

# The Countryside and You



Understanding Farming

**Canadian Cataloguing in Publication Data**

Main entry under title:  
The countryside and you

ISBN 0-7726-3447-5

1. Agriculture -- British Columbia. 2. Farms - British Columbia.  
I. Nikkel, D.C. II. British Columbia. Ministry of Agriculture  
and Food. III. British Columbia. Provincial Agricultural Land  
Commission.

S451.5.B7C68 630'.9711 C98-960008-4

Text may be reprinted without permission provided the  
B.C. Ministry of Agriculture and Food receives credit.

# ***The Countryside and You – Understanding Farming***

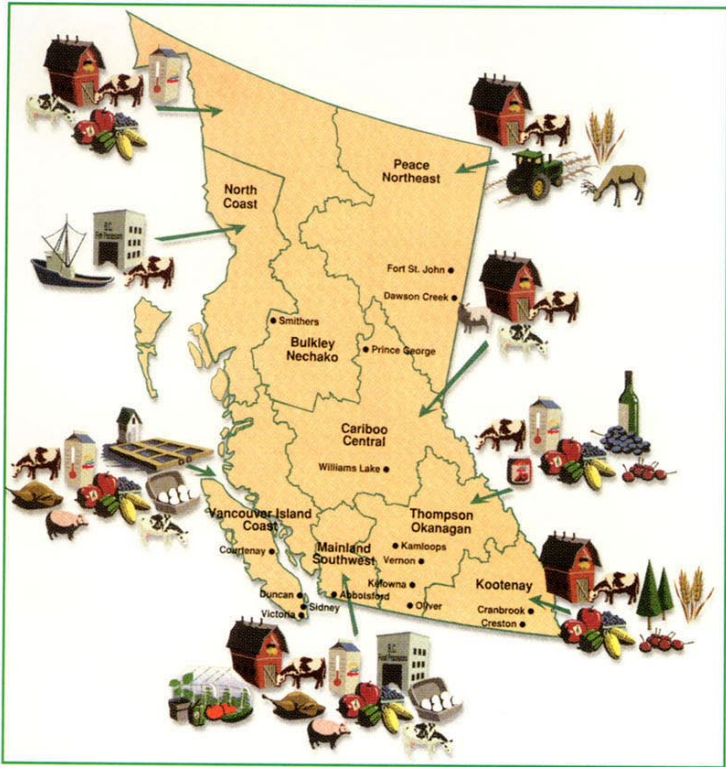
Prepared and Published by:

**Resource Management Branch  
B.C. Ministry of Agriculture and Food**

and

**Provincial Agricultural Land Commission**

Copyright 1998



British Columbia produces more than 200 different commodities in all regions of the province.



## The Countryside and You - Understanding Farming

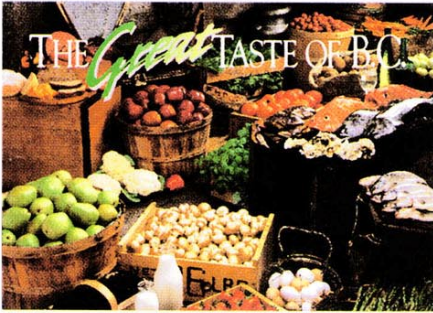
This booklet is intended for the non-farmer that lives near or is planning on moving near B.C.'s farmland. It will help you understand what to expect from farms and their day-to-day activities.

British Columbia's farming communities are wonderful places to live and work. The scenery, diversity and friendly people 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.

Farming is a livelihood and a business. B.C.'s 22,000 farms are dynamic, hard-working areas which support a thriving industry.



The provincial agri-food industry employs nearly a quarter million British Columbians, produces more than 200 different commodities and generates hundreds of millions of dollars in



economic activity every year. B.C. food products are famous world wide for their quality, safety and affordability. Farm families and businesses are sustained by putting food on not only your table, but on the tables of people around the world.

Many farm practices create sights, sounds and smells, which may be unfamiliar to people who have moved closer to the country from an urban area. B.C. farmers try to use new technologies and improved methods to reduce the impact these activities may have on their neighbours.

To help you understand these activities in your neighbourhood, this booklet lists farm practices you may encounter throughout the year. These range from the use of aircraft for spraying crops to the construction of fences to protect crops from wildlife damage. Such practices may seem strange to you, but they have evolved over generations and are necessary for B.C. farm communities' survival.

Acceptable farm practices are protected by B.C.'s *Farm Practices Protection (Right to Farm) Act*. 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 *Waste Management Act*, the *Pesticide Control Act*, the *Health Act* and other regulations. The legislation also creates a process to resolve complaints so neighbours need not suffer from unacceptable farming activities.

The challenge today lies in ensuring that a compatible relationship between farm and non-farm activities and land uses is maintained and enhanced - a relationship that treats farmers and their neighbours fairly.

