



The Countryside and You

**UNDERSTANDING WHAT IT MEANS TO LIVE
IN A FARMING COMMUNITY**



Ministry of
Agriculture





Understanding What it Means to Live in a Farming Community

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.'s 20,000 farms are dynamic, diverse and support a thriving industry. British Columbia's agri-food industry directly employs about 63,000 British Columbians, produces more than 200 different commodities and generates hundreds of millions 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. With the close proximity between farms, rural non-farm residences and urban areas there is a greater 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, bright lights, spreading of manure and spraying of crops to protect them from pests and enhance production. Farming requires long hours and the typical work day 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 law suits if he or she is using "normal farm practices" and complying with legislation such as the *Environmental Management Act*, the *Pesticide Control Act*, the *Health Act* and other 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 also 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 creates a process to resolve complaints so neighbours need not suffer from poor farming activities.

British Columbia 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 the 5% of the provincial land base that is capable of growing agricultural crops. It is an irreplaceable resource. Within the ALR, farming is considered to be the priority land use. When purchasing land you should be sure to confirm whether or not the parcel is within the ALR. Non-agricultural uses in the ALR are restricted and may only be conducted with the approval of 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 or construction to determine if the use is permitted.

Cultivating a compatible relationship between farms and their non-farm 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.

A photograph of a combine harvester in a field. A long, dark auger extends from the harvester over a red grain trailer. The background shows rolling hills under a clear blue sky. The foreground is filled with golden-brown grain.

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.



AIRCRAFT

Aircraft are used for a number of crucial farming activities in B.C. They can be used by grain producers to seed, spray and fertilize vast areas. Aircraft can be used to apply fertilizer and spray crops to control pests and disease. Across B.C., ranchers use helicopters to locate lost cattle and even drive herds back to the home ranch before winter sets in. Farmers are beginning to rely more on the use of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) or drones to carry out some of these tasks. In areas with soft fruit production such as cherries, helicopters are used to blow moisture off of the crop following rainfall in order to prevent the fruit from splitting and causing large economic losses for the farmer.



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 when ground-based equipment cannot operate due to high soil moisture that would damage the soil. 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 increase 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. Also remember to check with your local government about local regulations if you wish to burn and to find out if you need to obtain a permit to burn.

COMPOSTING

Composting is crucial for the proper management of agricultural waste resources and for the production of amendments that enhance poor or depleted soil. The integration of compost is one way that farmers can improve soil health and the long-term sustainability of their operations. It is also a way in which they can improve the sustainability of the surrounding community. Agricultural compost production is regulated under the Agricultural Waste Control Regulation under the *Environmental Management Act*.



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.

Public concerns about the impact of water quality on fish habitat are being addressed through the identification of fish-bearing waterways and streams that require approval from Fisheries and Oceans Canada and the Water Stewardship Division of the B.C. Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations before ditch work can begin. This requirement has a major impact on how lands are

managed. Farmers are generally aware of the importance of biodiversity and work hard to be good stewards and prevent any negative impacts of their activities on the aquatic environment. Applications for works in and around a stream can be made through FrontCounter BC.

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 with the slightest breeze, dust will be produced. To ensure dust is minimised 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.

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. 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. This will minimize your exposure to dust from exhaust fans.

Wind is another cause of dust spreading. 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 changing management practices.

Dust may also occur during crop harvesting, particularly with hay, grain or corn silage.

Although steps are taken to minimize dust generation, there are instances when it is unavoidable.

FARM VEHICLES

As B.C.'s roads and highways become busier, the movement of all vehicles is becoming more and more difficult. Road barriers, urban road patterns and traffic are particularly restrictive for farm vehicles, which can be very large and travel slowly. Unfortunately, there are few alternatives to using public roads when transferring equipment from field to field.

To combat traffic problems caused by slow moving farm vehicles, several communities are now providing signs to indicate that farm traffic is in the area. Patience and mutual respect should be the rule around farm vehicles, for your safety as well as the farmer's. There may be a higher frequency of road use by farm vehicles at certain times of the year, so consider adjusting your schedule for higher volume periods and give yourself plenty of time to reach your destination.





