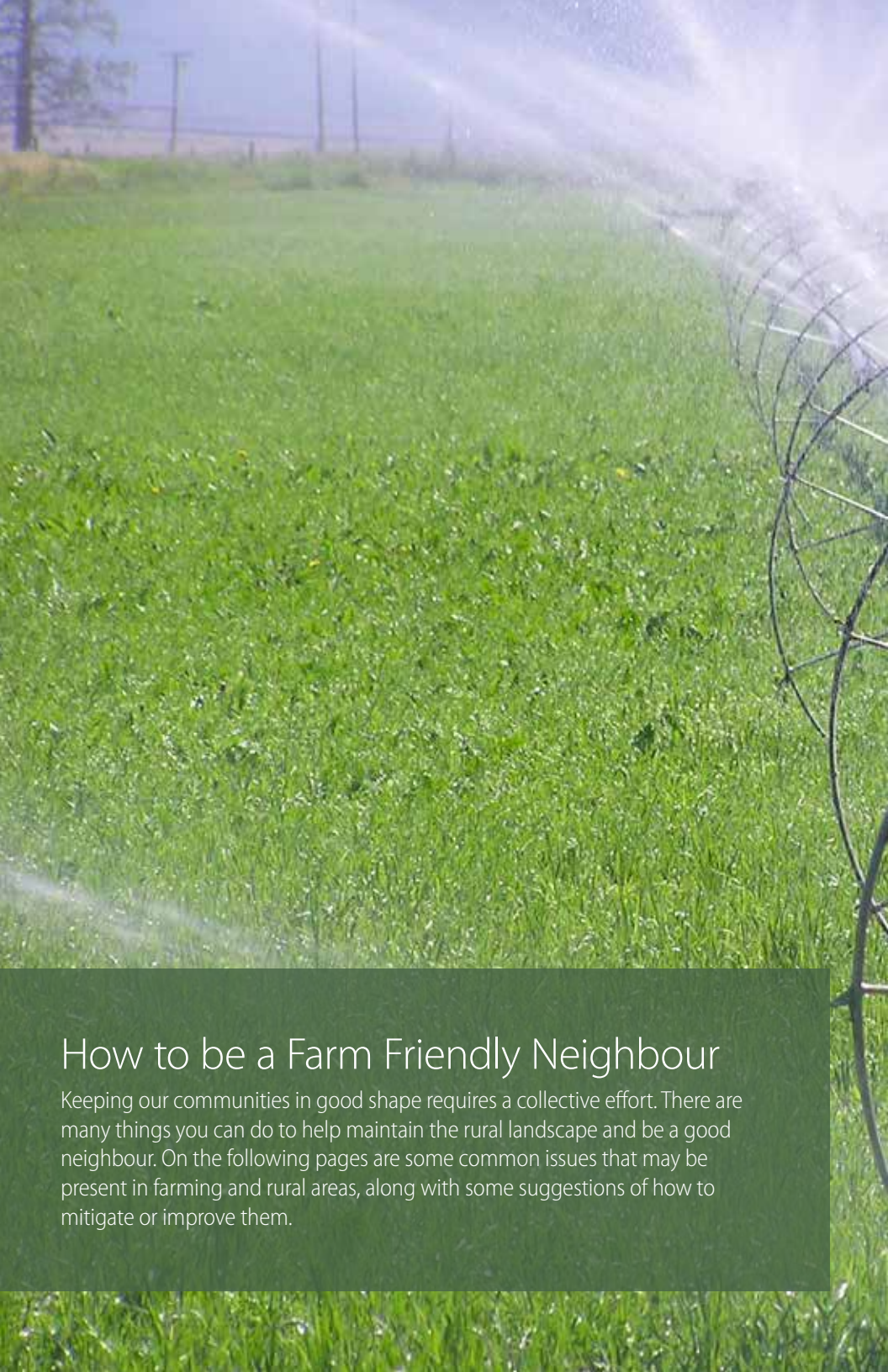
Increasing residential, commercial and industrial use of land has increased wildlife pressure on farmland. In many places in B.C. this has become a real challenge for farmers. For example, deer may eat forage and fruit and vegetable crops, carnivores attack sheep and cattle, birds eat berries and other crops and wildlife can carry undesirable insects, weeds and diseases onto B.C. farms. The results can be very costly.

Rapid urbanization and loss of greenspace is focusing attention on farmland as potential greenspace for wildlife habitat. In many communities, farmers and conservationists are working together to develop management practices for wetlands which balance agricultural and ecological concerns. These initiatives are good examples of agriculture existing in harmony with the surrounding natural environment.

