

“They worry because they think pesticides are dangerous or because the smell is strong.”—Grain, hay, and beef farmer in Montgomery County with 850 acres

Ease Neighbors’ Health and Environmental Concerns Through:

1. Consistency—Establish a routine and inform the community about your routine. This allows your neighbors to expect specific practices on certain days or at certain times of the year.
2. Observing regulations—Maintain appropriate licensing, records, and regulatory guidelines. By doing this you help ensure your neighbors’ health and safety and your own.
3. Providing information early or when requested—Inform the community of your practices and the reasons for them. Doing this alleviates and often prevents misconceptions and incorrect assumptions.

“I went over and talked to the neighbors when they moved in. I tell the ones living right next door when I will be spreading manure. I don’t spread the manure on weekends or holidays. You have to be a good neighbor and talk.”—225-acre beef and grain farmer, Harford County

“We discuss environmentally friendly practices and what we can do to help. Having your neighbors know that we’re trying to help really makes a difference.”
—Poultry and grain farmer in Wicomico County

“Have open houses at your farm to invite the neighbors in to see what you’re doing. I try to act neighborly. Become their friends and explain what

you’re doing. Instead of their first call being to the health department, they call me. They ask me why it smells or why leaves have come onto their property. When you don’t know your neighbors, the first people they call is the authorities. The first call needs to be to you and not someone else.”—Horse farm manager in Carroll County with 640 acres

Issue 4. Easing Traffic Congestion on Rural Roads

The increased congestion on rural roads, which are often narrow and not well maintained, presents challenges for farmers moving equipment and for commuters traveling to school and work.

“When it comes to tractors, they can seem really annoying for people because they move 15 to 20 miles an hour.”—Crop, hay, and grain farmer in Frederick County with 400 acres

Ease Traffic Congestion on Rural Roads Through:

1. Awareness of traffic flow—Monitor your neighborhood for times of increased or decreased traffic. By moving equipment between fields during times of low traffic you avoid inconveniences to yourself and others.
2. Establishing a schedule—Maintain consistent schedules, which enables neighbors to adjust their commuting times as necessary.
3. Using signage—Warn other drivers of hazards. Provide signs that inform them about maximum miles per hour and width of vehicle. This may help reduce the potential for accidents.

“The main problems that I see come from when I run the large machinery on the roads. People get annoyed being stuck behind it and it can be dangerous if people are speeding. To help this I have my wife drive the truck on the road with me to get cars to slow down. The county helped a lot by creating road signs that warn about large, slow-moving vehicles on the roads.”—225-acre beef and grain farmer, Harford County

“We also don’t run the tractor on the roads when school lets out at 3 o’clock and on Sunday when people are going to church. We live next to a church and we don’t want to interrupt service.”—Horse farmer in Carroll County with 640 acres

Population and land development will continue to increase in Maryland. Farmers can best prepare for the resulting growth and expansion by recognizing the issues and fostering good farm relations. For more information you can contact your local Cooperative Extension Office or County Farm Bureau. If differences cannot be reconciled, mediation services are available through Maryland’s Department of Agriculture.

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Farmers Advise Farmers

Maryland Farmers:

Have problems with trespassers? Do nonfarm neighbors complain about foul odors? Have you ever been threatened with a lawsuit because neighbors claim you’re polluting their stream? Are you being blamed for causing traffic congestion?

If you answered “yes” to any of these questions, you are not alone. Conflicts between farmers and their nonfarm neighbors are on the increase. Especially in Maryland, which ranks fifth among the 50 states in population density.

“Problems come from people moving from the urban areas like D.C. and Baltimore. They come to the countryside and now they want the luxuries of the cities out here.”—Crop, hay, and grain farmer in Frederick County

There is something you can do to manage or avoid farmer-nonfarmer conflicts: Let other Maryland farmers advise you about creating and maintaining positive relationships with nonfarm neighbors. Learn from their experiences and follow their advice about being a good farm neighbor.

Through surveys, Maryland farmers have identified four areas of concern. Problems between farmers and their nonfarm neighbors occur when nonfarm neighbors:

1. Lack farm awareness
2. Trespass and disregard property rights
3. Raise health and environmental concerns
4. Increase traffic congestion on rural roads

Read on to find out more about these issues and to discover ways of handling the conflicts they can create.

