

## Public Relations and Manure Application



Today's rural neighborhoods have changed, thus changing the need for a public relations plan for our farms. We need to help our non-farm neighbors understand our farming practices and concentrate being a good neighbor ourselves. Most people that pass by your farm or the farm that you are applying manure, know very little about modern agriculture. They were not raised on a farm and may be two or three generations removed from the farm. Many non-farm rural residents move to the country to enjoy the same things we do, quiet, natural beauty, and fresh air. Manure odor, large spreaders, and accidental spills on the road does not meet that view of the country. These people are important stakeholders to your farm and to farming in general.



### Stakeholders

Farmers and manure applicators need to understand who is all included in their stakeholders. Stakeholders are any individuals, groups, or organizations that can affect your business or who you affect. In agriculture this list is very long and very inclusive. It will include:

- farm neighbors
- non-farm neighbors
- people using the same roads as you
- local highway departments
- political officials
- many others

You decide who are the most important stakeholders and how it is best to address them. How your stakeholders view your farm can make your business more successful or can be a constant battle.

### Analyze Your Current Stakeholder Relationships

Knowing how your stakeholders view you and your farm is very important. Knowing their current viewpoint will help in developing a plan of how you are going to address them in the future. This is a great place to start a proactive plan for public relations.

|   |                                     |
|---|-------------------------------------|
| <b>Supportive and not Important</b>     | <b>Supportive and Important</b>     |
| <b>Not Supportive and not Important</b> | <b>Not Supportive and Important</b> |

Your public relations plan should first address how to keep those stakeholder who are **Supportive and Important** in that box. The next group is how to move those stakeholders that are **Not Supportive and Important** into the supportive box.

### Building a Positive Relationship with Your Stakeholders

The best time to build and maintain a positive relationship with your neighbors and other stakeholders is before something happens. Establishing a trust based relationship will buy a lot of goodwill if an accident happens. Being proactive in your public relations planning allows you to develop the image that you want for your farm. Steps needed to build a positive relationship with your stakeholders include:

- Establish a communication plan
- Listen – the most important step in good communication
- Respect their opinions
- Identify their needs and desires
- Develop trust by always telling the truth
- Ask them for their ideas
- Meet and exceed all local, state, and federal regulations
- Be proactive – don't wait for a problem
- Be flexible – be willing to adapt and improve your plans



### **Developing a Public Relations Plan for Manure Applications**

Your public relations plan needs to fit your farm, community, and local needs. You can't take a plan from a different farm and expect it to work for your farm. Some tips to consider in your plan include:

- Tell your story – everyone involved in the business should know that story and the language of your story (manure is a fertilizer not a waste).
- Be a good community member. Join a local civic group not just your local farm organization.
- Avoid spreading manure on holidays and special occasions. To do this you need to know your neighborhood. Avoid the fourth of July and Memorial Day, but you also should avoid spreading next to the school football field the day before Homecoming, or your neighbor who is having a graduation party.
- Manage odor as much as possible during agitation and spreading.
- Don't overfill tankers and trucks.
- Clean equipment before traveling to a new site.
- Know the weather forecast to avoid large rain events, wind blowing towards heavily populated areas, etc.
- Spread in the morning when air begins to warm and rise, rather than late afternoon.
- Incorporate manure whenever possible to reduce odor and better utilize nutrients.
- Inject manure when close to public areas such as other homes, parks, and churches.

- Do what you can to limit road travel for both your safety and the safety of other drivers on the road.
- Have clean up equipment such as scrapers and sweepers readily available in case of minor spills.
- Everyone handling manure should know your spill response plan and have a summary in their vehicles.
- If there is a spill or accident, have someone designated to be your spokesperson. This person should be comfortable talking with the authorities as well as the media.



### **General Comments on Public Relations Plans**

Some final thoughts on general public relation plans for your farm.

- Get to know your neighbors. Neighbors can be your best supporters or worst enemies depending on your relationship with them.
- Practice being a good neighbor to others. Be the kind of neighbor you want to have.
- Do something nice for your neighbors occasionally. Don't just be a friend when you need them.
- Give tours of your farm to neighbors, school groups, elected officials, etc.
- Let neighbors know about changes or expansions in advance.
- Be honest with your neighbors all the time.
- Go above and beyond when possible