



Fresh Country Air with a Hint of Derriere: *The Realities of Rural Living*

Ahhhh... the country life. In a crowded, complicated, and now COVID-filled world, the rural charm of Geauga County continues to allure folks from cities and urban surroundings. Its rolling hills have long been a tapestry of farms, forests, and buggy-shared roads, but now more homes and housing developments are being stitched throughout the landscapes as Geauga has become one of the fastest growing counties in Northeast Ohio. Although the average size of Geauga's farms has declined over the years, the number of farms has not. In fact, there are more farms in production in the county today than there were 30 years ago. So while it's easy to be carried away by the dreams of fresh air, open space, and country living, the not-always-pleasant realities of rural life should also be recognized and well considered. Knowing what to expect from your new neighboring farmland can prevent unnecessary heartbreaks and headaches. It's best to embrace early on what every farmer already knows... manure happens!

The Scoop on Poop

We all poop. But if you're a lactating cow, you can really poop! An average dairy cow can poop up to 15 times and produce approximately 120 pounds of manure every day. Whether beef cows or boiler chickens, lambs or llamas, horses or hogs, the challenges of managing manure can quickly become apparent and stir up concern. Yes, we're stating the obvious, but poop stinks! It accumulates quickly and needs to be managed relentlessly. Often the sights (and smells!) of the process of spreading manure takes new rural residents by surprise and conjures their complaints.

Spreading Manure Improves Soil Health

It is critical for newcomer neighbors to know that when done correctly, the application of animal manure significantly contributes to soil health. Manure has long been recognized as a soil "builder" and the benefits include an increase of soil carbon, organic matter, and soil fertility, along with reduced erosion. Furthermore, applying manure to crop fields creates an invaluable opportunity for farmers to recycle the nutrient waste into natural plant fertilizer. Though proper manure application can create odor, dust, and appear unsightly, the act itself is a useful and recommended management practice, and not necessarily a pollution concern. Only when manure pollutes waters of the state does it become a problem.



Both Sides of the Fence

There's no doubt it may be equally frustrating for longtime local residents to watch their once neighboring family farmland now growing acres and acres of houses and turf grass. Or, to learn indirectly of a complaint filed against your farm without any attempted neighborly dialogue. Or, to see your neighbor spreading manure when there's a giant storm on the way. Or, to watch your newly installed pond fill up with rainwater... and the neighbor's manure.

Indeed, the times they are a 'changing and as our community populations increase so does the need for education, conversation, and commitment to responsible resource management. Residents need to understand why manure spreading occurs and farmers need to do what they can to prevent their manure from becoming a nutrient pollutant.

Too Much of a Good Thing

Ohio's Soil and Water Conservation Districts wholeheartedly believe "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure" and will work to provide information and resources to increase dialogue and education, thus minimizing nutrient pollution and complaints. Your local District is available to help farmers implement best management practices to manage manure. They can also help distinguish when an actual pollution violation has occurred and, if so, will work with the landowner to help remedy the situation.

Manage Manure and Reduce the Risk

The Ohio Department of Agriculture ultimately governs farming operations and the Ohio Agriculture Pollution Abatement Law. Pollution is defined as "the failure to use conservation practices in farming or silviculture operations to abate wind or water erosion of the soil, or to abate the degradation of the waters of the state by animal waste or soil sediment including substances attached hereto." Listed below are some best management practices and recommendations that will help "protect waters of the state" and by doing so, will also provide an affirmative offense.

Consider WHEN you plan to apply manure. Is it a hot, humid afternoon when the odor will linger longer? Is there a chance of rain? Plan around weather conditions. Do not apply during or before a rain event and lower your chances of nutrient runoff by first checking the ***Ohio Applicator Forecast***. This interactive map is designed to help farmers identify times when the weather-risk for nutrient application is low based on precipitation, temperature, and soil data. Visit the Ohio Department of Agriculture's website for more information.

Consider WHERE. Are you applying near a stream, watercourse, drainage ditch or drainage swale? And how close are you to your neighbor's property? Do you have a windbreak or visual screen of trees planted? Be sure to review your state's Natural Resources Conservation Service's Nutrient Management Code 590 for guidance.

Consider HOW and HOW MUCH. Soil testing your fields is critical for planning your applications. Consider all of your options for how to apply manure. What's the amount of manure you are going to apply per acre? Again, the NMC 590 provides information on soils and the amount of manure that can be applied per acre based on available water capacity and soil composition.

As always, your local SWCD is here to help! As farmers, we have to show the neighborhood we're trying. As neighbors, we have to show an effort to understand. By doing our best from any side of the fence, we can help promote mutual respect and prevent the proverbial poop from hitting the fan.