



FARMERS LEASING FARMLAND **IN PENNSYLVANIA**

A resource for FARMERS currently OR considering leasing farmland.

Farming is one of the hardest professions in the world, but also one of the most satisfying. There are more and more non-farming landowners in rural America since so many people dream of living in the country on a big piece of land.

If you are a beginning farmer, chances are you will have to lease farmland until you can afford to purchase your own farm. You may already be farming and leasing land or considering expanding your operation by leasing more farmland.

This document will give you some information to consider when leasing farmland and working with landowners.

ODORS:

Landowners may be picky about odors, whether it be from manure you are spreading or animals you are raising. When you are leasing land, please be conscious of the fact that many landowners don't understand why you are spreading that stinky stuff.

Educate the landowner on the need to feed the soil with manure to grow the best crops you can. Also, explain the type of farming you are doing, which may affect the type of fertilizer you can use or choose to use and how it improves soil health. Commercial fertilizer is very costly so if even if your farming method allows you to use it; it is beneficial to use manure which is cheaper. Let them know that the odor is not permanent and will only last a few hours to a day or two maximum.

Most importantly, abide by Nutrient Management Rules and Regulations, and be sure you have the proper documents developed. Be sure you know where the landowner's well is and where any streams may be located on the property so that you adhere to proper set-backs. If you do not know what these regulations are, contact your local conservation district for guidance.

If you see the landowner outside having a picnic or event, choose to spread manure on a different field that day, or stay as far away from that area as possible if you have no other choice.

NOISE:

We all know tractors and equipment are noisy. That can't be helped, it is beyond your control. However, if you are planting or harvesting late into the night, try to stay away from the landowner's home.

Animals can be boisterous at times, again, something that is out of your control. Educate the landowner on the fact that cattle and other livestock will often bellow when they hear the "feed tractor" no matter if it's feeding time or not.

Weaning time is always noisy. Explain to the landowner that weaning young livestock from their mothers is a part of the natural cycle of life. Let them know that both mama and baby are fine but will bawl for each other during that adjustment period. Try to do as much as possible to keep this time as stress-free for your livestock as possible.

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 landowner/neighbor but to the animals as well. Use methods such as fly tags or fly predators to help control the population.

DUST/MUD:

Farming requires working with the soil, obviously. This will result in some sort of dust being created. If you haven't already, try to implement farming practices such as no-till and cover cropping that will help reduce the amount of dust created while you work.

There will also be times when it is impossible to avoid moisture laden soils, especially during harvest season. Be cautious not to drop an excess of mud on the landowner's driveway. If this happens, do your best to remove it.

If able, enter fields from a different location, talk to the landowner about crossing their lawn if you can do so without causing too much damage, thus eliminating too much mud on their driveway.

ANIMALS:

If you have livestock as part of your operation, you already know they can be unpredictable & challenging at times.

You know that not all animals are tame but landowners and non-farming neighbors may not understand that. Talk to them and tell them that while you understand they may want to pet the animals, they are not tame enough to approach and for their safety as well as the animal's you ask that they not do so. You may want to post a sign if it becomes a problem or you are uncomfortable telling the neighbor this. Possibly include this in the written lease if you feel it will be a challenge.

If you have a biosecurity area, be sure to have it clearly marked with signage. If you have animals that are approachable, ask those who may touch the animals to be sure to thoroughly wash their hands afterwards.

You most likely will have barn cats that roam. Let the neighbors know that barn cats are great mousers so it's best if they don't feed them too much. They will keep the rodent population in check! If your farm dog is not friendly, be sure to keep him in an enclosure with signs posted.

You may have a neighbor or landowner who wants to feed grass clippings, yard waste or table scraps to your livestock. If you are not ok with this, tell them so. Explain that you have created a balanced diet for your animals and would rather they not add anything to it. If swine, you may want to explain that it is not legal to feed pigs garbage. Also, explain to them that some plants and weeds can be toxic to farm animals.

Escapees—animals get out occasionally, it happens. Try to be conscientious of your fencing and be sure it is in good repair so this happens as little as possible. Electric fence should be checked regularly to ensure the current is at an appropriate level and not impeded by weeds or anything else on the fence. If your goats get out and eat the neighbors prized roses, you may want to do something to make amends with her, buy some new plants and offer to plant them.