Issue 1. Increasing Farm Awareness

Farmers agree that the general public does not understand farm production. Non-farmers are unaware of crop cycles, livestock management, and the farm business. Many nonfarmers know little about where and how their food is produced. This unawareness causes neighbors to make wrong assumptions and harbor misconceptions about farming.

“The problem is that nonfarmers don’t know what you’re doing.”—Grain farmer renting 600 acres in Caroline County

“People come up to my farm and inquire about why I do certain things. You have to talk to them.”—Vegetable farmer renting 500 acres in Dorchester County

Increase Farm Awareness Through:

1. Communication—Talk directly to your nonfarm neighbors. Communication is your most effective tool for educating them about farming. Informal neighborly discussions are a great way to discuss your farm and its operations.
2. Community involvement—Interact with your community by providing direct services or by taking part in meetings, local boards, or other organizations. Interacting with neighbors is a good way to improve relationships.
3. Farm visits and farm education—Offer on-farm tours, educational visits, and open houses. You’ll be able to meet members of the public and they’ll learn about what it takes to manage a successful agricultural operation. If you don’t want to open your farm, visiting schools, fairs, clubs, and scout groups is another way of increasing farm awareness.

“Be involved in the community. I get to know my neighbors and talk with them about problems by seeing them in county and town meetings. . . . Local public awareness is great. Non-farm neighbors need to be educated about farming as well as about laws in rural areas. I also snow plow the roads around the farm. Some large farmers have set up web pages.”—Cecil County produce farmer with 200 acres

“You don’t get sued by people you are friends with and keep in good communication with.”—Grain and vegetable farmer in Anne Arundel County with 400 acres

“I invite neighbors and people from the community to visit my farm and see what it’s all about. Problems arise when

there’s secrecy and distance between your farm and the community. Explain what you’re doing and why. Be open and kind.”—Hog, sod, hay, corn, and soybean farmer in Montgomery County with 300 acres

“On our land we also do this wetland preservation program where we’re protecting 6 acres and a stream that goes into a wetland. This shows people that you’re trying to help the community.”—Alpaca farmer in Washington County with 30 acres

Issue 2. Reducing Trespassing and Protecting Property Rights

Farms and farmland are private property, even though the open space may look to some like a public or recreational area. Trespassers not only put themselves in danger, but also may cause damage to a crop, the soil, or the management of the land.

“The main problem is lack of respect for farmland.”—300-acre grain farmer, Talbot County

“People encroach on my land and don’t realize that a farm is private property. They’ll drive through your crops, camp in your fields, and treat your farm as public property.”—Cecil County produce farmer with 200 acres

“Trespassing could be dangerous if I had just sprayed pesticide or insecticide.”—Produce farmer in Anne Arundel County with 77 acres

Reduce Trespassing and Protect Property Rights Through:

1. Use of boundaries—Establish clearly marked boundaries that indicate where public property ends and private land begins.
2. Warnings of danger—Erect signs that inform the public about the presence

of animals or other dangers, which puts trespassers on notice.

3. Communication—Discuss boundaries and crop production schedules with neighbors so they understand chemical applications and crop planting.

“I created natural buffers to define property lines. Put some trees and shrubs there that look nice but also make it clear where borders are.”—Produce farmer in Anne Arundel County with 77 acres

“People need to learn respect for farmland, at an early age. That is why Talbot County does an agricultural education program for 4th graders to teach them to respect farmland and not to trespass. We teach them about farming and what farmers do. I think it helps to catch them while they’re young, before they get drivers’ licenses.”—300-acre grain farmer, Talbot County

“I double fenced my farm to ensure that people understand the boundaries.”—Horse farmer in Carroll County with 640 acres

“I find that the best thing for a livestock farmer to do is maintain good fences. People have to know and respect the boundaries of property or else they’ll think they can walk right up to the animals.”—8-acre llama farmer, Anne Arundel County

Issue 3. Easing Health and Environmental Concerns

Many standard farm practices involve animals, odors, fertilizers, and pesticides. These unfamiliar sights and smells often raise health, safety, and environmental concerns in the nonfarming community.

“I get complaints about spray drifting onto cars and lawns.”—Washington County orchard farmer with 150 acres