Fencing is often the most effective method of preventing most forms of wildlife damage. However, wildlife fencing is very costly and not always feasible or practical, especially on large farms. As a result, other methods to deter or control wildlife may be necessary.

Noisemakers, used mainly in the Lower Mainland and Okanagan, are often the only way of frightening birds and small animals from berry fields, orchards and vineyards. Repellents and deterrents also work where there is random damage, particularly where the crop has not become an established feeding area. As a habitat modification and management strategy, some farmers also use lure crops and supplemental feeding to draw animals away from production crops.

Noisemakers, repellants, the use of lights and fencing can also be used on livestock operations to deter predators such as coyote, wolves, cougars and bears.



How to be a Farm Friendly Neighbour

Keeping our communities in good shape requires a collective effort. There are many things you can do to help maintain the rural landscape and be a good neighbour. On the following pages are some common issues that may be present in farming and rural areas, along with some suggestions of how to mitigate or improve them.

DOGS

Pet dogs, not trained to be around livestock, can be very destructive to farm animals and certain crops if they are left on the loose. Packs of dogs have been known to kill or injure livestock such as sheep and poultry. Holes dug in pastures by dogs can cripple grazing animals. Larger livestock can severely injure or kill a dog if they feel under threat. Keeping your dog on your property, or on a leash when you are out for a walk is very important. Farmers have the right to take action against dogs which are harming or harassing their livestock.

DUMPING

While most people make the effort to dispose of lawn and garden waste appropriately, there are some who may think it is easier to dump this type of waste on neighbouring properties, and some people may think that they are recycling this organic waste by doing so. For farms, this can have serious impacts. Dumping can spread noxious weeds and invasive plants. Livestock can be made seriously ill or even die from eating toxic plants or grass clippings which have fermented or gone mouldy. Please check with your local government for the appropriate place to dispose of lawn and garden waste.

FENCES

You can help protect crops and livestock by maintaining common property line fences. Gates may be closed to contain livestock; ensure that if you open a gate that you shut it again immediately. Maintaining common property line fences is a great way to maintain good relations with your neighbours. Often you can split costs and/or labour with your neighbour as you will both benefit from fences in good repair.

LITTERING

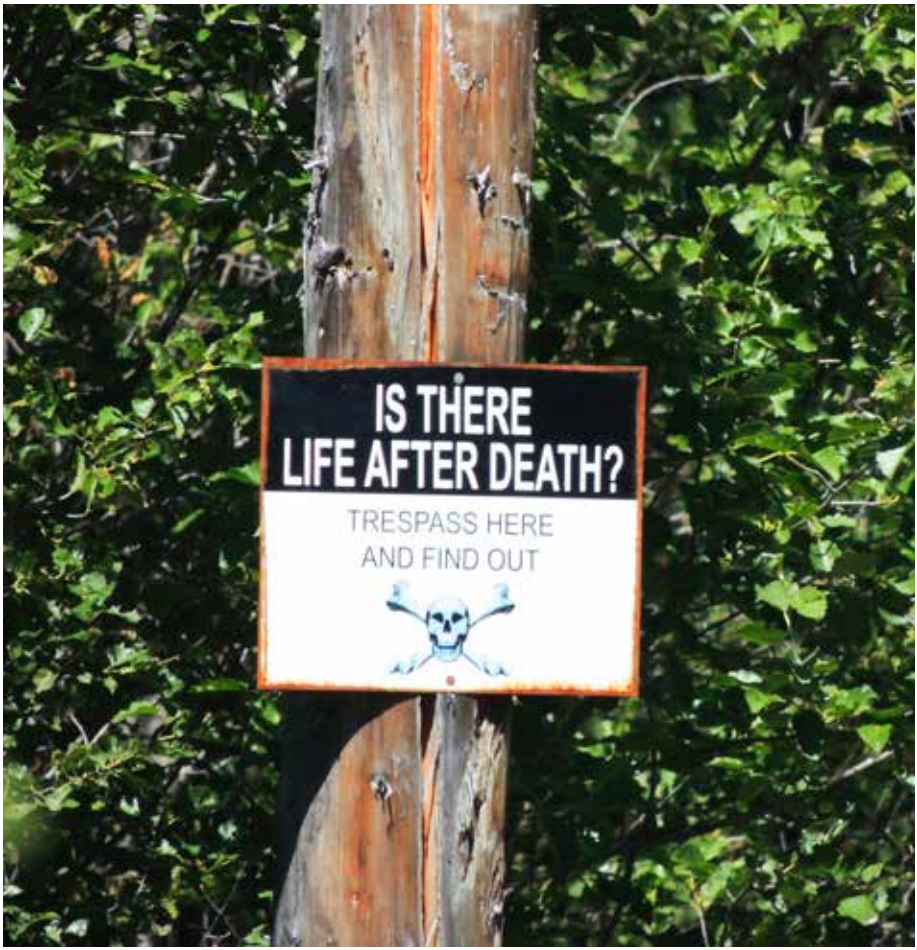
Most people, including farmers, proactively try to reduce litter. In the vicinity of farms, litter is not only unsightly, but it can also damage crops and equipment, and injure animals and people. Remember to look after your own trash and take it away with you to help protect the safety and visual appeal of farming areas.

