



State of New Jersey
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State Agriculture Development Committee
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Farmer-to-Farmer Advice for Avoiding Conflicts ...



... With Neighbors and Towns

**New Jersey
State Agriculture Development
Committee**

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Introduction

As New Jersey's population grows, farmers and non-farmers increasingly are being brought closer together. Farmers nearest to New Jersey's metropolitan areas have long been familiar with this trend, while those in the state's more rural areas also are seeing pockets of new development emerge around them.

Some aspects of this growth have been positive. Farmers have been able to take advantage of the enhanced proximity to consumers and cultivate new markets. At the same time, residential growth has not come without challenges. New residents are often drawn to the country by a vision of a pastoral landscape, sense of peace and slower pace of life. Yet they may be unfamiliar with, and at times unsympathetic to, typical farming practices – practices essential to maintaining a viable farm business. New neighbors who have never been exposed to production agriculture might complain about a farm's noise, pesticide application, odors, dust or a newly constructed farm building. As rural areas become more developed, local governments' previous familiarity with the normal sights, sounds and smells of agriculture also may diminish.

New Jersey does have a Right to Farm Act; in fact, the Act is one of the strongest in the nation. The Right to Farm Act helps protect responsible farms from nuisance suits and overly restrictive local regulations. Yet as many farmers acknowledge, the best right-to-farm protection often amounts to just being a good neighbor. No one wants to get involved in a formal, drawn-out legal process and spend time and money away from the farm if it can be avoided. When possible, it is much easier and cheaper to prevent disputes before they occur and to handle them quickly and efficiently if they do arise. Good relationships make this possible.

More than 50 farmers from throughout New Jersey have offered their tips and strategies for minimizing right-to-farm conflicts for this publication. From Sussex County in the north to Salem County in the south, they shared a lot of the same risk-management advice and ideas: Get to know your neighbors. Listen and talk to people when they have concerns. Use common sense. Be involved in the community. Keep the farm looking nice. Make the farm an asset in the eyes of the community. Underpinning all of these suggestions was one piece of common advice: Good communication, appropriate consideration and active involvement are the keys to maintaining good relationships with neighbors and municipalities.

Of course, the work of building relationships and addressing rural issues falls to more than just farmers. Neighbors and municipalities also must do their part. Collected in this publication, however, are suggestions for what farmers can do—ideas and strategies that have worked for other farmers, and that may work for you, too.



"Get to know your neighbors."
(Grain farmer, Hunterdon County)

Good communication was cited by farmers as one of the best strategies for reducing conflicts. Introduce yourself and get to know your neighbors. Whether neighbors become good friends or remain "wave-and-say-hi" acquaintances, the important thing is an open line of communication has been established. People who know each other are more likely to approach each other when problems arise. Neighbors feel more comfortable bringing problems to you rather than going to the township or letting them fester unspoken. This keeps issues from escalating and getting out of hand. Common advice from farmers was to stay on good terms: "Get to know your neighbor, be friendly and communicate."

"Just be friendly with your neighbors and try to keep good relationships. It's easier to talk with someone about an issue if you're already talking with them."

(Equine farmer, Mercer County)

"We try to be friendly to all the neighbors and say hello whenever we see them."

(Fruit farmer, Gloucester County)

"It's important to have built a relationship before a controversial issue arises. Many farmers do this only when a specific problem arises."

(Fruit and vegetable farmer, Burlington County),

"Maintain open communication and good relationships. When you have an open line of communication, you've already eliminated a barrier to resolving conflicts. If neighbors are willing to bring issues directly to you and you're willing to work with them to always resolve them, then you avoid conflicts."

(Grain farmer, Central Jersey)

"I have a good rapport with my neighbors. If they have a problem, they'll come to me instead of going to the town and blowing it out of proportion."

(Greenhouse farmer, Passaic County)

"Try to be polite and neighborly; wave and say hello."

(Fruit and vegetable farmer, Monmouth County)

"Getting to know your immediate neighbors is close to the top of the list in terms of importance. It can make life pretty hard if they're upset with what you're doing."

(Fruit and vegetable farmer, Mercer County)

"Smile to kids when riding by on your tractor. It's like a parade for them. This generates a good feeling in the kids and their parents, and as the kids grow, they're familiar and friendly with you (and don't vandalize the property)."