If you find a sick or injured animal that is out in the middle of the pasture in plain view of the neighbors, try to get it to a barn or out of the sun and where it can be more easily treated. If you can't move the animal, while you are working with it, park a tractor or something to keep you out of view of uneducated eyes. We all know that when working with a sick animal, it is not always a positive experience for those unfamiliar with normal veterinary practices. You can also put round bales or large square bales around the animal as a screen if necessary.

Depending on the type and number of livestock you own, it may be impossible to have enough barn space for them all. Be sure during inclement weather they have enough access to windbreaks and appropriate protection by using

the terrain of the land. Provide ample feed and water while they are outside. Educate the neighbors as well that this is ok and animals are healthiest when exposed to a wide range of temperatures, even newborns of most larger species.

BIRTHING SEASON:

This is one of the most stressful times on a farmer. Things go wrong. Again, if the animal is outside, follow the steps above to try to screen it from others.

If a neighbor asks to come watch a birth and you are not comfortable with that, just explain to them that animals are sensitive to every sight and sound when they are in labor and having a stranger there may complicate things. If you do allow them to watch, just give them guidelines to be as still and quiet as possible. Let them know that if you require assistance you will ask them for it.

Be sure neighbors know 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.

CROPS:

When negotiating a lease with a landowner, particularly a non-farming one, explain what plans you have for their land. What crops you may grow, amendments you will add to the soil, how you will prepare the soil, and the crops are planted and harvested.

Do not be afraid to ask them not to dispose of yard waste or anything else in your fields. Explain that it could damage your equipment or get in the hay that is fed to your animals making them sick. It may also contain harmful chemicals.

Also, be sure they know your crops are your paycheck. It is not okay for them to help themselves to your apples or peaches. Let them know if they wish to decorate their homes with cornstalks for fall, you would be more than glad to cut some for them or if you allow them to cut stalks, don't be afraid to ask them to bring you the ears of corn.

Talk to landowners about the importance of not using the land you are leasing for recreational purposes such as riding ATV's. Inform them that while there are times the fields may look like nothing is growing, the crop may just not be out of the ground yet. Also, let them know that if they rut up the fields, it can damage your equipment and make complying with conservation standards more difficult.

If you feel the landowner would like to partake in this kind of activity, suggest that they keep a portion of their land out of what is leased to you for that purpose.

SLOW MOVING VEHICLES:

Most farmers must travel on public roads in order to access all of their farmland. Be sure your equipment is properly marked with SMV triangles and/or flashing lights to signify you are moving slower than normal traffic. Regularly check your tractor lights to be sure they are properly working.

RIGHT TO FARM:

Pennsylvania has the Right to Farm Act which protects you, 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 LANDOWNER:

Most landowners you will lease from will be non-farming landowners. They may have a relative in their family who farmed at one point or is farming so they may have a little insight into the world of agriculture. More than likely the landowner will have no farm background at all. You must have patience and realize that these landowners have a love of the land, just as you do, which is why they purchased their property.

When negotiating your lease, be sure to discuss everything. If there are crops they do not want grown, if animals are allowed on the land, any days of the week they would prefer you to not work on their property. If there are buildings, be sure to discuss the use of those. It is also good to explain all soil amendment additions, planting and harvesting practices. Get these things in writing in a lease that is signed by both of you. The final lease document should be written by an attorney with ag experience. 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.

Most landowners want to see their property cared for properly. Be a good steward of the land. Be conscientious of your farming practices and care for their land as you would your own.

One of the best tips for you as a farmer leasing land is to COMMUNICATE with the landowner! Keep an open dialogue and have a good working relationship. Be sure to trim the weeds at the edges of the fields and their yard, this is an extra step that will keep a landowner happy. Keep any tools and equipment neatly organized, preferably out of sight or inside. If there is a big snowstorm and their snowblower won't handle the amount, go over with your loader and plow them out. When a holiday is coming, ask if they are planning a picnic or outdoor party so that you don't spread manure the day before or try to bale hay while their daughter is saying her wedding vows in their backyard!

ENJOY:

Most importantly, enjoy your life as a farmer. Be strong through the struggles that come with farming. You are one of the few who gets to see the beautiful sights that come with being a farmer on a daily basis.

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



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