

A scenic landscape of the Comox Valley. In the foreground, a blue tractor pulling a red harrow and a green trailer is working in a golden-yellow field. The middle ground features a green field, a lake with houses and trees along the shore, and a dense forest of evergreen trees. The background consists of blue mountains under a clear sky.

**- COMOX VALLEY -
AGRICULTURE AND
THE COUNTRYSIDE**



Life in the countryside

Living in the countryside is a lifestyle choice for many families. Rural areas can provide many amenities, however, the countryside of the Comox Valley is also where farming occurs. Farms are active working landscapes where farm families both live and make their living.

This brochure helps to explain farm activities and why they are a necessary part of rural life. It also explains some of the impacts that farmers experience and why being a good neighbour benefits everyone.

Farming is a growing business in the Comox Valley

Farming is a significant economic activity in the Comox Valley. In 2001, there were 300 farms in the Valley, which represented over two-thirds of the total number of farms in the Regional District of Comox-Strathcona. Farming in the Valley is growing steadily, both in terms of the number of farms, and the area of land in production. Comox Valley farmers sold over \$23 million worth of products in 2001 and had an investment in land, buildings, machinery and livestock worth over \$194 million.

Valley farmers produce in excess of 60 farm gate products. Most of the farmland is used for livestock (dairy and beef) and some poultry operations. There are also fruit, vegetable, nursery products and other specialty crops grown in the Valley. Some of these products are available at local retail outlets, at the Farmers' Market, and through direct, on-farm sales.



The Provincial Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR) is a very significant feature in the Comox Valley, covering an area of approximately 20,000 hectares. The ALR is a permanent provincial land use designation where farming and related activities are the primary use and regulation limits subdivision, housing and non-farm uses.

The *Farm Practices Protection (Right to Farm) Act* protects farms, both in and outside the ALR, when farmers use normal farming practices. This Act protects farmers from unwarranted nuisance complaints. However, it does not give farmers any exceptional rights. Farmers are still required to operate in a manner that reflects acceptable management practices, meets all regulatory requirements and complies with other legislation such as the *Waste Management, Pesticide Control, Water and Health Acts*. The *Farm Practices Protection Act* establishes processes to resolve concerns about unacceptable farming activities, including access to the Farm Practices Board.

It is important to ensure that farming has a future in the Comox Valley. Improving relationships between farmers and their non-farm neighbours, in a manner that treats everyone fairly, will help achieve this objective.



Farming Activities in the Countryside

Farm practices may involve activities unfamiliar to some people, especially for those that are new to the countryside. Several farm practices are described in this booklet. If you have any questions, a list of web sites is included on the last page for additional information.

Livestock & Fences:

Livestock production is a significant component of Valley agriculture. Cattle, sheep, horses and other livestock are often grazed on pasture. If they choose to congregate near your yard, and if this poses a concern, please discuss the problem with your farming neighbour.



On occasion, livestock may break down fences or gates and access adjoining property. If you discover livestock at large, please advise the farmer as soon as possible. Property line fencing is a joint responsibility. The owner of the adjacent property may be expected to assist in the installation or maintenance of fences.

Odour

A common concern for residents new to the countryside is odour. Odours may originate from numerous sources including livestock or poultry housing, manure storage, manure spreading, composting or from vegetable material remaining in the field after harvest. These are all normal farm odours.

Manure is used to replenish nutrients and add organic matter to the soil. Manure is normally applied to soil by a mechanical spreader, irrigation system or tanker. Most manure application methods create normal farm odours.

Farmers are encouraged to employ practices that preserve nutrients and reduce odour. Background odours from farms may occur at any time of the year. These smells are not harmful and their intensity often depends on the direction and force of the wind on any given day.



Dust

To prepare a seedbed, soil is usually cultivated or tilled. This should be done when the soil is relatively dry so that tractors and equipment do not compact the soil. Tillage usually results in an “earthy” smell and some dust. Under drying and/or windy conditions, dust can move from the fields to adjacent properties. Many farmers maintain crop residue or other cover to conserve soil.

Farmers are encouraged to use the minimum amount of tillage that is necessary in order to avoid erosion, protect soil structure and reduce costs.

Noise

Noise may come from a variety of farm sources. Tractors and machinery can cause noise during periods of cultivation, seeding and harvesting. Irrigation systems, ventilation fans, feeding equipment and livestock on outdoor pasture are other noise sources. Some farm operations may use audible bird scare devices to protect crops. Standards for their use have been developed in an attempt to lessen potential impacts on neighbours. As an alternative, the protective netting of crops may be encouraged.