(Diversified farmer, Mercer)

"We are a close community. We exchange phone numbers and can call each other if there are any issues."

(Equine farmer, Monmouth County)

"The most important thing is to be friendly and communicate."

(Equine farmer, Monmouth County)



"Treat your neighbors the way you would want to be treated."
(Livestock farmer, Monmouth County)

Being a good neighbor yourself and treating people right is critical for building good relationships. When you treat people with respect, lend a hand if they need help, listen when they have concerns and accommodate them where you can, you are being a good neighbor. Many disputes stem not from the farming practices officially cited, but from people not getting along and not talking. By being neighborly, making friendly gestures and helping out, you are laying the groundwork for the good relationships that help minimize conflicts.

"Just be a good neighbor. That's all. It's that simple. Respect your neighbors and they'll respect you."
(Fruit and vegetable farmer, North Jersey)

"Having good relationships with neighbors means being a good neighbor."
(Grain farmer, Central Jersey)

"Be proactive, talk with people. Give a little and take a little, and try to see others' points of view."
(Fruit and vegetable farmer, Middlesex County)

"Our experience tells us you should treat people like you would like to be treated."
(Field crops farmer, Monmouth County)

"We have to recognize that sometimes we bring on our own problems. You have to see it from their side. We're not always right. It goes both ways."
(Blueberry farmer, Atlantic County)

"Try to be understanding with them and work with any issues that come up."
(Equine farmer, Monmouth County)

"Keep your farm clean, respect your neighbors and participate in the community."
(Diversified farmer, Mercer County)

"The best right-to-farm protection is being a good neighbor."
(Fruit and vegetable farmer, North Jersey)

"The little things you do to help others are long remembered. People will remember what you give them long after what you charge them for something."
(Field crops farmer, Middlesex County)

"I give neighbors some product discounts throughout the season."
(Livestock farmer, Somerset County)

"Don't undermine the spirit of the Right to Farm law – farmers don't have carte blanche. The emphasis should be on balancing the needs of the farm with being a good neighbor in the community."
(Diversified farmer, Morris County)

"Look from the other side of the fence - consider their point of view."
(Grain farmer, Middlesex County)

"Respect goes both ways."
(Nursery farmer, Monmouth County)

"Use common sense to avoid problems."
(Diversified farmer, Morris County)

Using common sense and being considerate of neighbors was a common theme in farmers' advice. Farmers may have the right to farm, but many times there are easy ways to be flexible and to work with your neighbors. Being mindful of noise early in the morning, or scheduling work around a neighbor's weekend party, are just two examples. Neighbors are appreciative of the consideration you give, which leads to better relationships and fewer disputes.

"Use common sense in your management to avoid potential issues. If you wouldn't like it, then why subject your neighbors to it?"
(Dairy farmer, Hunterdon County)

"We try to be respectful and not wake the neighbors by spraying too early. Our festivals are all contained during the day during reasonable hours – no loud music at night."
(Fruit and vegetable farmer, Hunterdon County)

"When I need to work late, I work late, but when I know I can end early or I know someone's having a picnic or it's a holiday, I'll try to end early."
(Grain farmer, Central Jersey)

"If you use noise devices for wildlife control, only use them when necessary, and incorporate as many other methods of control as you can."
(Grain farmer, Monmouth County)

"We always check the wind conditions before spraying or plowing. We don't want to kick up a lot of dust or overspray our neighbors' properties."
(Fruit and vegetable farmer, Gloucester County)

"Use common sense to prevent obvious problems. Know what's going on at your neighbors' houses (for example, weddings or parties) and be a good neighbor."