If you are new to an agricultural area, and some of these practices seem unusual or cause concern, we urge you to consult this booklet. Several farm practices are described in alphabetical order. If you still have questions or concerns, we have included a list of organizations you may wish to contact.



# Farming activities in the countryside

Examples of farm practices you may encounter include:

## Aircraft

Aircraft are used for a number of crucial farming activities in B.C. They are used by grain producers to seed and fertilize vast areas. Aircraft are commonly used to spray cranberry and other



crops to control disease. All over B.C., ranchers use helicopters to locate lost cattle and even drive herds back to the home ranch before winter sets in.

The main advantage of using aircraft is that many farming activities are extremely time-sensitive and some farms cover huge areas. Aircraft are also crucial when ground-based equipment cannot operate due to snowfall or poor ground conditions.



---

## Composting and Recycling

Many people, including urban residents, routinely compost and recycle. On farms, composting and recycling are even more important because a large amount of material is



generated through normal operations. Composting and recycling are particularly crucial for the proper management of agricultural waste and for amending and enhancing poor or depleted soil.

---

## Ditches

Proper drainage is an important part of many successful farms. In areas with wet climates, drainage systems are usually needed 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 the Federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans and the B.C. Ministry of Environment, Lands and Parks before ditch work can begin. This requirement has a major impact on how lands are managed. Farmers do their best to enhance the waterways to be fish friendly.



## **Dust**

Tillage or cultivation is a necessary activity for many farm operations and significant amounts of dust can be generated. Tillage may be undertaken for a variety of reasons: to prepare a suitable or raised seedbed; to incorporate crop materials left after harvest, fertilizers, lime and other soil amendments; or to kill weeds.

If the soil is dry during these activities, and if there is even the slightest breeze, dust will be produced. To help keep dust to a minimum, farmers are encouraged to plow when the soil is not too dry and when the wind is very light.



This has greatly reduced the amount of dust created in areas close to urban lands.

Wind is another cause of dust. Farmers are now taking steps to reduce soil erosion from natural causes by maintaining crop residue cover, installing windbreaks and changing management practices. Dust may also occur from crop harvesting, particularly with hay or



corn silage. Although steps are taken to minimize dust being generated, there can be instances when it is unavoidable.

## **Fencing and Netting**

Wildlife can be a real challenge for farmers. For example, deer often destroy fruit and vegetable crops, carnivores attack sheep, birds eat berry and other crops and animals can carry undesirable insects, weeds and diseases onto B.C. farms. The results can be very costly for farmers.



Fencing is the best method of preventing most forms of wildlife damage and is usually the most cost-effective option. Netting, for berry crops, is a noiseless, non-toxic and non-lethal form of control (especially for birds) that requires little maintenance; however, it is very costly to install.



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.

## **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. They also use wells constructed on their own property. 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 may operate from February through May, and September through November, in some areas.

## **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.

Depending on the operation and time of year, lights could be on for as much as 24 hours a day. For some vegetable and flower producers, lighting is used for transplant, propagation and other floriculture activities.



## 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. The *Livestock Act* defines

“Livestock Districts and “Pound Districts”, and the conditions under which livestock may be at large. The *Trespass Act* requires that owners of adjoining land in rural areas construct and maintain fences between their properties, unless they agree otherwise.



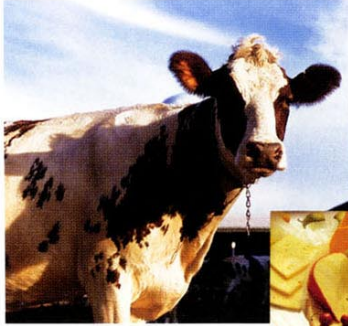
## **Movement of Farm Vehicles**

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



To combat traffic problems with 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.

## Odours



For some people, their sense of smell is the most precise measurement of changes in their environment. 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 of neighbourhoods built

adjacent to traditional farming areas. Some odours result from animal housing, waste storage, manure spreading, crop residue and composting, which are all acceptable farm practices. To reduce odours, many farmers and agri-business are exploring and investing in new technologies.



Odours from animal housing facilities and waste storage facilities can occur year-round, and are usually minimal. The spreading of manure can



generate strong odours, but for only a few days during the crop growing season, which usually ranges from spring to early fall.

Odours from composting facilities 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 generate odours in the fall and can be noticeable for up to a month, depending on weather conditions.

## **Pests or Pesticides**

Today's consumer expects a safe and high quality food product.

Many farmers are using new technologies and methods to minimize or eliminate the use of pesticides. When farmers use pesticides to prevent pests, they must adhere to strict laws such as the *Pest Control Products Act*, and only apply pesticides that are registered in B.C. This is done in accordance with strict guidelines developed by manufacturers and governments. Both the federal and provincial governments regulate pesticide use.



