

MWPS-50

# LIVING ON ACREAGES

## What You Need to Know

NATALIE CARROLL and DON JONES



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*. . . And Justice for All.*

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# 1

## Country Living, an Overview

**C**ongratulations on your move to the country! The general information presented in this book will help you understand some of the opportunities and responsibilities that you now have that you probably would not have if you were to live in an urban area. The discussion will be general, providing an overview of life on a rural acreage. For specific information that applies to your geographic area, you should always contact local authorities and local expertise. The major differences between rural living and urban living have to do with the differences in the landscape and your responsibilities and opportunities. You will see and experience more agriculture and forested areas but will live in a less densely populated area, see fewer buildings, and encounter less traffic. Most likely, you will expend more effort taking care of your home and maintaining your property. While your local county governing board will have jurisdiction over many of the decisions affecting your property, those limitations are often not as strict as those in more urban areas. This first chapter provides a brief introduction to rural living and then gives a chapter-by-chapter overview of this book.

## Introduction

The sights, sounds, and odors you will experience in the country will be different from those in the city. Country living is often quieter and more relaxed. Often, you may be able to sit or walk in your backyard without hearing radios, televisions, or other human activities. In the country, people can usually observe more stars in the sky. But the countryside is not all stars and solitude. The open areas and reduced population can create problems that a person moving to a rural area needs to be aware of and be ready to adapt to.

## Life in a Rural Community

You will most likely find some differences between urban and rural communities. Although you might be able to enjoy slower and usually quieter daily living, you may also find that a simple trip to the store for bread or milk, or anything else, takes considerably longer. There may be convenience stores near you, but grocery stores, hardware stores, lumber yards, and other major shopping facilities are likely to be considerably farther away. For many who live in the country, it takes a morning (or afternoon) to do their major shopping. If you work in an urban area, you can, of course, tack your shopping on to the end of your day, but the increased distance can make for longer days and increased expenditures for gasoline and other travel-related items.

You may also find the some rural schools are smaller and not as well funded as city schools. This is because the lower population density in the country provides a smaller tax base for funding education. Smaller schools have benefits and drawbacks. Your children probably won't have access to the breadth and depth of courses they would have in a city school. There will probably be less teacher specialization in many high schools, as one teacher may have responsibilities for many topics (e.g., biology, chemistry, and physics). While most rural schools in the U.S.

are capable of providing students with a solid education in subject areas that can prepare them for advanced education, it is always advisable to check with neighbors with children to make sure the school will be suitable for your children.

A commonly perceived benefit of smaller schools is smaller class sizes. This doesn't always happen, however, particularly in rural areas experiencing rapid growth. In smaller schools, a smaller student population allows teachers, administrators, and other school personnel to get to know each student and fosters a sense of community in the school. Furthermore, many of the teachers and other school personnel, live in the community and see their students at the local store and at sporting events and other school functions. School personnel may even have their own children in the school system participating in school activities and interacting with your children. It is much more difficult for a student to be anonymous in a rural school. While this lack of anonymity may decrease many types of student problems, it could be problem for parents and students accustomed to larger schools with bigger student populations. The smaller school will give parents more opportunities to be involved in school activities and in their children's educations.

Just as in the schools, rural neighbors generally feel a close sense of community. They may be more likely to notice of who comes and goes than your city neighbors. This may be annoying at first for people who are not used to it, but, after a while, most come to consider the lack of autonomy to be a benefit. Good rural neighbors often keep an eye on your property, as well as their own, and let you know if anything unusual or suspicious is happening in the neighborhood. Depending on your particular relationship with neighbors, you may even want to give them your work number or let them know when you are going on vacation. People sometimes leave house keys with a trusted neighbor in case of emergencies.

Just as in an urban area, you will be responsible for arranging to have your utilities connected. The major utility differences

between urban and rural areas are that many people use liquid propane (LP) gas for heating instead of natural gas. You will most likely have your own well and onsite wastewater disposal system (septic system). Both of these systems require monitoring and maintenance for the health and safety of your family. If you get your water from a well, have it checked before you begin using it and yearly thereafter. Also, check your onsite wastewater disposal system periodically, and have the septic tank pumped every three or four years. If you are building a new home, you should review the options for your wastewater disposal system before deciding which one is most appropriate for your site and soils.

You will be responsible for the disposal of your trash. Some areas allow burning of wood and paper products; others do not. You may also wish to compost your kitchen scraps, particularly if you plan to garden because compost is an excellent source of organic matter for flowers and vegetables. Although you may be able to recycle much of your trash, you will also need to find a private contractor to collect your trash. One of the best ways to find out the best way to handle trash or utilities in your area is to ask for advice from your neighbors.

