

# Community Relations For Livestock Producers

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The need for livestock producers to behave in a responsible manner toward the environment has always been a legitimate ethical concern. In recent years, understanding of how livestock production might negatively impact the environment has grown. At the same time, society has taken a much greater interest in how food is produced. It also appears society is becoming more sensitive to perceived intrusions on quality of life from business activities. As a result, environmental concerns and public image are demanding more attention and skills from livestock producers.

The long term success of pork production will in large part be influenced by how successful producers are in developing production systems that are environmentally friendly and perceived to be consistent with societal values for food production. Pork producers must first "walk the walk" in terms of reducing negative environmental impact, avoid creation of "nuisance" situations, and contribute to societies' social and economic goals and then "talk the talk" to tell their story and positively position their products and production systems in the public mind.

This reality is being driven by the following factors:

1. The public has more interest in and influence on livestock operations than was true in the past. Many see consumers as an integral part of the production system. This situation is driven by:
  - Increased livestock industry visibility, communications, and media attention.
  - Attention from activist and consumer movements.
  - Development of holistic philosophies.
  - Increased public hearing and notice requirements.
2. Urbanization is resulting in a public that has little or no tie to production agriculture. With no close up experience in production agriculture, many attitudes are developed from sources like movies and television where treatment of agriculture is seldom accurate and realistic. Producers face a significant challenge in helping the public understand modern pork production so public attitudes that shape policies and regulations will be realistic.
3. As population grows food demands will continue to increase. Continued urbanization has lead to more sophisticated and organized food delivery systems. As a result, production systems will be more systematic and likely larger, and therefore have more visibility and impact in specific locations. While the consuming public is driving these changes with their purchasing habits, they may also find the resulting systems in conflict with some of their values about food production.
4. With continued population growth and current lifestyle choices, there will be greater demands for personal living space and basic resources like water and fresh air. This will increase the potential for conflict over land access and use and increase the likelihood of situations where livestock production might be perceived as a nuisance.

## PRODUCER AWARENESS - THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNITY RELATIONS

Even though most livestock producers are conscientious and responsible, the need still exists for producers to continue to improve environmental management and to develop trust with the public. Motives for these efforts will be two fold.

- ***Ethical and/or Stewardship Reasons***

In agricultural circles farmers are often called the original environmentalists. This view is usually attributed to the environmental ethic that says we have obligations to future generations. With a tradition or value in agriculture for passing on the farm to children, present operators feel a responsibility to leave the farm in no worse condition than they assumed it. This concept can be expanded to expect that collectively we leave our planet in no worse shape than we found it. These values are reinforced by the fact that farmers usually express a great deal of pride in the physical appearance and condition of their farms. Most farmers hold a value that they need to respect the environment and the rights of future generations. The cost of actually reaching that goal is sometimes challenging in a competitive economy. The promise of future advancements in technology that will help solve environmental problems may in the best case be the cure we seek for problems we may have created, or an excuse to shirk responsibility now.

When faced with ethical/stewardship issues in their operations, producers might ponder the following question: Would this action be OK if everyone did it?

- ***Self Interest***

Voluntary compliance is preferable to regulation. In the past several years many state and local governments have adopted regulations and ordinances designed to control and direct livestock production. Some of this effort is necessary and positive for the long term interests of the industry and society. However, it is also becoming apparent that there is great risk that many provisions that are adopted can result in situations that create undue hardships and challenges to producers and to those charged with administration and enforcement. Since there is considerable variety in production units based on site, size, technology, and management, it is very difficult to design regulations that make sense for all operations. It is common for local ordinances to differ widely on key standards. This creates differing and artificially induced economic conditions for producers based on their location. The pork industry and society/government will enjoy better results and lower costs if producers can effectively regulate themselves with best management practices and facilitate effective communication and trust building with the public. In this way, both producers and the public can avoid some of the costs and inefficiencies inherent in regulation and more effectively reach their goals.

Negative images are detrimental to pork sales and counteract promotion expenditures. Pork can only be the "meat of choice" if it is perceived to be produced in a socially acceptable manner. Farmsteads, livestock buildings, and lots must project a clean and wholesome appearance. Increasingly, consumers will avoid products that they associate with dirty conditions. For instance, open cattle and swine lots along roadways

where animals are seen in muddy, smelly, and dirty conditions result in negative images for meat products. Likewise, when the public encounters odors from confinement facilities and manure storage structures, many will associate this with meat products and be repulsed. Producers and the industry should put a high priority on reducing these occurrences through development and selection of systems and technologies, as well as siting and facility design and layout.