Weather conditions can influence the timing of applications, which usually occur early in the morning or late in the evening. This helps minimize drift and protects beneficial insects and plants. It is very costly and is applied only when absolutely necessary.



Many producers now utilize Integrated Pest Management or “IPM”. IPM involves the use of biological, mechanical and monitoring methods to help reduce or eliminate the need for chemical sprays. With this system, “good bugs” are used to eliminate and control “bad bugs.

---

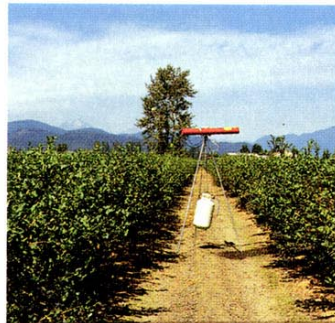
## Sounds of Farming

Farming sounds may be generated from a range of mobile or stationary machinery. 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 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.

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, refrigeration units and many others.



## **Wildlife and Water**

Rapid urbanization and loss of green space is focusing attention on farmland as potential green space for wildlife habitat. In many



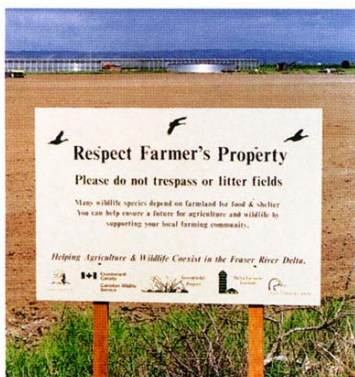
communities, farmers and conservationists are working together to develop management practices for wetlands which balance agricultural and ecological concerns. These initiatives are good examples that agriculture can exist in harmony with the surrounding natural environment.



## How you can help protect the countryside

There are many things you can do to help farmers with their work and be a good neighbour.

### Do Not Litter



Most people, including farmers, are trying to reduce litter. On farms, litter is not only unsightly, it can damage crops and equipment, and injure animals and people. Even discarded bottles or plastic wrappers can reduce the value of the crop for processing and result in reduced profit and marketability.

### Control 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 farmer. Weed control is so important to all B.C. residents that noxious weeds are controlled under B.C.'s *Weed Control Act*.





---

## **Keep Dogs on a Leash**

Loose dogs can be very destructive to farm animals and certain crops. Packs of dogs have been known to destroy small animals such as sheep. They can also cripple cattle and horses by digging holes in pastures. Keeping your dog on your property, or on a leash when you are out for a walk, is very important.

---

## **Report Theft or 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 or alert your farm neighbour. We are all victims when crime becomes rampant in our community.



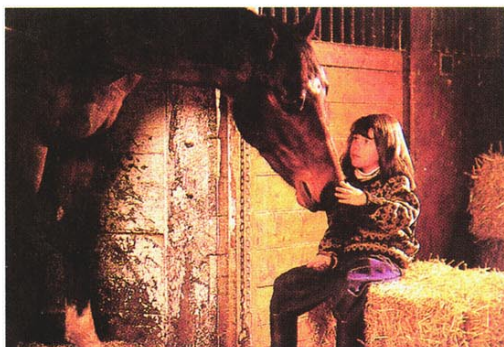
## Do Not Trespass

Access to farmland without the farmer's permission can cause crop and soil damage, cause personal injury and allow animals to escape. Hikers, cyclists, school groups, hunters, dogs, off-road vehicles, boaters, fishers 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 a 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.



## Summary

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. Take advantage of the sights, sounds and smells of the open countryside. Slow down a little and 'Share the Road' with farm equipment. Explain to your children the benefits of living in a food-producing area, and reap the rewards of a harmonious co-existence between friends and neighbours.



Is country living for you? Remember, rural living is not 'wilderness living'. You are not moving back in time, just to another place. The world is busy everywhere, and

the countryside is no exception. It is important to remember that the Agricultural Land Reserve was established to provide a home for farming and to provide food security for your future.

We deal with noises and smells in the city and enjoy the beautiful surroundings too. Similarly, there are noises and smells in the countryside, but from another source.

*There is an industry and an important way of life to be found in the countryside, and it is called FARMING.*

## Where to Get 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:

- the B.C. Ministry of Agriculture and Food (the telephone number of the office nearest you can be found in the Blue Pages of the telephone directory or by calling toll free 1-800-663-7867 or (604) 660-2421 in Greater Vancouver)
- BCMAF Resource Management Branch, Abbotsford (604) 556-3100
- your local municipal or regional government office
- the Farm Practices Board, Victoria at (250) 356-8946
- the Agricultural Land Commission, Burnaby at (604) 660-7000
- the B.C. Ministry of Agriculture and Food web site at:

<http://www.agf.gov.bc.ca>



BRITISH  
COLUMBIA

Ministry of  
Agriculture and Food

QP # 22294-1



Provincial  
Agricultural Land  
Commission