

# Managing Relationships With Non-Farming Neighbours



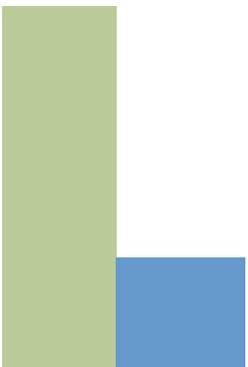
## The Community FarmLinkX Project

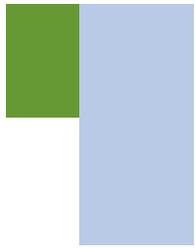
This publication has been developed as part of the SANTFA initiated Community FarmLinkX Project, funded by the National Landcare Program and the Department of Water, Land and Biodiversity Conservation.

The project was delivered between 2006 and 2008 to promote adoption of conservation farming methods by broadacre farmers on the northern Adelaide fringes and create awareness amongst non-farming residents about improved farming practises being implemented on farms.

## Acknowledgements

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Increasing urban development and an influx of lifestyle property residents in the Northern Adelaide fringes poses some new challenges for broadacre farmers in the region. A key challenge is managing relationships with non-farming neighbours.

With increasing environmental awareness by the general population and heightened concerns over chemical spraying and other farming practices, broadacre farmers are under increasing scrutiny.

This publication aims to provide ideas for broadacre farmers on how relationships can be better managed, and practices which reduce negative impacts on non-farming neighbours.



## Farming is a Professional Business

Today's broadacre farm is a professional business. New practices, new technologies and high levels of capital investment, have seen broadacre farming emerge as a "state of the art" profession, rather than an agrarian pastime.

Growers have evolved as key environmental managers, striving to improve the quality of their soils and natural resources during their period of guardianship.

Broadacre farmers play a key role in local communities, providing employment and contributing to local economies, and community networks.

It is important that broadacre farmers promote themselves as responsible, professional business and environmental managers. Reckless behaviour in broadacre farming, brings growers under scrutiny and threatens that professional, environmentally and socially responsible image for all.



## Managing Dust

Media images of dust storms enveloping towns and cities do nothing for building a positive image of broadacre farming. Likewise, local dusting of houses adjacent to eroding paddocks, neither help the image of broadacre farming, nor neighbourly relations!

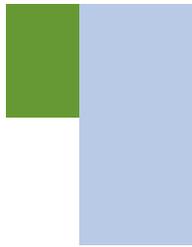
Modern farming practices have significantly improved the management of wind erosion on sensitive soils. No-till farming, residue retention and judicious (or elimination of) livestock grazing on "at risk" paddocks, should relegate dust storms to a thing of the past!

Things you can do:

- Adopt no-till or direct drill sowing practices
- Don't graze stubbles (particularly grain legumes) on sensitive areas, especially near houses, to maintain surface cover

Adopting no-till doesn't necessarily require huge capital expenditure on equipment. Often current seeding equipment can be modified to enable no-till or one-pass sowing at low cost.

If you are unsure of making the step into no-till, remember there is help and support available. The SA No-Till Farmers Association (SANTFA) provides a wealth of information, programs and events supporting growers in their conversion to no-till.



## Reduce Burning

The frequency of stubble residue burning is certainly reducing with the shift to conservation farming and residue retention systems, but there is still a significant amount practiced.

There is no doubt that smoke annoys householders! Not only is there a smell issue, but it can aggravate respiratory conditions such as asthma. Also, with increased community consciousness about carbon emissions and global warming, residue burning does nothing to promote a positive image for broadacre farming.

If you have a paddock with a heavy residue load which is likely to cause problems at seeding time, before diving for the box of matches you should be asking "is there alternative way of handling this?"

Straw baling has proved a useful "low impact" method of reducing paddock stubble loads in the district, plus a useful method of leveraging additional income. It also leaves some residue cover to protect the soil. Often contractors can be arranged to windrow and bale straw in your paddock, and pay you based on the amount of straw produced.

Agisting in sheep to graze the stubbles and reduce the residue load may also be an option.

There are situations where stubble burning is a very useful tool, particularly when paddocks are infested with snails or herbicide resistant ryegrass. If burning is required it needs to be done thoughtfully.

Choosing days when there is a positive breeze away from housing is essential, not only to avoid annoyance of neighbours, but also for safety reasons. To light up stubble in the late afternoon when inversion conditions are likely, is fraught with danger. Murphy's Law will ensure that in inversion conditions the smoke will inevitably float, directly over the town!

Over the years, there have been many techniques developed to handle large amounts of paddock residue. The modification of seeding machinery by widening row spacing and changing tine configuration and design, all help to enable sowing through heavy stubbles.





## Spraydrift Management

Chemical spraying was **the main** concern in a 2006 *Community FarmlinkX* survey of urban residents situated in close proximity to farmland in the Gawler and Freeling districts. It was rated higher than dust, smoke, noise and odours. In particular, aerial spraying was of most concern for urban residents.

Spraydrift was a key concern of the small scale landholders surveyed as well, particularly those with vineyards or involved in other horticultural pursuits. Legal liability associated with chemical drift was a major concern of growers surveyed.

