



Neighbor Relations

“Fences make good neighbors” is an understanding that goes back long before urban farming, and it’s a good one for home-based backyard farmers to remember when dealing with neighbors. The most important point to realize is that not everyone is a fan of farming. While some are eager to turn farming into a political act, for SPIN farmers it is a profession, not a cause. It is much easier to farm without distractions or discomfort, so the main objective is to have your farming activities be a non-issue. Here are some guidelines we’ve developed over the years to handle home-based, backyard farming diplomacy.

--Keep your operation discreet, especially if your nearest neighbor, like your farm, can be measured in feet. This is particularly relevant to post-harvesting that involves setting up tables and packing materials and ideally, a cooler. If you have a garage, it may be worthwhile to clear a part of it to use for this activity.

--Consider investing in fencing for privacy. Attractive fencing is not that costly for a sub-acre space, and it can also be used for production.

--Make your backyard plots look like a well-tended garden, rather than like a typical farm. Because of your sub-acre scale, you can do some things larger growers can’t. Perimeter landscaping, well-weeded and maintained plots and flower production will create yards fit for a magazine cover. A much touted advantage of urban farming is that it can alleviate blight, but to do so you need to include aesthetics and landscaping in your farm planning.

--A good-looking farm tends to be a good-earning farm. It also says something about you. The surest way to impress someone, be it customers or the community, is to create a farmscape that borders on the sublime. It does not require much effort, and the bonus comes in unsolicited offers of more backyards for whenever you want to expand your land base.

--Composting and farming may seem inseparable, but not every yard needs to have its own pile. If home base for your operation is your own yard, composting can occur there, where you can keep it neatly organized and attractive with trellising that can be used for vertical crops like cucumbers or scarlet runner beans. If, however, none of your sites provide a discreet space for composting, recycle any farm waste off-site.

--Converting front lawns to cropland can certainly make a statement, but you can say it with flowers just as well as with veggies. Cut flowers are a lucrative and versatile crop that can be sold in bouquets and added to salad mixes. Once neighbors get comfortable knowing where flowers come from, the leap from lilies to lettuce won’t seem like such a big one.

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--A farmer needs to make hay while the sun shines, but if a rototiller is part of your operation, be mindful of when you use it. They are no noisier than a mower or leaf blower, but few want to wake up to them, either.

--Just as you would like neighbors to come to respect you as a professional farmer, you should respect them as neighbors of the farm, and not try to turn them into customers of the farm. Save your sales pitches for the farmers market. They did not ask for a working farm to be in their midst, so keep business out of it.

--Be generous. If you come back from market with unsold produce, give it to the neighbors every now and then. Your crops are high value, but goodwill is priceless.

Although SPIN-Farming is a-political, SPIN farmers are in many ways ambassadors of agriculture. Working farms in cities and towns are still somewhat exotic, so curiosity or skepticism is a natural reaction to expect, and you should not take it personally. There is no reason your farming activity should negatively impact the neighbors, and you can demonstrate that to them.

Establishing any new relationship requires a leap of faith by both sides, but you have more going for you than just "Trust me." You've got SPIN-Farming! Though home-based backyard, urban farming is a new concept, SPIN-Farming has been around for 6+ years. Enough people are having success with it, so it provides a track record. You can use it as a credential and proof of concept to help neighbors understand what you are doing and how you are doing it. Send them to www.spinfarming.com to show them what you're a part of and why more and more are starting to support it, and why they should, too.



SPIN-Farming Makes Agriculture Accessible to Anyone, Anywhere!