

Resolving Common Farm Management Practices¹

By
Jerome L. Frecon²

Agricultural Agents have been helping the public and farmers for almost 90 years in Gloucester County as well as many other counties in New Jersey. This agent has served GC farmers for 25 of those years. While our primary mission has been the development and delivery of agricultural information to farmers, we have provided many other agricultural services to our constituents. Our offices are often conduits for any the dissemination of information on agriculture to the public.



Long before and after the passage of the Right to Farm Act, Agricultural Agents have been educating nonfarm residents about the management practices of farmers. In Gloucester County, the demand for this information has increased as the county has been transformed from a rural county to one dotted with more and more homes on the best farmland. Many of these homeowners have no agrarian roots, or know little about modern agricultural management practices.

Many of these people call our offices to ask and understand why their farmer neighbors implement certain agricultural practices that they find annoying, or that they feel may be unsafe or negatively influence their lifestyles.

Over the years, some of the most common questions posed to us have revolved around the following management practices:

- a) Spraying or pesticide application;
- b) Irrigation – water issues and noise from pumps;
- c) Direct marketing – signs, hours of operation, products sold;
- d) Slow moving and dust making vehicles like tractors;
- e) Burning hedgerows and pruning;
- f) Wildlife depredation trapping and hunting;
- g) Animal odors and other animal practices;
- h) Trucks and other large equipment;
- i) Noisemaking cannons and other devices to repel birds;
- j) Farm labor and labor housing;
- k) Dumping and spreading deteriorating fruits and vegetables;
- l) Noise, dust and odors from specialized equipment.

Other agricultural agents may have received additional questions on farm management practices, but these are groupings of some of the most important I have encountered.

¹ This article was originally published in The New Jersey Farmer on February 15, 2008.

² Agricultural Agent, Rutgers NJAES, Cooperative Extension

My first question posed to any resident asking why a farmer is using a particular practice is to ask that person if they have addressed the question to the farmer. I usually tell the person that most farmers are friendly and it would behoove them to know and visit with them if they are a neighbor. If they refuse to do that, can't locate the farmers, or tell me they have tried to talk to the farmer, then I tell them I am not sure why the farmer is using a particular practice. However, I do try to give them general information why most farmers might be using the management practice they are questioning.

For example, one of the major concerns is pesticide-spraying. Concerns over pesticide-spraying focus on why the farmer is spraying and whether it might be harmful to their family.

Some answers might be: a) I really don't know what the farmer is spraying but that I am sure it is labeled and is probably recommended in our production recommendations; b) the farmer is not going spray any more than he has to because pesticides are costly; c) farmers are all environmentalists and are concerned about their possible impact on the soil and water and few farmers find spraying enjoyable; d) all farmers are required to go through extensive training to obtain and keep the pesticide applicators license; e) if they are concerned about the safety of the pesticide I might explain to them that all pesticides are labeled and farmers would not want to risk their health and the health of their children by spraying pesticides they thought were unsafe.

I have observed over my 25 years that frequently I can deflect further problems for farmers by being honest and giving the questioner accurate and science-based information. If I can't, I direct them to someone who might be able to help them in another department or at the state level... If they do not accept what I tell them then I explain the Right to Farm Law that may exist in their municipality and the state law. This avenue is available to them to vent and resolve their frustration and dissatisfaction with agricultural management practices.

This educational information given to questioning neighbors has saved many disputes between the general citizenry and farmers.

To find the Agricultural Agent in your county, visit <http://njaes.rutgers.edu/county/>.