As a result, agricultural spraying is one area we need to get right!

Aerial spraying should be avoided near houses and towns. It is too risky from a spray drift and image point of view.

With ground spraying, there have been major technological advances in low drift spraying equipment, as well as our understanding of conditions, products and techniques that minimize the risk of spray drift.

Things you can do to minimize the risk are:

- Spray under desirable weather conditions – appropriate temperatures (less than 28°C), high humidity ( $\Delta T$  less than 8 but greater than 2) and no inversions
- DO NOT spray with the wind direction toward sensitive areas
- DO NOT spray when there is excessive wind speed (more than 15kph)
- Aim to spray with a consistent cross wind of between 3 and 15kph
- DO NOT operate with a boom height too high
- Select the correct droplet size – coarse to very coarse droplets are less driftable and need not compromise efficacy if nozzles are set up and operated correctly. Air induction nozzles produce coarser droplets than flat fans
- Avoid spraying with volatile products – with some products, low volatile formulations are available
- Be careful with adjuvants – some wetting agents can increase drift risk by reducing droplet size
- Observe downwind buffer zones – 50m for ground spraying
- Establish vegetation buffers – this is a longer term measure, but worth considering in paddocks adjacent to housing

The smell of some agricultural products can invoke reactions from non-farming neighbours. With many of these products, it is actually the volatile hydrocarbon-based solvents that create the odour (which can linger for a significant period) rather than the active chemical ingredient itself. The solvent, being volatile, can lift off the target and travel considerable distances, whilst the active ingredient remains on the target.



The perception of the uninformed majority though, is that “if you can smell it, then you are being exposed to the chemical”, which creates a perception problem.

When spraying near housing, where possible, choose low odour products. Note that low odour formulations of some traditionally “stinky” products are available (i.e. some formulations of 24D amine and 24D low volatile ester). While they can cost a little more, they may help to avoid conflict with non-farming neighbours.

## Offensive Odours

Recent increases in fertiliser prices have made the application of manure products as an alternative crop nutrient source very popular with broadacre farmers situated close to chicken farms, piggeries and feedlots.

Apart from being a cheap source of many crop nutrients, products such as chicken litter and pig effluent can have their own “rich organic smell” that lingers for several days after spreading. Unfortunately, neighbours often don’t appreciate the smell, causing them considerable annoyance!

In addition, some of these products can be quite dusty in nature which arouses concerns over contamination of rainwater supplies.

Be thoughtful when choosing paddocks to spread with these products. Applying them to paddocks near houses is asking for trouble.

## Noise

Noise associated with machinery operation can create conflicts with non-farming neighbours particularly at night when residents are trying to sleep.

If possible, try to time machinery operations in paddocks adjacent to houses during daylight hours. For some operations (e.g. hay baling) this may not be practical. In these instances a courtesy phone call to inform residents as to the nature and likely duration of the machinery operation goes a long way towards avoiding potential conflicts.

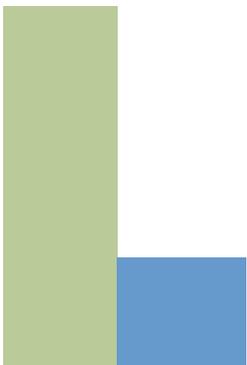
Adoption of one-pass sowing substantially reduces the time that machinery operates in paddocks and the associated annoyance factor.



## Building Relationships

Many conflicts can be prevented by good communication and developing positive relationships with non-farming neighbours. The following tips may provide ideas for developing good neighbourly relationships.

- Make a point of meeting your neighbours. Explain who you are, what you do and how you can be contacted. This shows that you are approachable and interested in them. If large numbers of residents are involved it may be more practical to put a Letter of Introduction into their mailbox.
- Inform neighbours about what you are doing. A phone call ahead of operations that might create noise or odours will give them notice and potentially time to prepare.
- Reflect professionalism and competence in what you do. Keep a neat well maintained farm. Show concern about controlling problems, rather than just dismissing them.
- Invite close neighbours to experience and learn about your farming operations. Host a tour of your farm. Invite key neighbours to accompany you for a few rounds of a paddock in your tractor or harvester. This provides them a unique opportunity to experience and learn about what you do, the technologies you employ, and why those activities are necessary.
- Do an occasional favour for neighbours. Perhaps even give them something. Often the gift a bale of straw to a keen gardener or a few bags of screenings for a backyard chicken keeper goes a long way towards building positive relationships.
- Hold an annual BBQ for neighbours.





## Conflict Management and Communication

At times, conflict is unavoidable, no matter how much effort you've made to prevent it from occurring. When it does occur it is important it is managed to minimise the damage and prevent it from escalating. Here are some tips which should help:

- Take the matter seriously.
- Stay calm. Avoid getting angry or defensive.
- Ask lots of questions. Find out what the other person is upset about. Don't debate their issues.
- Acknowledge what they have said. It reassures them that you have heard what they have had to say.
- Assure them that you are willing to resolve the problem
- Apologise. Make amends if possible.
- Look for solutions so that everyone gets what they need.
- Review the situation at a specific time in the future, to see how things are going and if anything needs to be modified.

