

FACT SHEET

LIVING TOGETHER IN RURAL AREAS

AGRICULTURAL PRACTICES AND THEIR IMPACTS

The nature of agriculture is increasingly intensifying in order for farmers to continue to be profitable. With the increase in intensity comes better management, adoption of new technologies, production guidelines and industry codes of practice. But there is also a range of different impacts that might not have previously been experienced.

Commercial farms are businesses like any other and moving in next door to a farming operation may not meet your expectations of a peaceful life in the country. In rural areas, the sources of the impacts you experience are often much easier to notice than in an urban environment, where impacts more easily blend in or are readily dispersed.

The common impacts of agricultural production are explored here, with suggestions as to how you might address them.

Odours

Major odour-producing land uses include:

- Intensive animal production;
- Abattoirs;
- Dairies and piggeries;
- Egg and chicken production; and
- Garbage tips and waste effluent treatment plants.

These are rarely a threat to human health, yet wind direction and strength can cause impacts well beyond the boundary fence.

Dust

Dust can be a nuisance with common sources including:

- Ploughing and other soil preparation operations;
- Harvesting crops;
- Traffic on unsealed roads;
- Livestock; and
- Natural causes such as wind storms.

Dust impacts are highly affected by wind.

Smoke

Smoke is unlikely to create a long-term impact and may only last for a couple of hours. It can trigger health conditions such as asthma and other breathing disorders.

Some agricultural practices recommend burning crop stubble to minimise the risk of crop diseases spreading. These burn-offs are very well controlled and notification must be given to the Rural Fire Service.

Bushfires and bushfire management activities are hard to avoid when living in country NSW, and the Rural Fire Service can be a good source of information on the local area.

Noise

In some agricultural areas and at some times during crop production cycles, rural NSW can be a noisy place, and it can keep you awake at night. Open country, wind strength and direction can help noise carry over long distances.

Broadly, there is no general prohibition on causing a noise on a property, but “offensive noise” may affect others. The *Protection of The Environment Operations Act (Noise Control) Regulation* provides Authorities and individuals a legislative means to control noise.

Many noise impacts are seasonal and may only last for a few days; however, they can be generated by a wide range of activities including:

- Night-time and early morning machinery operations;
- Trucks, tractors, and diesel pump motors;
- Bird and other pest scaring devices;
- Animals, such young calves recently weaned from their mothers; and
- Motor bikes, dogs barking and clanking windmills.

Visual Amenity

Productive agricultural land can be put to many uses and increasingly, NSW farmers are trialling new and different ways of keeping their farm enterprises profitable. This means that rural landscapes can change frequently, for example:

- Pasture and grazing land can be turned over to crops or orchards;
- New, more intensive industries can develop;
- Farm buildings can appear;
- Native scrub and other vegetation can be cleared under a permit system;
- Broad acre rural land can be subdivided into smaller rural residential allotments; and
- Hail and bird netting can be constructed over large areas of orchards, possibly changing the view for many weeks of the year.

Rural Amenity

Another impact of the changing way land is used in rural NSW is the loss of the ‘rural-ness’ of parts of the countryside. As urban sprawl on the outskirts of major urban centres increases and as development around beachfronts and up coastal valleys expands, more and more farmland is being subdivided and converted to rural residential uses.

Weeds

Weed control on your farm may be an issue and have implications for your neighbours. If you let weeds thrive and set seed, your neighbours will be less than impressed as they are more likely to be affected. Some weeds have health implications, especially for people who suffer from allergies or asthma. The *Noxious Weeds Act 1993* obliges anyone who owns, leases, rents or has control over land to control noxious weeds.

Chemical Use

The responsible use of agricultural chemicals provides benefits for both farmers and the surrounding environment. Farmers are very careful in their use of chemicals, as it is a waste of money if the chemicals don’t hit the target plant or pest. It is also an offence for chemicals to cause damage beyond the target area.

- There are a range of Acts and Regulations that control the use of chemicals.
- Most farmers undertake Farm Chemical User Courses emphasising correct application rates, safe use and safe storage.
- Use of some chemicals is restricted in some parts of NSW.

There are likely to be many different philosophies about the use of chemicals in agriculture.

Much of the high quality, fresh food that is produced requires the use of chemicals for pest control. Increasingly, organic and bio-dynamic production systems are developing ways of producing the same quality with a reduced reliance on chemicals, but it is the decision of the farmer as to what system they use.