IRRIGATION

Irrigation is required on many of British Columbia's farms to ensure adequate yield and high quality crops. Farmers must acquire legal access to irrigation water through a licensing process on the province's rivers, lakes and streams and groundwater. Others rely on a delivery system connected to an irrigation district, water improvement district or municipal system.

Irrigation may be applied at any time during the day or night to make the most effective use of the delivery system and to reduce the peak withdrawal rate from natural watercourses. 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 as many as 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 Act specifically states that:

- ✓ *a livestock owner may allow livestock to be at large within a Livestock District*
- ✓ *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 Act*

- ✓ *enclosed land is an area surrounded by a barrier sufficient to exclude or contain livestock*

The online BC Data Catalogue can 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. Unless both owners agree to a unique fencing arrangement, the *Trespass Act* requires that owners of adjoining land in rural areas share the cost of constructing and maintaining fences between residential and adjoining farmland properties.

Local governments may develop bylaws that establish reasonable setbacks from neighbouring property for intensive livestock operations.



NOISE

Farming sounds may be generated from a range of mobile or stationary machinery, processing facilities and from 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 in order to minimize the risk of spray drift, or to have the greatest impact on pest and weed control. Some harvesting and seeding 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 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.



At night levels of ambient noise tend to be lower, and the noise may therefore be more noticeable. 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 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, crop residue and composting. These are all acceptable farm practices. Odours from farms do not typically pose any 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.

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. Many farmers are using new technologies and methods to minimize or, in some cases eliminate, the use of pesticides. 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.

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.

Many producers utilize Integrated Pest Management or “IPM”. IPM involves the use of biological, mechanical and monitoring methods to 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.

Controlling pests & disease on your back-yard fruit trees is critical in fruit producing areas; untreated trees can result in significant losses for commercial orchards and negatively

impact area-wide pest management programs.

The federal government determines which pesticides can be registered for use for specific crops in Canada. The Ministry of Environment regulates the use of pesticides in BC.



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.





