

Gaining Positive Relationships Between Farmers and Urban Neighbors

By Jessica Spruit

The country. A flat, open space of land occupied mostly by livestock and the occasional human. The city. Rows upon rows upon rows of houses, occupied by people and the occasional dog or cat. And when they meet half-way, you get a small community where the houses have big lawns but no livestock or crops. Today, we will be discussing the inbetweens, or urban neighbors, and the farmers or ranchers. More specifically, how they can build progressively beneficial relationships with each other.

First, some benefits to starting up these connections in the first place. Oftentimes, a farm will have some form of valuable items. These can range from tools to vehicles and other machinery. And although a farmer does many things in a day, it is impossible to be everywhere all at once. This is where it is important to have a positive relationship with urban neighbors, who can keep an eye out on a farmer's property and machinery. In addition, both parties will make new friends and have an opportunity to get out of the house once in a while.

Next, we'll talk about the ways in which farmers and urban neighbors can create those relationships. First, if you see your neighbor, greet them. Ask a simple question. This is more difficult in the country than in the city, so it might be a good idea to host a barbecue or party to greet new neighbors or simply catch up with old ones. Community events such as yoga, music classes, and clubs can also be a good way to meet and create positive relationships with neighbors. Planning and common sense goes a long way, too. As a farmer, it is often difficult to plan when you are going to plant and harvest, as it depends on our unpredictable Albertan weather, but simpler farm tasks can be shifted by a few days. For example, spreading fertilizer on a beautiful Saturday afternoon will not help with any neighborly relations. In my opinion, the best way to befriend a neighbor is by being there for them. If a neighbor goes through a hard time, don't pry for information, but instead assure them that you will be there for them. Offer to help with household chores until they feel better. This is a good way to not only maintain a positive relationship with your neighbors, but also a way to earn their trust and respect.

Dealing with complaints is a big stressor for the farmer, but happens to an increased number of farmers as more urban neighbors move in. Complaints are an occupational hazard towards living on a farm, especially farms with livestock. Smell and noise complaints are not uncommon, and quite difficult to deal with. When having any confrontations with neighbors, be polite, and don't throw around blame. Gently explain that there is nothing to be done about noise or smell, and that it is a part of living in the country. Other complaints may be about the use of pesticides, herbicides, and fertilizers. When fending off complaints dealing with these, explain why they are necessary, and assure the concerned neighbor that the county has environmental laws in place and is doing everything they can to protect wildlife.

In conclusion, the most crucial aspect of having beneficial farmer to urban neighbor connections is communication. Communication is needed to uphold these positive relationships as well, and with any luck, you'll have valuable neighbors that you can trust with anything.

Sources:

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