In some cases, chemicals required for new industries may not be compatible with the existing ones, and vice versa. This is currently the cause of significant disputes in NSW, as the industries are likely to have required significant investment for their establishment. There are minimal grounds that justify you demanding your neighbours to change their existing legitimate chemical use.

Key Recommendations

- Research the main agricultural industries in your area so you know what impacts to expect;
- If you are buying a property, consider what impacts may affect you, and how your planned endeavours may affect others;
- Talk to your local council about local planning zones, and think about possible future development scenarios;
- Take what actions you can on your own property to minimise impacts and talk to your neighbours about any concerns you may have. Try to reach agreements about how to address them cooperatively; and
- If a dispute does arise, and you can't solve it with your neighbour, consider alternative dispute resolution processes before taking legal action. The Community Justice Centre can provide formal third party mediation services.

What You Can Do

Odours

- Do your research before you buy, to find out whether there are any odour-producing industries nearby;
- Let your neighbour know your concerns, and encourage a cooperative approach that minimises the impact on you; and
- Because wind direction is such a big factor in transmitting odours, wind breaks and strategic planting of trees and shrubs can reduce some odour impacts.

Dust

- Take whatever measures you can on your own property to minimise dust nuisances;
- Talk to your neighbour about the impact their dust is having on you;
- Work cooperatively to develop appropriate measures to reduce the impacts; and
- Plant vegetative windbreaks to interrupt the transmission of dust through the air.

Smoke

- Find out whether smoke-generating activities will be a regular occurrence nearby;
- Let your neighbour know your concerns and ask if burn-offs can be undertaken when the wind is blowing away from your property; and
- Go away for the time of the burn-off.

Noise

- Talk to your neighbour to find out when noisy activities are likely to occur;
- Plan your activities around these times. You might decide to go away if the impact will be significant;
- Consider incorporating acoustic insulation in and around your home;
- Plant trees and shrubs along your boundary for a good long-term solution. Ask your neighbours if they would plant some as well;
- Suggest to your neighbour that irrigation pump motors be enclosed in an acoustically insulated shed; and
- Compassion and common sense can eliminate many causes of excessive dog barking. A well cared for dog will generally not bark unreasonably and disturb neighbours.

Visual Amenity

- Be aware that vistas may change;
- Be aware of the types of agricultural activities that are likely in your area;
- Be aware that in most of rural NSW, professional farmers who are carrying out legitimate agricultural activities will own much of the land; and
- Plant screening vegetation to reduce the impact of unsightly sheds and other developments.

Rural Amenity

- In most cases, there is not much that can be done to reduce the impact of urban sprawl;
- If you are about to purchase rural land because you value its 'rural-ness', make sure you consider the future development prospects of surrounding land areas; and
- Check with the planning officer at the local council for any development permits or applications for sub-division. You may be able to lodge an objection.

Weeds

- Be aware of the types of weeds in the area;
- Implement a seasonal spraying program to manage weeds;
- Communicate with your neighbour to co ordinate joint programs; and
- Contact your local Council Weeds Officer if unsure about weeds or treatment.

Chemicals

- Be aware of the agricultural activities in the area and find out the likely level of use of chemicals – some crops require more chemicals than others;
- Ask your neighbour whether they use chemicals, and understand how these might affect you; and
- If you are thinking about setting up a new industry like a vineyard, fully consider what impact your use of chemicals will have on the existing residents around you – including existing farmers.

Who To Contact

- Inverell Shire Council – 67 288288 www.inverell.nsw.gov.au
- Rural Fire Service – 67 210446 www.rfs.nsw.gov.au
- Community Justice Service www.cjc.nsw.gov.au
- Inverell Police Force – 67 220599 www.police.nsw.gov.au
- Industry and Investment NSW – 67 221388 www.industry.nsw.gov.au
- Border Rivers Gwydir CMA – 67 288020 www.brg.cma.nsw.gov.au
- North West Livestock Health & Pest Authority – 67 223091 www.lhpa.org.au
- Dept. of Environment, Climate Change & Water – 131555 www.environment.nsw.gov.au
- Gwymac Landcare – 67 211241
- Land & Property Management Authority – 67 703100 www.lpma.nsw.gov.au

Further Information

www.austlii.edu.au/databases_POEO_Act_1997

www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/Living-and-working-in-rural-areas

www.ruralfutures.une.edu.au/downloads/SmallFarmWeeds