



LANDOWNERS LEASING **FARMLAND IN PENNSYLVANIA**

A resource for LANDOWNERS currently OR considering leasing farmland.

Everyone dreams of moving to the country, having a nice home surrounded by serene farmland. You may want to buy a large parcel of land and have a neighboring farmer tend to the land for you. You may already own land and are considering leasing it to a farmer.

This document will outline some of the issues that you may face when living in the country. Many of these are situations that cannot be controlled by the farmer, they are just a fact of life in rural America.

ODORS:

This is probably the Number 1 concern for those who have a home in the country. Please understand that animals and animal agriculture have a certain odor that many will not find pleasant. Some just describe it as “fresh country air” and deal with it for the brief time that it lingers.

It is important for farmers to spread manure on farmland to feed the crops and soil so that they can grow the feed needed for those animals. Commercial fertilizer is very costly so many farmers use as much manure from their own animals or purchased from other farmers to fertilize the ground as possible. Manure is a natural fertilizer and much more economical for farmers to use. It also helps improve soil health.

It is important to know that the odor is not permanent and generally only lasts from a few hours to a day or two. Manure is spread throughout the year to prepare the soil for planting and in between cuttings of crops such as hay or after one crop is harvested in preparation for the next to be planted. Farmers must adhere to rules and regulations as set forth in the Nutrient Management Regulations. You can find this information through your local conservation district.

NOISE:

Loud noises near farmland are another given. Animals make noise, tractors and farm equipment are loud. Again, this is not something that the farmer can control. While technology has come a long way, tractors are still noisy when they are operating. Farmers work late hours during planting and harvesting so you may hear equipment running in the wee hours of the morning.

Animals tend to be noisy at times. Often they will bellow loudly when they hear the “feed tractor”. Rest assured this is not because they are starving for food, it is just their nature, kind of like they are saying “yay, here comes our meal!”. Animals are creatures of habit and even if that tractor is running for a use other than feeding, you may hear them making noise.

During the natural cycle of life, young animals are weaned from nursing their mothers. Throughout the process of weaning, the mothers and young animals will have an adjustment period in which they will each bawl for the other. It is completely normal for the animals to be loud during this phase. Farmers practice methods to keep animal stress at its lowest during these times, but there still will be noise.

FLIES:

With animal agriculture there is an increase in flies due to an abundant source of food. Flies feed on animals, their feed and waste. They are a nuisance not only to you and the farmer but to the animals as well. Farmers will treat their animals with insecticides to better control the problem.

DUST/MUD:

Agriculture involves working with the soil. While many farmers have implemented practices such as no-till farming and cover cropping that greatly reduce the amount of soil that is disturbed, dust is still a side effect of farming.

On the flip side, occasionally there will be seasons that make it difficult for the farmer to do their job without traveling on soil that is muddy. The equipment may drop mud on your driveway. If this is a problem, talk to the farmer, ask them to try to be careful not to do so or allow them access to your property through your grass if possible.

ANIMALS:

We've already covered the two main issues many have with animals-smell and noise.

Most farmers, but not all, raise some type of livestock in their operation. There is a vast array of animal agriculture: rabbits, poultry, sheep, goats, pigs, alpacas, horses and cattle to name a few.

Farmers raise animals as a part of their business. Most will be sold at some point so that the farmer can make a living. They care greatly for those animals but please understand that these animals are "working" animals, they are not pets. They may not be tame, therefore, you may not be able to walk up and pet them. Always be sure to talk to the farmer before approaching an animal to be sure it is safe and they are okay with you doing so.

Some farmers, especially those who raise poultry and swine, have a biosecurity area around where they house the birds or pigs so that disease is not introduced to their livestock. Never enter a building that houses livestock without permission. If allowed to pet the farmer's animals, be sure to wash your hands thoroughly after doing so.

Please do not think that you are "helping" by feeding farm animals your grass clippings or table scraps unless you talk to the farmer first. Most farmers work with a nutritionist to be sure their animals are fed a balanced diet. Food waste should not be fed to livestock as farmers are required to follow state regulations relating to feed waste being fed to animals. There are also many plants and weeds that are toxic to animals--you may inadvertently do more harm than good.

Animals sometimes get out of their pens or fencing. This may mean that they trample your beautiful flower beds. Unless this happens due to complete neglect by the farmer, please try not to be too hard on them. They are just as upset that the animals got loose and caused damage as you may be.

Just like humans, animals get sick. Unfortunately, this sometimes happens out in the middle of a pasture in full view of everyone. Most times a farmer will try to move the animal to a barn so that it can be properly and more easily treated and cared for. They usually will use a tractor, UTV or skidloader-type machine to move the animal. Please do not be alarmed if you see an animal in the bucket of a machine.

Sometimes even though every route was taken to heal the animal, they die. Farmers may have a compost pile where dead animals are placed along with old hay which will break it down in order for it to be used as fertilizer in the future. Properly maintained compost piles do not smell.

Animals will be outside in inclement weather. Many animals are well acclimated to the outdoors and are healthier when outside. Please know that for a farmer with a large herd of animals, it may appear they do not have enough barns for the animals. However, they normally have some type of weather protection available such as wind breaks, woods, valleys, etc. Most animals are healthier when they are able to be outside during a range of temperatures. This is true for newborns of larger species as well.

