

AGRICULTURAL INDUSTRIES AND THEIR IMPACTS

Agriculture is a dynamic industry subject to variable market conditions that may require intensification of existing farms or adaptation to new and emerging technologies in order to remain economically viable.



Commercial farms are businesses and have impacts associated with their day-to-day operation which can affect the amenity of neighbouring allotments. Purchasers of rural land need to be aware that moving next door to a commercial farm may not meet expectations of a quiet and peaceful country life and that productive farming enterprises have legitimate impacts. Similarly, residents living in close proximity to commercial and industrial enterprises in an urban environment should expect a level of impact from the surrounding land uses.

The common impacts of agricultural activities and their potential source in the Shire are summarised below:

Noise

There is a misconception that moving to a rural area equates to a quiet and tranquil living environment. This may be the case for some of the time however there are legitimate agricultural practices that will result in the generation of noise. In an open rural environment, the ability of noise to carry over long distances is increased.

Some of the main causes of noise generation have been evaluated below:

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- Operation of farm machinery particularly early morning or late at night;
- The use of 'scare guns' in fruit orchards to deter birds and bats;
- Truck movements for delivery and pickup of stock;
- The use of firearms for pest control;
- Working dogs;
- Newly born or weaned stock;
- The use of truck, tractors, motorbikes, chainsaws, diesel pumps & compressors;
- Livestock in general (roosters, geese, pigs, cows) and livestock slaughtering;
- Agritourism-related uses, events and experiences (crowds of people, amplified music, loud speakers).

Dust

Agricultural practices such as cultivating the earth results in the generation of dust, more prevalent in windy conditions. Furthermore, activities such as stock movement, driving on gravel roads, spreading fertilisers, poultry farming, and the harvesting of crops can generate dust.

Odours

Certain agricultural activities, particularly more intensive operations, can generate odours. Of particular significance are intensive livestock keeping establishments including poultry, piggeries and dairies and from facilities such as sewerage treatment plants, abattoirs and waste disposal centres. Odour has the ability to drift as a parcel of air for an extent of 2km under relatively still conditions, as it is wind turbulence that dilutes and mixes the odorous parcel of air. Odour is more detectable at night when the air is cool.

Chemical Use

The use of chemicals in agricultural operations is common practice that can benefit the community as a whole by reducing the spread of weed and animal pests. Chemicals are used by farmers to control the spread and kill weed and pest species that impact on the agricultural capacity of the land, more particularly:

- Control of environmental and noxious weeds which reduce the carrying capacity of land & invade ecosystems;
- Control pests in fruit & vegetable crops;

- Baiting pest animals (feral dogs & cats, rabbits, foxes & other vermin).



There are Regulations and Acts that control the sale and use of chemicals, with certain more powerful chemical control agents requiring the farmer to undertake a Chemical Use Course/Certification before being purchased and used. Furthermore, farmers are required to store chemicals in a secure holding facility on-site with appropriate hazard signs and labels.

Rural residents may express concerns regarding the impact of spray drift to rain water tanks, gardens, animals or farm dams when living adjacent to a farming property where chemicals are used. Chemical control agents are very expensive and therefore farmers are cautious to apply chemicals only when conditions are correct, for example in minimal winds and by targeting weed species when they are actively growing.

Communicating with your neighbour on what chemical sprays are being used for and discussing application techniques may alleviate some of land use conflicts arising from chemical usage.

Smoke

Certain agricultural activities require the use of fire to burn off cleared vegetation, burn remaining stubble from cropping activities, and in bushfire hazard reduction which generates smoke. The effects of smoke can trigger broader impacts to the community including breathing disorders and increased chance for asthma. Burning off is managed by the NSW Rural Fire Service whom grant landowners permits to burn off when conditions are suited.

With large tracts of native vegetation present within the Shire on privately owned land, Council land, National Parkland and catchment lands managed by WaterNSW, there is a risk of bushfires within the Shire. Bushfires can create a smoke pollution hazard.

Visual Amenity

The dynamic nature of agriculture means that the visual amenity of rural land is subject to change. Changes that can be expected are summarised in the following points:

- **Sowing of new pasture crops and species:**
Sowing new pastures/crops requires cultivating the earth using such mechanisms as scarifying and ploughing accompanied with fertiliser and seed application. This can drastically change the look of rural land as what was a paddock of pasture one day may be a fallow paddock for some weeks to come until the newly sown crop/pasture emerges.