(Diversified farmer, Somerset County)

"There are little things you can do. Be as considerate as you can. Don't disk your field if it's windy, and don't disk at night."
(Fruit and vegetable farmer, Monmouth County)

"I don't run machines too late. I'll turn off the grain dryer by 5 or 6 p.m. to keep from disturbing neighbors."
(Grain farmer, Middlesex County)

"We've changed some of our practices to keep good relations, for instance when and how often we burn. We keep burn piles around longer and only burn during the day when it is not windy."
(Wine grower, South Jersey)

"Keep the noise down early in the mornings and later in the day. Don't try to create any problems."
(Fruit and vegetable farmer, Middlesex County)

"We try never to do tractor work on the weekends because we're surrounded by houses – we don't want to kick dust up into our neighbors' yards. You wouldn't want that if you were having a barbecue on the weekend."
(Fruit and vegetable farmer, North Jersey)



"Have an educational process for your neighbors."
(Equine farmer, Monmouth County)

Most people today did not grow up near a farm and may be unfamiliar with typical farming practices. This lack of information often is what leads to complaints. To address this issue, many farmers reach out to their neighbors to help educate them about their farm and agriculture in general. This helps address issues before they arise, since people are less likely to complain if they understand what you are doing and why you are doing it. Familiarizing neighbors with the farm lets them know what to expect and that you are not doing something just to annoy them.

"We visit neighbors individually each spring and let them know what to expect each growing season – soil prep, harvesting, cultivating, etc. We communicate with them and they communicate with us."
(Diversified farmer, Monmouth County)

"Introduce yourself and make them aware of what you're doing. We absolutely want them to know it's a working farm. Let them know there's going to be spraying, equipment, and that they'll see people harvesting."
(Fruit and vegetable farmer, Hunterdon County)

"We're open to the public for tours. They can come and see what we are doing."
(Equine farmer, Monmouth County)

"We invite schools, neighbors, etc., to the farm for educational tours. People are amazed at the cost of pesticides and that we don't enjoy spraying – that we only spray when we have to."
(Grain farmer, Middlesex County)

"We have two neighbors, the old and the new. The new ones need lots of education."
(Fruit farmer, Gloucester County)

"After a new development went in, we had a hayride and bonfire to educate our neighbors on what we do and where things are located, like our irrigation pond. It was a chance to get to know our neighbors on an informal basis."
(Wine grower, South Jersey)

"We've been involved in the county's 'Agriculture in Action' open house, which brings the public onto a working farm to get a first-hand look at agriculture. They enjoy wagon tours while getting an appreciation of what it takes to be a farmer in New Jersey."
(Diversified farmer, Somerset County)

"Get to know your neighbors and make sure they know what you're doing. They won't all necessarily be happy about it, but at least they know your story."
(Fruit and vegetable farmer, Mercer County)

"Our family hosts an annual 'harvest open house' for the public every fall. Three to four hundred people attend, and it helps us build good relations."
(Grain farmer, Hunterdon County)

"We get involved with education, like going to the schools and bringing kids onto the farm to teach about agriculture."
(Diversified farmer, Monmouth County)

"Make sure your neighbors know you and your operation."
(Diversified farmer, Mercer County)



"Keep the farm neat and attractive."
(Equine farmer, Mercer County)

Maintaining a good-looking farm goes a long way toward building a positive impression of you and your operation. As one farmer put it, "Appearances matter." If the farm is not well-kept, it reflects poorly on you and your consideration of neighbors' concerns, whether such a view of you is warranted or not. Too often people judge a book by its cover, and a farm with broken machinery lying around or one that is otherwise seen as an eyesore will get less public support. Taking small steps to make the farm attractive can help give your farm a good public face.

"We try to keep our farm clean and presentable on all borders."
(Fruit farmer, Gloucester County)

"You can't keep a sloppy place. They don't want to look at your junk. You can always find a place to hide it."
(Livestock farmer, Monmouth County)

"Keeping a good appearance of your farm will result in respect for your operation. I see some farms with broken, rusty machinery left in the yard with weeds growing through it. Get rid of it. A messy farm gets no respect."
(Grain farmer, Monmouth County)

"Keep everything kind of neat, especially the areas where the neighbors are so you can avoid problems."
(Fruit and vegetable farmer, Hunterdon County)

"Our farm is well maintained. The neighbors prefer a neat neighborhood. Just because it's a farm, it doesn't need to be shabby, with weeds growing through unattended field machinery."
(Diversified farmer, Mercer County)

"We keep our farm neat and clean so it looks good. No one likes to live near a sloppy, uncared for farm."
(Grain farmer, Monmouth County)

"I try to maintain my property so it looks like the others around me. I keep it well-landscaped and well-groomed so it's not an eyesore. Maintain a property the rest of the neighborhood can be proud of."
(Grain farmer, Central Jersey)

