



Chapter 9. BUILDING GOOD NEIGHBOUR RELATIONSHIPS

This chapter explores:

- BMPs for controlling odour, flies and dust
- tips for managing and resolving conflict
- dealing with complaints

Certain attributes of livestock farming, like odour and flies, come up again and again as being objectionable to neighbours. To some degree, factors like odour, flies, noise and dust are part of agricultural operations. Whether they are considered a nuisance or not is largely subjective; the person who smells the odour or hears the noise decides whether it is tolerable to him or her.

Nevertheless, you can reduce nuisances by using good farming practices based on common sense and courtesy. In the process, you can also help reduce conflicts with neighbours. Developing and maintaining good neighbour practices is really about managing relationships.

9.1 CRITICAL ISSUES FOR GOOD NEIGHBOUR RELATIONSHIPS

9.1.1 Odour

Farmers need to consider **FIDO** (frequency, intensity, duration, and offensiveness) of odours. Frequency

of odour problems can be managed by reducing the number of times neighbours detect odours from your operation. Intensity is the strength of an odour; it is diminished by distance and dilution. Duration has to do with how long odours are present. Strong odours for a short period of time (hours) are usually considered less objectionable than a lighter odour for a long time (days). Offensiveness has to do with how objectionable something smells. For example fresh manure usually is judged less offensive than manure from a long-term anaerobic storage.

Tips to minimize odour issues include:

- To reduce odours from manure storage, see page 27.
- To reduce odours from manure application, see page 72.
- Notify your neighbours to let them know in advance of your manure spreading plans and be willing to adjust your plans to try to meet their needs.
- Don't spread on weekends or holidays.

9.1.2 Flies

Fly problems often result in neighbourhood disputes. It may be difficult to say for certain that flies originate from a certain farm, but they can upset neighbours.

Tips to control fly populations include:

- See page 28 for fly control practices.
- For more details, get the factsheet *A Guide for the Control of Flies in Alberta Confined Feeding Operations* available from Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development (ARD).

TECHNOLOGY AND MANAGEMENT PRACTICES can help alleviate nuisance issues. However the most effective and economical practice is to maintain positive relations with your neighbours.

9.1.3 Dust

Dust is another concern for neighbours, whether it is from barns, pens, fields or excessive farm traffic such as silaging, harvesting, or manure application.

Tips to control dust include:

- Apply dust palliatives to suppress dust (e.g. calcium chloride).
- Apply water from a truck or other portable spray system to farm roads.
- Set up wind barriers aligned perpendicular to the wind direction (e.g. continuous board fence, burlap fence, snow fencing, hay bales).
- Establish windbreaks placed perpendicular to the wind direction to trap larger sized dust particles.
- Stop or limit dust-producing activities during a high wind event.
- Reduce vehicle speed on dusty roads.
- Place hoods on fans so exhaust air is directed towards the ground.
- Wash fan blades, screening and hoods with water rather than using blowing air to clean them.
- Use up-to-date ventilation equipment to minimize exiting dust levels.
- In poultry facilities, use coverings on conveyor belts.
- Ensure pelleted feed is high quality; very small particles in feed can contribute to higher dust levels.
- Wet down feedlot pens.



Dust is a concern for neighbours.

9.2 MINIMIZING COMPLAINTS

First of all, how does your farm look to outsiders? A trashy and unkempt farmstead will raise suspicions. Neighbours may think “if your farm looks messy you must not be a good operator”. At the least, mow regularly and keep junk out of view. Keep buildings painted and in good repair. Use fences or vegetative screening to block items that may be considered unsightly.



Make sure the public sees your operation as a well-kept farmstead.



9.3 PREVENTING AND RESOLVING CONFLICT

Conflict often occurs between individuals because of a real or perceived difference in needs or values. Learning the skills necessary to prevent and resolve conflict is important in today's society. To avoid potential conflict you need to plan ahead, communicate with the community and document the actions taken on your operation to manage and reduce issues that may draw complaints. Ensure communication with your neighbours is open, honest and thorough to avoid misunderstandings and concerns.

Properly managed conflict can be productive because it can:

- encourage people to examine issues more carefully,
- deepen the understanding of concerns or issues for those involved,
- open the door to new ideas and alternative solutions,
- help foresee the consequences of proposed actions, and
- enable people to take risks and solve problems.

Tips for managing and resolving conflict include:

- Take the matter seriously; listen to and acknowledge concerns.
- Be open, tactful and sincere in identifying concerns and seeking understanding.
- Admit mistakes and apologize when they occur.
- Show understanding when others make mistakes and offer assistance to correct the issue.

- Shift the emphasis to mutually acceptable solutions and offer to look into the matter.
- Promptly respond to complainants with information needed to relieve concerns.
- Take responsibility and steps to mitigate damage or eliminate problems.
- Stay on top of on-going problems, while keeping neighbours informed of changes on the farm.
- Identify and involve people who support the operation and can help in dealing with conflict.
- Focus on keeping supporters onside and do not spend too much time dealing with opponents.



Hosting a well-planned farm tour gives neighbours a better understanding of your operation.

9.4 DEALING WITH COMPLAINTS OVER NUISANCE ISSUES

The *Agricultural Operation Practices Act* (AOPA) includes setbacks requiring an appropriate minimum distance of separation between farming operations and neighbouring residences to deal with odour nuisances. Complaints about livestock operations are reviewed by the Natural Resources Conservation Board (NRCB) to determine whether the operation is in compliance with AOPA. However, even though an agricultural operation is complying with the various regulations, the farm still can create nuisances for neighbours that need to be dealt with appropriately.

The Farmers' Advocate Office (FAO) may be requested to assist in dealing with complaints about odour, noise, dust, smoke or other nuisances resulting from agricultural operations. The FAO will work with a farm operator and his/her neighbours to find solutions to nuisance issues from farming activities that interfere with the neighbours' use and enjoyment of their property or dwelling. The FAO will provide the farm operator, the complainant and the municipality with possible solutions and systems to assist in resolving disagreements outside of the courts.

If a complaint is not resolved at this stage, a Practices Review Committee may also be established to assist in resolving the dispute. The committee is appointed by the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to ensure an open and transparent evaluation of the farm and to assess if the farm is following generally acceptable farming practices. A Generally Accepted Agricultural Practice (GAAP) certificate may be issued to a farm operation; the certificate acts as a due diligence defence if a neighbour files a complaint with the court.