It is also important to recognise that many conflicts between farmers and non-farming neighbours stem from the actions of the non-farming neighbour. When dealing with issues keep in mind the following:

- Face to face communication is better than letters, messages or talking to everyone but the person you are in conflict with (provided there is no threat of violence).
- Choose the right time and the right place to discuss an issue. Don't tackle an issue when the other person is obviously busy, at the end of a hectic day or hasn't had time to deal with the problem adequately.
- Plan or script what you are going to say. It is important to state clearly what the problem is for you and how you feel about it. Be diplomatic.
- Listen to their side of the story and what they have to say. Be prepared to learn something you were not aware of.
- Attack the problem, not the person. Don't blame the other person, interpret their behaviour or make threats.
- Work co-operatively to address a problem. It's far more effective than telling the person that they have to change.



## Case Study: Callum March, Balaklava

Callum farms at Balaklava and has one paddock literally surrounded by houses, with two sides that border the town, and single houses on the remaining two sides. In total, approximately 50 houses border the paddock.

"We had the odd comment about dust years ago when we practiced more tillage and had sheep, but now chemical spraying is the main concern from our neighbours", Callum said.

"As far as spraying goes, we basically follow a set of guidelines supplied to us by PIRSA for our Town paddock"

"This involves using low drift nozzles, not spraying at night and making sure the wind is blowing away from the majority of houses at between 5 and 15kph".

"We also have someone acting as a spotter when we spray that paddock to constantly monitor wind strength and direction, and we set up tell-tale flags to indicate wind direction".

"We also notify the residents of the single houses downwind of where we spray up to a day before, so they can shut their windows and remove washing off the line".

"Those neighbours really appreciate the courtesy call and generally thank us for being thoughtful", Callum added.

Other strategies Callum employs to reduce impact on town neighbours include choosing crops which don't require the use of odorous chemicals and choosing low odour products and formulations.

"We don't grow pulses and canola on the Town paddock so we don't have to use smelly, higher toxicity insecticides", Callum said.

If glyphosate spikes are required in knockdown herbicide applications, carfentrazone (Hammer®) is used rather than oxyfluorfen (Goal®) because of its reduced odour. Ally® and Amicide-Lo® (a low odour formulation of 24D amine) are preferred broadleafed herbicides.

"We've recently fitted our header with a chaff cart to collect weed seeds which will hopefully reduce the amount of chemical we need to use on paddocks", Callum added.

"We have planted a tree break along one edge of the paddock as a future buffer for nearby houses".

"It wasn't compulsory but decided it would be worthwhile in the future", he added.

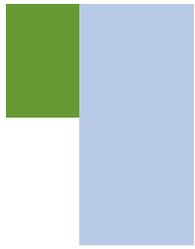
Despite taking a proactive approach to managing spray concerns from neighbours, Callum received a complaint two years ago.

As a result we formulated a letter explaining what we were doing in trying to run a sustainable operation and minimise spray and dust impacts on our neighbours, as well as our contact details if anyone had concerns, and personally delivered it to nearby residents".

"The personal approach was a real advantage as people could put a face to the farming activities next door", Callum added

"All in all, we find that good communication is the key to managing relations with neighbours", Callum said

"It's not always easy, but we realise we have to do it", Callum concluded.



## Case Study : Barry and Robyn Muster, Freeling

Barry and Robyn Muster operate a mixed broad acre cereal/hay producing property, which incorporates a 40 sow piggery near Freeling, One of their paddocks is adjacent to a housing estate with a disused railway line providing a small buffer.

Barry and Robyn take a very proactive approach to managing relationships with their town neighbours.

"We try and find out who our neighbours are – if we know someone new has moved in, we go out of our way to try and meet them", Robyn said.

"We explain to them that we are farming the paddock next door, and to invite them to call us if they have any concerns or question about what we are doing".

"Some time ago we had a new neighbour move in who had no knowledge of farming whatsoever".

"We invited him for a ride in the header when we were working next door, which he did".

"It was an excellent way of him getting to know us and a bit about what we do, and very good PR value".

"I think you've got to take an educating role with neighbours; to let them know about aspects of farming and to answer their questions".

"PR is important in maintaining good relationships with neighbours – If you can get one or two on side, they tend to spread the word amongst others in the town", Robyn said.

To help reduce the impact on neighbours, the Musters no longer burn stubbles, and bale the straw instead.

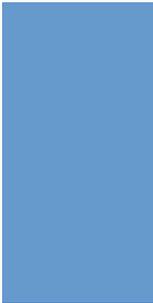
"We are very conscious when chemical spraying, particularly near houses", Barry said.

"We don't use the plane anymore near the town – only paddocks that are well away from it", Barry added.

"When people see a plane they immediately think you are spraying chemical, even if you are spreading urea".

"We also avoid spraying on windy days or when the wind is blowing directly toward houses".





## References

“Spray Drift” Factsheet Grains Research and Development Corporation (July 2008)

“Building a Better Rural Neighbour; Preventing Managing and Resolving Conflicts” , Centre for Agriculture and Business et.al.



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