"We try to keep our farms neat and our buildings painted in view of the neighbors."
(Fruit farmer, Gloucester County)

"Keep that line of sight as nice looking as possible. It doesn't have to be fancy – just attend to weed-whacking the fences, mowing. Remember that there are people concerned about neighborhood and property values. They are land proud. Yes, it's superficial, but people read a lot into it."
(Equine farmer, Gloucester County)



"People remember the little things
you do to help them."
(Field crops farmer, Middlesex
County)

Helping neighbors out in small ways creates good will and fosters positive relationships. Everyone appreciates a friendly gesture, and doing something as simple as sharing some of the farm's products or plowing a neighbor's driveway goes a long way. The little things you do to help mean a lot to people.

"If they need a helping hand once in a while, help them out."
(Greenhouse farmer, Passaic County)

"We give extra watermelon and sweet corn to our neighbors and shovel snow for our more elderly neighbors."
(Fruit and vegetable farmer, Monmouth County)

"My neighbor's son worked on another farm nearby and I let him cut through on his motorcycle (with restrictions to protect my fields). They were grateful I gave the permission and it created a good working relationship."
(Grain farmer, Central Jersey)

"Once we get to know neighbors we'll let them pick produce on our property. I will often give them some of what we grow as a friendly gesture."
(Fruit farmer, Gloucester County)

"We like to be good neighbors to everyone around. We find that we help them and they help us."
(Equine farmer, Monmouth County)

"If neighbors need plants for around the house in the spring, we give them the wholesale price, and sometimes we give the plants away for free. It goes a long way toward generating good will."
(Greenhouse farmer, Passaic County)

"Always have open arms when someone needs help or assistance - it's the Golden Rule."
(Nursery farmer, Hunterdon County)

"Treat neighbors the way you'd like to be treated -- dropping off seeds and in-season farm products on their doorsteps, plowing their driveways during bad snowstorms, letting them use the pond for fishing with family and friends if they ask. That's a big deal to them. Do the little things that people will really appreciate. Make the benefits of living near your farm outweigh the drawbacks."
(Vegetable farmer, Gloucester County)

"Assist your neighbor with whatever they may need, especially if it involves the use of heavy equipment you may have. I helped my neighbor dig up his lawn with my tractor so he could re-seed."
(Equine farmer, Monmouth County)

"To help non-farmer neighbors, we maintain the ditches and grass on the property lines."
(Wine grower, South Jersey)

"We plow the neighbors' driveways when it snows and allow them to dump grass clippings and other yard waste on a specific area of our property for compost. We try to always be friendly."
(Vegetable farm, Monmouth County)

"If someone in the community needs a hand, give it."
(Equine farm, Gloucester County)

"Saying 'I have the right to farm' and dismissing a person isn't productive –it just makes life tougher for you."

(Fruit and vegetable farmer,
Mercer County)

When neighbors have concerns, how you respond can play a large role in how the situation turns out. The Right to Farm Act is a valid defense, but when cited abruptly or used as a sword, it can inflame a situation and make matters worse. Many farmers felt a better approach is to be a good neighbor and see if something can be done to easily resolve the matter. Essential to this process is making yourself accessible when someone has a concern and being mindful of neighbors' points of view.

"When you talk things through, usually things work out –keep the lines of communication open."

(Equine farmer, Mercer County)

"Just be approachable, don't block yourself in. If someone comes to talk to you, talk to them."

(Fruit and vegetable farmer, North Jersey)

"Do the forensics on the complaint. What is it they really want? Where are they coming from? You must get to the root of it."

(Blueberry farmer, Atlantic County)

"Know your rights but be reasonable and keep an open mind to all sides of an issue. Don't waste your time over trivial matters that are easily handled. A stubborn farmer is looked at negatively."

(Livestock farmer, Monmouth County)

"Tell them to come to you if they have a problem. Say, 'If you have a problem, let me know and we'll do the best we can to address it.'"

(Greenhouse farmer, Passaic County)

"Be considerate and consider their point of view. Put yourself in your neighbor's shoes."

(Grain farmer, Middlesex County)

"When we had a complaint about noise, we addressed it right away in a way that was practical for the farm and satisfactory for them. We could have waved the Right to Farm flag but we didn't."