WILDLIFE

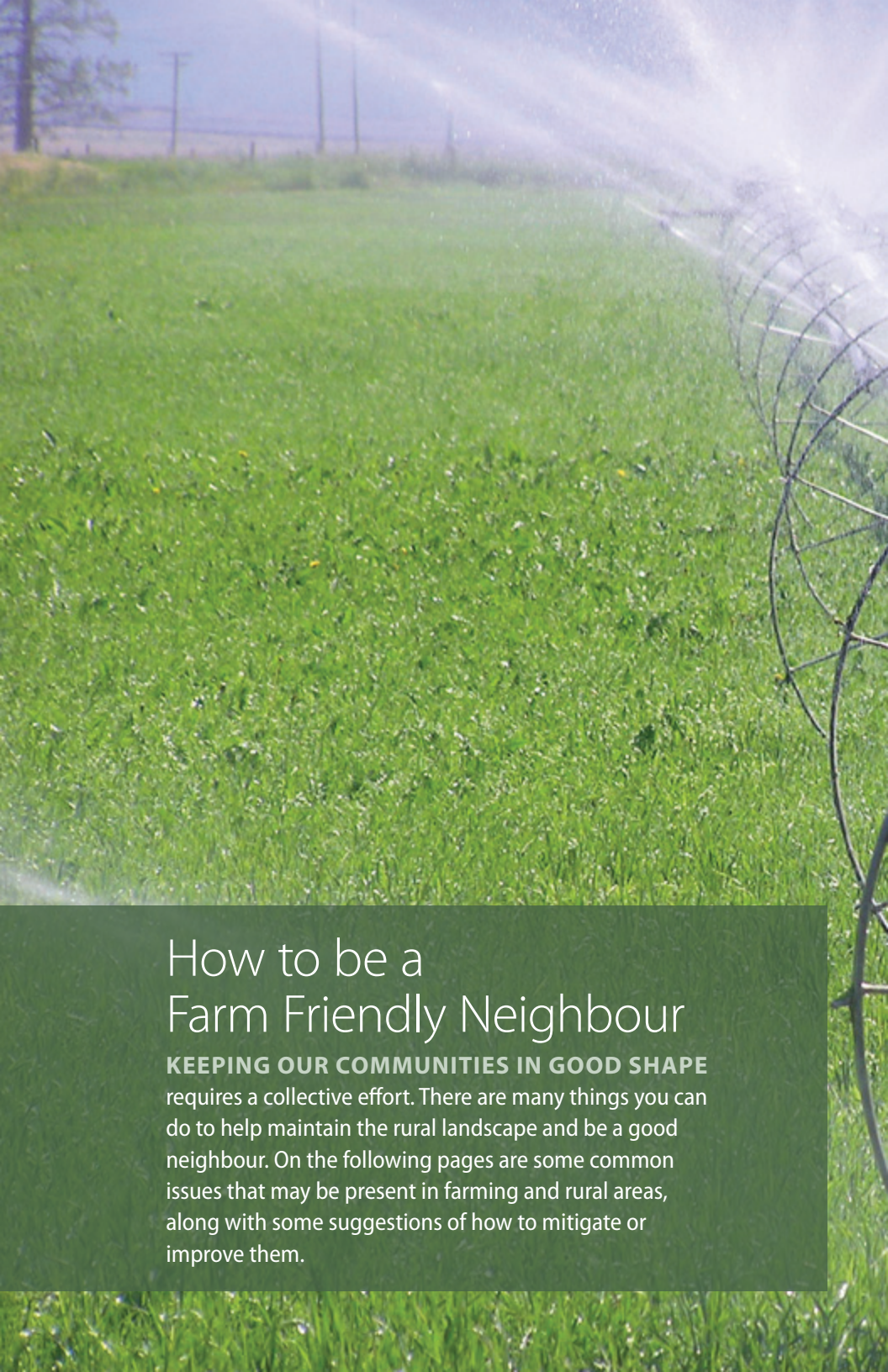
Increasing residential, commercial and industrial use of land has increased wildlife pressure on farmland. In many places in B.C. this has become a real challenge for farmers. For example, deer may eat forage and fruit and vegetable crops, carnivores attack sheep and cattle, birds eat berries and other 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.



DUMPING

While most people make the effort to dispose of lawn and garden waste appropriately, there are some who may think it 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.

LITTERING

Most people, including farmers, are trying to reduce litter. In the vicinity of farms, litter is not only unsightly, it can 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 visual appeal and safety of farming areas.





WEEDS

Weeds can also 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.

Some garden plants can be invasive. We recommend landowners consult local government website and the BC Invasive Species Council website when considering the most appropriate choices for your garden plants.

DOGS

Loose dogs can be very destructive to farm animals and certain crops. Packs of dogs have been known to destroy livestock such as sheep and poultry. Holes dug in pastures by dogs have even been known to 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.

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.

FENCES AND GATES

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.



TRESSPASSING

Accessing farmland without the farmer's permission is trespass. Respectful neighbours always ask for permission, a farmer 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, and only enter those areas if the farmer encourages public visits such as a farm tour, and only with the farmer's permission.





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, and cultural 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 odors, dust or noise. It is important to remember that the ALR was established to provide a home for farming and to provide food

security for your future. 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.



Contacts

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**

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www.gov.bc.ca/agriservicebc

✓ **AGRICULTURAL
LAND COMMISSION**

604 660-7000

Toll free through ServiceBC:

1 800 663-7867

www.alc.gov.bc.ca

✓ **YOUR LOCAL MUNICIPAL
OR REGIONAL GOVERNMENT
OFFICE**

✓ **BC FARM INDUSTRY
REVIEW BOARD**

(Formal farm practice complaints)

250 356-8945

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BCFarmIndustryReviewBoard