



Discussion Topic

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GOOD NEIGHBORS WAVE HELLO

How does one go about establishing friendly relationships with people who seem contrary to just about everything that happens on a farm? Jim Ochterski, Senior Extension Educator with Cornell University, offers seven tips.

First, he said, understand the difficulty of odors from your neighbor's point of view. Asking them to "just deal with it" isn't the best tact.

Next, he said, treat your neighbors like they are customers.

Good customer service should include:

- Friendly rituals: give neighbors a wave.
- Allow neighbors to make some choices such as determining the timing for manure spreading.
- Get annoyances grouped and out of the way first. Deal with the location and duration of dust and odors.

Thirdly, he said, respond to concerns with a "one page plan" approach. In one page list:

- Each and every step you're taking to resolve the situation.
- Who is helping you.
- What information you're gathering and what ideas you're exploring.
- How people can contact you.
- What you will change or possibly change in response to the concern.

Fourth, he said, serving your local community as a member of the planning board, advisory committee or zoning board of appeals gives you a front-line opportunity to discuss concerns with community leaders.

Fifth, develop a farm Web site.

On your Web site, include photos of how your farm works, descriptions of what you're doing to protect water quality, helpful tips about the industry, and commentary about how your farm relates to the community.

Sixth, he said, go easy on the roads.

"Our rural roads weren't built for today's farm equipment, and many nonfarm neighbors are noticing," Ochterski, said. "

Lastly, Ochterski, said, do what's legal and what's right.

The right thing, he said, is often how a practice or behavior is going to be perceived in the court of public opinion. "None of us can stop our neighbors from passing judgment on how we operate our farms, but we can work to ensure those judgments are positive. This will help to avoid eventual neighbor conflicts." Even though the law does not call for it:

- Farm animals must appear well cared for.
- Machinery must look safe and reflect the owner's pride.
- Farm grounds in public view should be free of junk and farming debris.
- A courteous wave or acknowledgement to a passerby enhances how our farms will be seen and judged.

QUESTIONS

1. What are the limitations on alternative energy in your community? Should there be more or fewer restrictions?

2. How can a simple friendly wave counter attitudes that tend to be anti-farming?

3. What can your county Farm Bureau do to keep things friendly between members and contrary neighbors?