(Nursery farmer, Cumberland County)

"The best way is to go over and talk face to face. We'll work directly with the person. If it's minor and can be addressed, that's the best way."

(Fruit and vegetable farmer, North Jersey)

"I've seen a lot of issues come through the County Ag Development Board. Sometimes it's the neighbors' fault and sometimes it's just that farmers aren't trying too hard either. Both sides can be guilty."

(Field crops farmer, Monmouth County)

"We've been here for 20 years and neighbors know they can call anytime. I answer all questions and there has never been an issue with neighbors not having answers."

(Equine farm, Monmouth County)

"Remain accessible and answer any questions neighbors may have in a non-confrontational manner. Be friendly, be nice. You don't want to come across as defensive."

(Fruit and vegetable farmer, Hunterdon County)

"Get involved in the community"
(Livestock farmer, Monmouth
County)

People remember not only the little things you do for them, but what you also do for the community. By participating in and giving back to the community, you become a part of the community. People see and appreciate what you do, such as when you donate products and support local organizations. They also appreciate the simple fact that you and the farm are there. In offering tours, selling locally grown products or hosting family-oriented festivals, you are providing a service to the community. The overall effect of being involved is the community supports you when problems arise. In right-to-farm issues, they will more likely view the farm as an asset as opposed to a nuisance. They also may go to bat for you to oppose negative township actions (e.g., condemnation).

"Be proactive and participate in the community."
(Fruit and vegetable farmer, Monmouth County)

"If you can involve community organizations in your events, it goes a long way. People look at you more sympathetically when you give back to the community."

(Fruit and vegetable farmer, Mercer County)

"Become an integral part of the community. Plow snow for neighbors, sponsor sports teams and town events, etc. It's not just money but in-kind services. When right-to-farm issues come up such as dust, trespass, odors, loose animals, we're viewed as part of the community and not a problem or nuisance."

(Diversified farmer, Monmouth County)

"Our family is very visible in the community and we take active roles in community events whenever possible."

(Grain farmer, Hunterdon County)

"We donate Christmas trees, pumpkins, corn stalks, etc., to various local organizations and neighbors."

(Grain farmer, Middlesex County)

"We allow the local Lions Club to use the farm for their annual pig fest right after our fall festival – the area's already set up for a community picnic."

(Fruit and vegetable farmer, Middlesex County)

"When our kids were in school, we would invite the grammar school classes over to see the mares and horses."

(Equine farmer, Mercer County)

"Because so many of the neighbors wanted to buy fruit, we started a retail self-serve stand in front of the packing house. This has done very well."

(Fruit farmer, Gloucester County)

"We always try to help the schools out. We do school tours and let the kids pot up a little plant and take it home with them. The kids love it, and it creates good will."

(Greenhouse farmer, Passaic County)

We host the largest family-friendly event in the town, an annual festival with activities for everyone. It's become a tradition and has brought us closer with our local community.

(Wine grower, South Jersey)

"If the neighbor's kids ever come looking for a job, say yes. Make that a meaningful experience – it's a way to involve them and their whole family in the farm."

(Fruit and vegetable farmer, Mercer County)

"Get your neighbors and your town to consider your farm an asset to the community and they'll better accept the minor inconveniences of your farming practices."

(Diversified farmer, Monmouth County)

"Get involved and stay involved in the community."

(Diversified farmer, Morris County)

"Stay active in the township and interface with local officials."
(Fruit and vegetable farmer,
Hunterdon County)

Developing good municipal relations is a lot like developing good neighbor relations. It all stems from getting to know your municipal officials and familiarizing them with your farm. Farmers advise participating in and being active with local government in some way. This might involve serving on a local committee or simply attending meetings to share your thoughts. It also could involve holding farm tours or inviting groups to the farm. What is important is that working relationships are developed and you help local officials understand the farm. What makes this possible is participating and being involved.