- **Farm Infrastructure/Buildings:**
Infrastructure requirements on site vary for differing agricultural industries, but a level of awareness that new buildings and infrastructure such as hail and bird netting may be constructed impacting of the visual amenity of rural land.



- **Vegetation Clearing:**

The clearing of native vegetation for agricultural purposes may be required in order to increase the grazing capacity of rural land, subject to approval/or a permit being acquired. Clearing of vegetation dramatically changes the visual appearance of rural landscapes.

The above changes to the visual amenity of the agricultural landscape may be perceived negatively by some members of the rural community and may lead to incidences of conflict. Being aware that the visual aspects of the rural land may change and educating the broader community on what agricultural activities may contribute to the visual change shall assist in alleviating incidences of conflict.

Weeds and Animal Pests

Weed and animal pests impact on the productivity of farming land in the Wollondilly Shire. Farmers are legally entitled to and are bound under certain regulations to implement control measures for animal and weed pests. Some of the key impacts of undertaking animal and pest control have been outlined below, indicating where farmers and the broader community can work together to reduce the spread.

- **Use of Firearms:**

Primary producers are legally entitled to own and operate licensed firearms in connection with farming and grazing activities. The use of firearms may be used to control animal pests including but not limited to foxes and rabbits. The use of firearms can produce levels of noise that may affect the amenity of surrounding land uses and can lead to complaints to local authorities. When moving to a predominantly rural location residents should be aware that farmers may be using firearms to control animal pests.



- **Unrestrained Animals:**
Roaming of unrestrained domestic animals can have devastating effects on livestock and native fauna. Roaming domestic pets can attack, mangle and kill livestock and native fauna or torment them to an extent where they die from shock. Further, roaming domestic animals can transmit and contract diseases. Owners of domestic pets in rural locations should ensure their fencing is adequate to contain animals wholly within property boundaries. Keeping your domestic pets locked up at night and contained within your property boundaries when unattended will reduce the number of native fauna species and livestock attacked by roaming domestic pets in the Shire.
- **Invasive Plants from Domestic Gardens:**
There are plants commonly found in domestic gardens that can spread and impact on the carrying capacity of agricultural land in the Shire. Poorly maintained gardens are a common source of invasive domestic plants. Certain cultivars of commonly found domestic plants are more susceptible to spreading due to their prolific seed production. Seeds are then distributed by a number of means including, wind, water, machinery, domestic and native animals.

Natural Environment

Wollondilly contains a wide variety of landscapes that provide habitat for a diverse range of plant and animal communities. When enjoying Wollondilly's natural bush setting have regard for any native animals you may encounter and keep your distance. When driving on the Shire's roads be on the lookout for native animals on the road verge, where fauna commonly graze.



Rural Amenity

The rural amenity of an area relates to the ambience of the rural environment or the cumulation of all facets in the environment that gives it a rural “feel”. Such features include the rolling green hills, dams and watercourses, pockets of vegetation or simply cows grazing in the paddock, which describe the character of the rural landscape. However, the agricultural use of the rural landscape can also result in structures such as igloos, hothouses, farm sheds, & stockpiles of feed/fertiliser/manure.



There is a misconception regarding rural amenity in that structures that contribute to the agricultural use of the land such as igloos, hothouses, stockpiles of feed/fertiliser/manure may be perceived negatively. Such features are an integral feature of the agricultural landscape along with aesthetic features such as the rolling green hills and grazing cows.

The rural amenity of the Wollondilly Shire has changed over time with an increased number of dwellings and the subdivision of rural land for rural-residential purposes. Purchasers of land in rural localities should be aware that the rural amenity and visual characteristics of the landscape may change.

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It is recommended that prospective purchasers carefully and thoroughly study the neighbourhood to identify the land use types which currently exist.

Furthermore, you may wish to ascertain what future strategies, plans or development applications are in place for the locality you are purchasing within. Current studies and strategies, including Wollondilly 2040 – Local Strategic Planning Statement, can be viewed at:

<https://www.wollondilly.nsw.gov.au/shire-projects/strategic-planning-and-land-use-policies/studies-and-strategies/>.

Current and past development applications can be viewed at:

<https://tracking.wollondilly.nsw.gov.au/>.