In most cases, farming noises happen only periodically. Field work, particularly harvesting, sometimes requires early morning or late evening activity which can generate noise for short periods of time.

In some cases, noise may be experienced on a more regular basis. Typical examples are ventilation fans, milking systems or feeding equipment. While these sources of noise are seldom avoidable, they may be managed through location, timing and other appropriate noise mitigation measures.



Farm Vehicles

Usually farmers own or lease more than one parcel of land. This means they occasionally move farm equipment, feed, manure or livestock on public roads. Farmers have the right to use public roadways for this purpose, but are required to use a slow moving vehicle sign on their equipment. The sign warns other motorists that vehicles displaying this sign may be travelling at a much slower speed than the maximum permitted.



Watch for
Slow Moving Vehicle
signs and pass only
when it is safe.

Observe signs warning of the use of farm vehicles on local roads. Farm vehicles on the road may result in slower travel speeds. For everyone's safety, care and patience are strongly recommended when approaching and passing farm vehicles.

Lighting

Lighting on farms and farm equipment is used for safety, security and for working after dark. Lighting used for fieldwork is only required occasionally, and generally has limited impact. Greenhouses may use lighting for specialized purposes such as propagation. The scale and duration of such lighting requirements can be significant.

Water & Drainage

To improve the yield and quality of crops, irrigation is common on many farms in the Comox Valley during the growing season. In order to make the most effective use of the delivery system and reduce the peak withdrawal rate from water sources, irrigation may occur at any time of the day or night. During these periods noise from pumps and/or sprinklers can be expected.

Wet soils limit potential crop growth. Farmers therefore often use open ditches or underground drainage pipes to remove water from the soil. Maintaining these drains and ditches by removing sediment and excessive vegetation is required from time to time in order to maintain soil productivity.



Being a Good Neighbour

Should you live near, drive through or use recreational trails in or near farming areas, there are many things you can do to minimize impacts on agricultural production.

Please consider the following:

Animal Control

Dogs can injure or kill livestock and damage crops. Both may result in harm and serious economic losses for farmers. It is important that pets be kept under control.

Avoid Trespassing

Farm fields may look like parkland but playing or walking on fields can damage crops and animals may escape if gates are left open. Ditches, irrigation pipes and farm machinery located in fields can be dangerous. Farming is a high-risk occupation. Neither you, nor your children, want to be accidentally injured. Please respect private property as you would expect others to respect yours. Ask for the owner's permission if you wish to access their farm.

Prevent Littering

Bottles or other litter in farmers' fields can cause injury to livestock, damage equipment and/or reduce the value of a crop. Any injury or damage is a direct cost to the farmer and can impact on the profitability of the operation and the farm family's livelihood.

Control Weeds



Weeds are one of the biggest pests a farmer has to contend with, causing serious economic losses. Although the farmer can control weeds on his property with tillage or other methods, weeds from your property can spread to adjoining land. There are weeds that you should know and may be obliged to control under the *BC Weed Control Act*.

Theft & Vandalism

The countryside is not immune to crime. Theft or damage to crops, equipment, fences, buildings and other assets cost farmers thousands of dollars each year. If you see or suspect an illegal activity, please alert your farm neighbour and/or call the RCMP immediately.

Summing Up

Farming is a major land use activity, which makes a number of very important contributions to the Comox Valley. Non-farm residents in the Valley far out number farm families. It is therefore important that we are all aware of the benefits of the countryside, understand farm practices and use common sense and respect in dealing with our friends and neighbours. Taking these small steps will ensure conflicts are minimal and will make the job of farming easier.

Please do your part to assist in ensuring a future for farming in our community.



For Additional Information

- Contact your local Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries office at 250-897-7518 or check these web sites:
- Farm Practices in B.C. Reference Guide:
<http://www.agf.gov.bc.ca/resmgmt/fppa/Refguide/intro.htm>
- Agriculture Food and Fisheries:
www.agf.gov.bc.ca
- Farm Practices Board: <http://www.agf.gov.bc.ca/ministry/fpb.htm>
- Agricultural Land Commission:
<http://www.landcommission.gov.bc.ca/>
- Weed Guide
www.agf.gov.bc.ca/croplive/cropprot/weedguid/weedguid.htm
- Regional District Comox Strathcona
<http://www.rdcsc.bc.ca/>



This brochure was developed as part of the Comox Valley Agricultural Area Plan. Participation and support in this process included the Regional District of Comox-Strathcona, BC Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries, BC Ministry of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services, BC Investment Agriculture Foundation, Agricultural Land Commission, Island Farmer's Alliance and the local farm community through the Farmers' Institute.

January, 2003