"Don't isolate yourself and your farm from the community or local decision-makers."
(Diversified farmer, Morris County)

"Get involved in the community and township. It's not easy, working 12 hours a day and then getting dressed to go to a meeting, but you have got to make the effort."
(Fruit and vegetable farmer, North Jersey)

"We participate. My husband was on the Open Space Committee and I ran for Township Committee. We try to know our municipal officials."
(Wine grower, South Jersey)

"We host an annual picnic for the Chamber of Commerce and attend local meetings."
(Fruit and vegetable farmer, Middlesex County)

"I used to serve on the Open Space Committee and took the mayor on a personal hayride."
(Fruit and vegetable farmer, Middlesex County)

"Become civically involved in your community – volunteer for committees like the Environmental Commission or Planning Board."
(Diversified farmer, Monmouth County)

"Seek out officials who are farm-friendly and build relationships with them before problems arise. Be friendly, say hello and make officials at all levels welcome at your farm."
(Fruit and vegetable farmer, Burlington County)

"You could classify our township as very supportive of agriculture, but that didn't come about by accident. We formed a township farmers' committee and talked about things that were important to us and got a real dialogue going."
(Fruit and vegetable farmer, Mercer County)

"I attended a local businessman's breakfast also attended by the local elected officials. Introducing myself and explaining my operation was the best thing I could have done. I was out promoting myself and my business as an asset and friend to the community, and the local and county officials knew me and my operation before I came before any zoning or planning board with land use applications. It made a world of difference."
(Nursery farmer, North Jersey)

"Most municipal officials need to be educated about agriculture."
(Fruit farmer, Gloucester County)

"Partner with officials to educate them on local agriculture, to explain what farms mean to the local economy and quality of life."
(Diversified farmer, Somerset County)

"Always act to build good will between you and the township."
(Diversified farmer, Somerset County)

Treating local officials with respect and assisting the township in small ways helps build good relationships. Animosity and conflict can be avoided by being professional and fostering good communication. Good will can be created through friendly gestures such as donating products or providing use of the farm for a town event. All of this helps the township appreciate the farm and see it as an asset to the community. The result is the farm gets more support and respect.

"Always have open lines of communication with the 'powers that be' in your area. Township officials need to be included and respected."
(Nursery farmer, North Jersey)

"Don't embarrass anyone during meetings. Meet with them privately."
(Grain farmer, Middlesex County)

"Be extremely professional and point out any errors they have politely."
(Fruit and vegetable farmer, Monmouth County)

"We donate many things, like decorations for community day, and have loaned our hay wagons for the local parade."
(Wine grower, Gloucester County)

"We'll donate plugs to the town so they don't have to start their greenhouse as early. It goes a long way toward generating good will."
(Greenhouse farmer, Passaic County)

"Offer your farm as a site for municipal worker or volunteer training – fire department, heavy equipment operators, building inspectors, etc."
(Diversified farmer, Somerset County)

"We always assist freeholders and local officials with photo opportunities. It's 'good press' to be seen shaking the hand of a farmer."
(Fruit and vegetable farmer, Burlington County)

"We accept the town's leaves and make compost for the farm. This saves the township significant costs in disposal fees."
(Fruit and vegetable farmer, South Jersey)

"I'll speak to various school groups at the request of the township."
(Fruit and vegetable farmer, South Jersey)

"I worked with and helped our town's lawyers on our original farmland preservation initiative."
(Fruit and vegetable farmer, Middlesex County)

"We donate to a lot of community groups, from school groups and garden clubs to the fire company and police. We donate trees to the township. It's only right – help out."
(Nursery farmer, Mercer County)

"You're more than just a farm. You have to act and believe in a way that makes others believe you're an asset to the community and belong in the community."
(Nursery farmer, North Jersey)



"Work with local officials."
(Fruit and vegetable farmer,
Middlesex County)

Making an effort to work with, rather than against, your township goes a long way toward building positive working relationships. Following local rules, getting necessary permits and working with officials directly whenever you can is an important sign of respect. If there is an ordinance so restrictive that Right to Farm assistance is necessary, strive to keep the process from becoming antagonistic. Local officials also appreciate when you work with them on certain farm activities, such as those that may upset neighbors. This way they can be ready to respond should any questions arise.