Most farms have barn cats and at least a dog or two. The cats may roam onto your property, but that can be a good thing, barn cats are incredible mousers! Cats are smart, even if they are fed at home they will go to the neighbors for an extra portion of goodies. Be sure to ask if any farm dogs are friendly before approaching.

BIRTHING SEASON:

During birthing season, please be sensitive to the fact that animals are bringing new life into the world. The mother is extra sensitive to every sight and sound around her and anything new or unusual could complicate things and cause labor to stall.

Births do not always happen in a barn or building. Many animals give birth outside in a pasture during all temperatures with no trouble at all.

Mother animals can be extremely protective and it may be dangerous to go near them or their baby(ies) during the birthing process or shortly afterwards. They will see you as a threat just like they see a wild animal as a threat and may “chase or hit” you to get you out of their territory.

It is a stressful time for farmers as many things can go wrong during a birth. Unless invited, please do not walk into a farmer’s barn to watch a birth. If invited, please be still and quiet during the event. The same goes if you are watching from a distance, for example if a cow is calving in a pasture next to your yard. It is something beautiful to witness, just do so quietly and do not try to help unless the farmer asks you to do so.

CROPS:

The crops that a farmer grows are part of his livelihood and it is how he or she supports their family. Please do not dispose of grass clippings, yard waste, trash or anything else in a farmer’s field unless they tell you it is ok. Rocks and tree limbs could damage the farmer’s equipment.

There are a variety of crops that a farmer may grow, but the main crops you are likely to see are corn, soybeans, hay, small grains (wheat, barley, oats, rye), vegetables and fruits.

It is wrong to “just take some” of the crop growing. If you have an orchard next to you, do not feel you can just pick apples or peaches whenever you like. In the Fall when you would like to decorate your home with corn stalks, please don’t cut them without permission. Ask the farmer, most times they will tell you it is okay...but they will probably want the ears of corn off the stalks!

While you may own the land, refrain from using the fields to ride ATV’s, dirtbikes, etc. You may damage growing crops and rut up the field which could cause damage to the farmer’s equipment and make complying with conservation standards more difficult. Even if a field looks like nothing is planted, most farmers have a crop planted year-round.

If this is an activity you would like to pursue on your property, keep a portion out of what is leased to the farmer for that purpose.

SLOW MOVING VEHICLES:

Farm equipment is large and slow moving. Most farmers must use public roads to access all of their farmland. Be aware of this when traveling rural roadways. Farm equipment should be marked with the minimum of an orange SMV triangle to make other drivers aware of the fact they are moving slower than posted speeds.

Be patient—the farmer is trying to do their job. Often several pieces of equipment are attached or traveling together. Before passing, be sure you know if there are multiple pieces of machinery you will need to pass so that you may do so safely.

RIGHT TO FARM:

Pennsylvania has the Right to Farm Act which protects the farmer against nuisance lawsuits that may arise from conflicts with neighbors.

For more information visit: <https://pennstatelaw.psu.edu/academics/research-centers/agricultural-law/resource-areas/pennsylvania-right-farm-act>

THE FARMER:

The farmer is just like the rest of us who have “normal” jobs. He or she is trying to make a living, produce a quality product and raise their family.

Farming is a stressful job and a farmer never knows what they will face when they get out of bed in the morning. Will the weather cooperate so they can plant or harvest? Will the cattle be in the pasture where they belong? Will grain prices go up or down before harvest? There are so many variables in farming that the farmer has little to no control over. They are completely at the mercy of Mother Nature and the markets.

If you are leasing your land to a farmer, sit down and talk through what the farmer may have planned for your land and discuss what you may or may not want them to do with your property. Do some research so you know what to charge. Be sure to put everything in a written lease prepared by an attorney with agricultural experience that you both sign. PA Farm Link has a booklet that explains what all should be included in a lease. It may be the best \$11 investment you make.

One of the best tips for you as a landowner is to COMMUNICATE! If you are planning a picnic or outdoor party on your property, let the farmer know when that will be so they don't spread manure the day before or aren't trying to bale the hay while your daughter is saying her wedding vows!

Create a good working relationship with your farmer. If you need help with something on your land, for example if a tree falls and it needs to be cut up but you don't have the equipment-chances are the farmer has a chainsaw and would be happy to help you out. If your garden grows a bumper crop of zucchini and you know the farmer doesn't grow any themselves, offer them some.

Most farmers are friendly, sociable people who are happy to help a neighbor out. So, get to know your neighboring farmer(s). It is nice to have neighbors who generally help each other, especially in times of need. Be the neighbor you want to have.

ENJOY:

Most importantly, enjoy all that country living has to offer. The peaceful quiet, the beautiful sights and wonderful aromas drifting through the air.

PA Farm Link is a 501c3 non-profit organization with a mission of linking farmers to the future through:

ONLINE DATABASES:

- Entering farmers seeking a farming opportunity
- Landowners in search of someone to lease or purchase their farm

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMING:

- Beginning farmer workshops
- Succession/transition workshops

OTHER TOOLS:

- Next steps consultations
- Succession facilitators (IFTN Certified)
- “Planning the Future of Your Farm” workbook
- Resource Central located at www.pafarmlink.org



Contact PA Farm Link at:

2301 N. Cameron St.

Harrisburg, PA 17110

717-705-2121

farmland@pafarmlink.org

www.pafarmlink.org