THEFT AND VANDALISM

Theft of crops, livestock or equipment and vandalism to machinery, buildings, and fences cost B.C. farmers thousands of dollars each year. If you see someone engaging in these illegal activities, please call the police and alert your farm neighbour. We are all victims when crime becomes rampant in our community.

TRESPASSING

Accessing farmland or farm buildings without the farmer's permission is trespassing. Respectful neighbours always ask for permission to enter farmland. A farmer or rancher may be concerned about crop and soil damage, spread of weeds or disease to livestock and poultry, personal injury and animals escaping. Hikers, cyclists, school groups, hunters, dogs, off-road vehicles, boaters, fishers, horseback riders and the like can cause problems for farmers when farmland is used without permission. Large open fields or dikes may look like they should be part of public property, but in most cases, they belong to a private landowner – please respect their property rights. Buying product from a farm stand or shop does not automatically give purchasers the right to access the working part of the farm. Only enter those areas if the farmer allows public visits or activities such as a farm tours, and only with the farmer's permission.



WEED CONTROL

Weeds can have a negative impact on farm crops. Farmers need to control them to ensure healthy plant growth and yield, reduce disease, and prevent livestock from getting sick from poisonous plants.

If weeds are allowed to spread from your property to an adjoining farm, they can quickly cause serious economic harm to a farm. Weed control is so important to all B.C. residents that noxious weeds are controlled under B.C.'s Weed Control Act. Under this Act, all occupiers of land, including residential properties, must control noxious weeds on that land. Using IPM strategies allows for many options for effective weed control and can vary depending on species. Control is often more successful if performed early before weed populations are unmanageable.

Some garden plants can be invasive. We recommend landowners consult their local government website and the BC Invasive Species Council website when considering the most appropriate choices for your garden plants. The Field Guide to Noxious Weeds and Other Selected Invasive Plants of B.C. is a great resource to reference for identification

Is Country Living for You?

If you are moving to or traveling through the countryside, take some time to become aware of what it means to farm and what it means to live next to a farm. Many of the qualities people enjoy about country living result directly from farming, including open space, aesthetic and pastoral views, and the rural way of life. Farming's contributions to your community include environmental, economic, cultural, and social benefits.

Knowing about agriculture can give you an idea of what you can expect living near farms. It can increase your

appreciation of farming activities going on around you. It also can help you understand the positive contributions of agriculture, as well as why farms sometimes produce odours, dust, or noise. It is important to remember that the Agricultural Land Reserve was established to protect the very limited resource base on which farming can occur. While it can be a beautiful landscape, it is, first and foremost, a working landscape.

Understanding farm practices can increase your enjoyment of living in the country and help you enjoy the seasonal flow of agricultural activities around you. Enjoy your life in this working landscape; it has so much to offer

For More Information

Thank you for taking the time to learn more about farming in B.C.
If you have any questions or require more information, please contact:

B.C. MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE AND FOOD
(General inquiries and farm practice inquires)
AgriServiceBC
1 888 221-7141
AgriServiceBC@gov.bc.ca
www.gov.bc.ca/agri

AGRICULTURAL LAND COMMISSION
(ALR land use inquires)
604 660-7000
Toll free through ServiceBC:
1 800 663-7867
www.alc.gov.bc.ca

YOUR LOCAL MUNICIPAL OR REGIONAL GOVERNMENT OFFICE
(Local bylaw inquiries)
http://civicinfo.bc.ca/directories

BC FARM INDUSTRY REVIEW BOARD
(Formal farm practice complaints)
firb@gov.bc.ca
250 356-8945
http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/governments/organizational-structure/ministries-organizations/boards-commissions-tribunals/bc-farm-industry-review-board

Prepared and published by:
Strengthening Farming Program
BC Ministry of Agriculture and Food and the Agricultural Land Commission

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