"Make sure you get the right permits to put up buildings."
(Equine farmer, Mercer County)

"We constantly ask the municipality to point us in the direction of compliancy. Rather than do something that may or may not need municipal approval, we first go to the township to get their interpretation."
(Wine grower, South Jersey)

"If an activity involves a gray area, we'll call the official, explain what we're doing and see if there's anything we need to do to comply with certain regulations. We found that by calling, there's less that's required."
(Nursery farmer, Cumberland County)

"We were here first, but you have to be flexible. If a neighbor complains and the zoning official comes, state your case and say, 'I have a right to do it, but I'll be flexible where I can.' You will win a lot of points with local officials if you're not hard-nosed about the issues."
(Livestock farmer, Monmouth County)

"Try to do what they ask, and make a good-faith effort in meeting local ordinances and policies."
(Diversified farmer, Morris County)

"Be less combative and more cooperative."
(Diversified farmer, Morris County)

"Know and follow ordinances, and get relief when needed for oppressive issues."
(Dairy farmer, Hunterdon County)

"I make a point of notifying the police when I burn and advising them of the expected smoke-drift patterns that might alarm nearby residents. This helps police in answering complaints."
(Cranberry farmer, Burlington County)

"Our irrigation guns sometimes blow across the road when sudden winds arise. Since the police know what the farm needs to do to operate, they're able to tell the people who complain to just travel another route so we can do our jobs."
(Fruit and vegetable farmer, Burlington County)

"Creating a partnership with the town helps when it comes to complaints. The town may actually get the call first and be able to defuse a potential situation (by explaining the issues to the caller) before it ever reaches the farmer himself."
(Diversified farmer, Somerset County)

"I don't particularly like getting an event permit for my festival, but it's no charge and you have all these things covered (health department, parking, tent inspection, etc.). The police sign off so they know what's going on."
(Fruit and vegetable farmer, Mercer County)

"If moving in, you need to learn the neighbors and neighborhood before you proceed."
(Grain farmer, South Jersey)

According to farmers, the best way to minimize disputes when starting a new farm business or changing to a new operation is to be proactive. This involves doing the same types of things farmers advised for already-established farms, such as getting to know your neighbors and local officials, and familiarizing them with the farm. It also involves researching the area and gauging how receptive the community is. Farmers said it is important to be open with everybody and to make an effort to start off well.

"Check the neighborhood's history and how friendly the township is with agriculture."
(Diversified farmer, Mercer County)

"Introduce yourself and let them know what you have planned."
(Livestock farmer, Monmouth County)

"Get to know people; don't be isolated."
(Fruit and vegetable farmer, Middlesex County)

"Be proactive and up-front with everyone, especially your municipality. Talk to your municipal officials and neighbors about what you're thinking of doing on your farm."
(Fruit and vegetable farmer, Gloucester County)

"Have an open house or a picnic or a hayride so you can explain what you do."
(Nursery farmer, Mercer County)

"Before you start, talk to your neighbors. Ask if they have any concerns, like a new baby who may be disturbed if loud machinery is used early in the morning or late at night. Let them know when you plan on using irrigation pumps, repellent guns, etc."
(Equine farmer, Monmouth County)

"Do anything you can do to prevent imposing on other people. If you have a corn dryer, don't point it toward neighbors, and don't run late at night."
(Field crops farmer, Monmouth County)

"Communication is the key."
(Grain farmer, Middlesex County)

"Go to the township and find out what is required and what is allowed. Explain what you have in mind. Know which ordinances affect your farm."
(Nursery farmer, Mercer County)

"Be open with the public. Let people see what is going on."
(Fruit and vegetable farmer, Middlesex County)

"If you have livestock, do it right, don't cut corners. In this business, manure management is key."
(Livestock farmer, Monmouth County)

"I'd definitely meet with the town manager if it's the type of farm that's going to attract a lot of people."
(Fruit and vegetable farmer, Mercer County)

"It's important to start on the right foot with people and give neighbors an idea of what they can expect from the operation –and to let them know how they can benefit from having a farm neighbor."
(Vegetable farmer, Monmouth County)

Last words

Farmers have long known the benefits of maintaining good relationships with their neighbors and municipalities. As New Jersey's population grows and expands, enjoying good relationships only becomes more important. Getting to know your neighbors and local officials, helping them understand the needs of your farm, staying involved in the community, being accessible and talking to people when they have concerns—all of this takes time. The effort is rewarded, however, in the form of fewer disputes and greater community support. By working with others and being flexible when you can, you build a positive image for yourself and the farm. People appreciate the farm more, and they see it as an asset in the community rather than a nuisance. As farmers put it, the best way to resolve a conflict is by managing risks and not having a conflict in the first place. Good relationships help make this possible.