## Living with Farming

Fewer than 2 percent of Americans farm for a living today, and only 10 percent of Americans now live in rural areas, but many rural areas, especially in the Midwest, are still heavily farmed. Over time, farms have consolidated and fields are often located several miles apart, and the business of farming continues to require that large and often slow-moving equipment travel on rural roads. Agricultural practices such as planting, spraying, and harvesting, require moving large equipment from the farmstead to cropland. This equipment is not designed to travel at high speeds and may take up most of the road width when traveling from field to field. During harvest, you may also notice

large wagons, trailers, or semi-trucks transporting grain to storage or market. In some areas, you may even find Amish farmers who work and travel using horse drawn equipment (Figure 1-1). All vehicles, agricultural and non-agricultural, moving less than 25 miles per hour on maintained roadways must display a slow moving vehicle (SMV) sign on the back of the vehicle that is visible from 500 feet. Be patient and drive slowly and carefully around equipment. Farmers sometimes attempt to pull over for you to pass when it is safe to do so, but if they are driving or pulling very large equipment, it is often dangerous for them to do so. At times like this, it is best to remember that you probably moved to the country to enjoy the slower pace, so try to relax when you are caught behind a large piece of farm equipment moving at 20 mph.

Figure 1-2 shows a variety of farm scenes. As this figure shows, farmers may raise animals and crops together, or animals and crops alone. When farming involves cropping systems, you can expect noise from tractors, combines, and other heavy equipment at certain times of the year. You will especially notice the noise and traffic on the roads during planting in the spring and spraying for pests at times throughout the summer. In the fall, there often will be sounds and dust associated with harvesting. These activities must be done at very specific times and when the weather is right, so you will likely see farmers in their fields around the clock.



Figure 1-1. Amish buggy with SMV.



Cattle resting on pasture.



Field tillage.



Tractor and field tillage machinery traveling between fields.



Grain combine traveling between fields.



Shed and cattle lot operation.

Figure 1-2. Typical farm scenes.

Disruptions from animal agriculture (cattle, swine, dairy) are more consistent throughout the year. When farming involves animal production, you can expect to share the road with slow moving farm machinery and large trucks transporting feed and animals. When animals are being raised in your vicinity, you may be exposed to manure handling equipment, land application of manure, and the odors associated with farm animals and manure application. Because animal odors may be worse during some weather conditions (such as when the wind is from a particular direction) and activities (such as spreading manure), you may notice offensive smells at certain times of the year.

## Book Overview

The remaining chapters of this book provide specific information about various aspects of country living. The last page of each chapter provides a list of resources that can provide additional help or more in-depth information for the topics discussed in the chapter.

Chapter 2, *Lot Development*, describes general considerations for new buildings, access to public roads, maintenance and zoning. Because there are many differences

across the country, these guidelines are very general. You must talk with local officials about specific information. Chapter 2 can help you decide what questions to ask. Among other things, it explains soil and topography features to consider when you begin searching for a rural acreage or are contemplating improvements to your homestead. Forethought and planning can save many headaches later.

Chapter 3, *Utilities and Rural Services*, describes common water conservation practices and explains water supply systems and onsite wastewater disposal systems. It also discusses electric and gas systems, alternative power sources, trash pickup, telephone services, and mail delivery. You will not be able to get cable television in the country, but satellite dishes and wireless towers can provide services similar to those you may have had in an urban setting. This chapter also discusses permits that may be required in your area.

If you are building a house or other structure, Chapter 4, *Driveways, Parking, and Site Accessibility*, will be useful. This chapter discusses recommended measurements, surfaces, maintenance practices, multiple entrances, and safety. Other topics include mailboxes and school bus shelters.

Chapter 5, *Home Accessibility*, suggests ways to make your home more easily accessible. The chapter contains diagrams and drawings to illustrate the main concepts of universal home design and home accessibility.

Chapter 6, *Outdoor Living Areas*, gives information about caring for your property and outdoor improvements. It provides suggestions for caring for your lawn, deck, pool, or fountain. You will also find information on planting and maintaining a garden as well as suggestions for planting trees and shrubs and for developing wildlife areas. These activities generally require extra storage space, so information is also included to help you build an outdoor storage shed. Example property layouts are included. The chapter also discusses environmental considerations and security issues that you should consider.

Chapter 7, *Pests*, gives suggestions for reducing or preventing damage from rodents, insects, feral cats and dogs, coyotes, raccoons, possums, eagles, and other animals. These animals cause damage to buildings and landscape plantings and can harm your pets

or farm animals. Although wildlife often causes problems in urban areas, you can expect more pest problems in your rural home than you had in the city simply because there is so much more wildlife around.

Chapter 8, *Safety, Security, and Emergency Planning*, discusses emergency preparedness, fire protection, ambulance services, snow drift control and snow removal, power outages, weather emergencies, and lightning protection. The more isolated you are from your neighbors, the more important it is that you be prepared and know what to do in an emergency.

A major difference between urban and rural living is that you are responsible for disposal of your household wastes and wastewater in the country. Chapter 9, *Rural Sanitation and Septic Systems*, explains choices for trash disposal and sewage treatment.

Chapter 10 has a *Maintenance Scheduling Calendar* that includes a schedule for common rural household maintenance tasks and suggestions for the jobs you can do yourself and those best left to professionals.

## Resources

**Cooperative Extension Service:** All universities engage in research and teaching, but the nation's more than 100 land-grant colleges and universities have a third mission—"Extension" or "reaching out," and—along with teaching and research—land-grant universities "extend" their resources to help solve problems of public needs. These programs are largely administered through thousands of county and regional extension offices, which bring land-grant expertise to the most local of levels.

Congress created the extension system nearly a century ago to address exclusively rural, agricultural issues. At that time, more than 50 percent of the U.S. population lived in rural areas, and 30 percent of the workforce was engaged in farming. Extension's engagement with rural America helped make possible the American agricultural revolution, which

dramatically increased farm productivity and lowered the cost of food.

Call your local county extension office or go to the following website and click on your state to locate your land-grant university's extension service:

**Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service (CSREES),**

[http://www.csrees.usda.gov/qlinks/partners/state\\_partners.html](http://www.csrees.usda.gov/qlinks/partners/state_partners.html)

**MidWest Plan Service (MWPS),**

<http://www.mwps.org>

**Natural Resources, Agriculture, and Engineering Service (NRAES),**

<http://www.nraes.org>

**Your local Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) office can also be a**

valuable resource. Or visit at

<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/>

## Water Supply

Rural Americans generally obtain their water from wells and are responsible for both testing and maintaining those wells. However, rural residents in some areas, particularly western states, often are connected to rural water systems that are regulated and tested just like city water systems. Some state and local governments set rules to protect well users. Although the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) does not monitor private wells, their website (<http://www.epa.gov/safewater/privatewells>) has information about water quality and some information about wells. The following major well topics are covered at this website:

- The types of drinking water wells and guidelines for proper construction.
- Information about private drinking water wells in your region or state.
- Frequently Asked Questions about your well water.
- Health risks associated with drinking water wells.
- Organizations that work to keep private drinking water wells safe.
- What you can do to keep your drinking water well safe.

This site allows you to download or order copies of brochures, booklets, posters, reports, and multi-media publications. You can also link to web sites with additional information on private drinking water wells.

## Water Sources

Drinking water comes from surface water and ground water. Approximately 23 million U.S. citizens rely on private supplies for drinking water. Most of this water is drawn from groundwater through wells, but some households also use water from streams or cisterns. See Figures 3-2 and 3-3 for diagrams of how well supply water. Intermediate storages (Figure 3-3) would be used in the case of a low-output well that is not able to supply water at the rate needed to meet short-term peak needs such as doing laundry or taking showers. If you use water from a

stream or cistern, you must take special precautions to protect and maintain your drinking water supply and ensure its quality.

Ground water is pumped from wells that are dug or drilled into aquifers, which are geologic formations that contain water. The quantity of water in an aquifer and amount of water produced by a well depend on the nature of the rock or soil in the aquifer from which the well draws water. Some drinking water wells may be relatively shallow (50 feet or less) while some may be very deep (more than 1,000 feet). Dug wells are generally much shallower (20 to 30 feet) than drilled wells and are not recommended because of the increased likelihood of contamination. However, in some locations, dug wells are the only way to obtain sufficient water, so extra precautions to protect against contamination may be necessary. Groundwater usually does not travel great distances to reach a well, generally less than a mile, so, the activities around your home can have a major impact on your well. For instance, petroleum leaking from a home heating oil tank may enter and float to the top of the water table. Once there, the oil will flow with the groundwater. If your well is in the path of the flow, you may find petroleum in your water supply.

Water use varies throughout the day, and temporary high demands occur each day. A well flow rate of 8 gallons per minute (gpm) is the minimum flow rate to satisfy the water demands in a home, while watering livestock

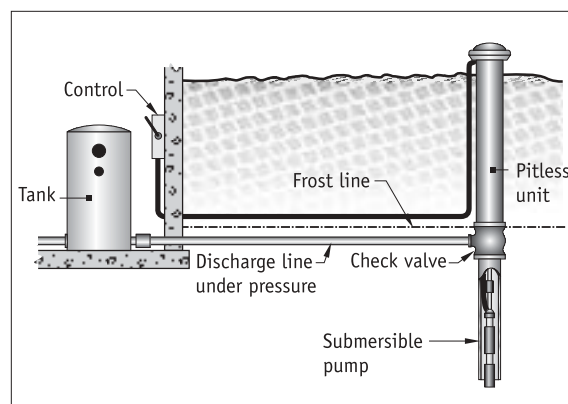


Figure 3-2. Typical well and pressure tank used in many rural homes.