## **PRODUCER AWARENESS - DEALING WITH PUBLIC OUTRAGE**

In the past several years many pork producers have encountered reaction from the public that might be characterized as “outrage.” Most often this occurs when new facilities that are perceived as large are proposed. Similar responses have been observed from incidents labeled as manure spills, and as a general reaction to structural changes in the livestock industry. Usually this public alarm confuses producers who feel the reaction greatly overemphasizes the risk that their actions will produce. The difference in how risk is perceived by the risk assessment profession and the public has been addressed in work by Peter M. Sandman. Following is a summary of this phenomenon as presented by Sandman:

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### **Risk = Hazard + Outrage**

#### **A Summary**

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If you make a list of environmental health risks in order of how many people they kill each year, then list them again in order of how alarming they are to the general public, the two lists will be very different. Risk managers in industry and government often deduce from this that the public perception of risk is ignorant or irrational. But a better way to conceptualize the problem is that the public defines “risk” more broadly than the risk assessment profession. It helps to stipulate new definitions. Call the death rate “hazard”; call everything else that the public considers part of risk, collectively, “outrage.” Risk, properly conceived, includes both hazard and outrage.

Sandman identifies twelve components of outrage, among them: voluntary/coerced; familiar/exotic; not memorable/memorable; controlled by the individual/controlled by others; fair/unfair; and imposed by institutions that are trustworthy/untrustworthy. Risks that are high in these factors are high risks, even if they are not especially hazardous. Efforts to explain the hazard are unlikely to succeed as long as the outrage is high. To decrease public concern about small hazards, therefore, risk managers must work to diminish the outrage.

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## Reducing Public Outrage

The **concept** of “public outrage” is discussed in the first section of this module. Peter M. Sandman offers the following **strategies for reducing** public outrage:

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### Reducing Outrage

#### Six Principle Strategies

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1. Stake out the middle, not the extreme. In a fight between “terribly dangerous” and “perfectly safe,” the winner will be “terribly dangerous.” But “modestly dangerous” is a contender. Activists can afford to exaggerate, but industry and government cannot. Move to the middle of the seesaw.
2. Acknowledge prior misbehavior -- repeatedly. The prerogative of deciding when we can put our mistakes behind us belongs to our stakeholders, not ourselves. The more often and apologetically we acknowledge the sins of the past, the more quickly others decide it’s time to move on.
3. Acknowledge current problems -- dramatically. Omissions, distortions, and “spin control” damage credibility nearly as much as outright lies. The only way to build credibility is to acknowledge the problems, going beyond mere honesty to “transparency.” And since people don’t expect such acknowledgments, they have to be dramatic or no one will notice.
4. Discuss achievements with humility. Odds are you resisted change until regulators or activists forced your hand. Now have the grace to say so. Attributing your good behavior to your own natural goodness triggers skepticism; attributing it to pressure greatly increases the likelihood that we’ll believe you actually did it.
5. Share control and be accountable. The higher the outrage, the less willing people are to leave control in your hands or to accept your assurances that all is well. Look for ways to put the control elsewhere (or to show that it is already elsewhere). Let others -- regulators, neighbors, activists -- keep you honest and certify your good performance.
6. Bring concerns to the surface. It’s the concerns that stakeholders are not voicing that make the most trouble. Bring them to the surface subtly: “I wonder if anybody is worried about...” “I talked last week with a neighbor who was worried about...” This is a technique borrowed from psychiatry, where it is sometimes called counterprojection.

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## Strategies for Making Livestock Operations Compatible with Neighbors and the Community - An Overview

The first step in achieving and maintaining a positive relationship with the public is to **behave in a responsible manner**. Comply with all regulations and, where possible, exceed environmental standards. Respect and appreciate neighbors' concerns about how your operation affects their quality of life and property values.

The second step is to **emphasize your positive behaviors and actions and improve the public's understanding of the swine industry**.

Many of the following actions and behaviors will have a place in an effective environmental and public relations plan. Location, size, image, and type of operation will determine which actions should be included and emphasized.

1. Consider location and visibility when planning new facilities or modifying existing sites.
  - a) Consider distance from:
    - Roads
    - Neighbors
    - Public areas
      - Parks
      - Streams
      - Schools
      - Churches
      - Lakes, etc.
  - b) Study prevailing wind patterns and topography and consider how neighbors might be affected by odors. With existing facilities, consider fences and trees to “stack” odors.
  - c) Develop a landscape plan that keeps production facilities and manure storage units from becoming an eyesore and blends facilities into the landscape. Use landscaping techniques that project a positive image to viewers of your operation.  
Consider use of:
    - Screening
    - Hills
    - Berms
    - Earth tone colors and colors perceived as “clean” and “healthy”
    - Low noise fans
    - Shrubs, flowers
    - Decorative fences

2. Comply with all regulations.
  - a) Go beyond the minimum standards required, if feasible.
  - b) Exceed set-back distances if possible when building new facilities.. Some added cost at construction may be money well invested in the long term.
3. Practice a “good neighbor” policy.
  - a) Demonstrate through actions and words your respect for neighbors, community, and the environment.
  - b) Develop a manure management plan that takes into account neighbors as well as the environment while maximizing the nutrient value of the manure.
  - c) Support the local community with your business. Buy inputs locally if feasible; use local services such as veterinarians and builders.
  - d) Support local events such as local charities, school programs, community celebrations, and scholarship programs.
4. Communicate.
  - a) Keep neighbors informed of pending changes and actions.
  - b) Conduct tours for officials and regulatory staff, tours or similar events for neighbors.
  - c) Communicate manure management plans, including times and potential locations for spreading. Determine dates or locations that should be avoided.
  - d) Evaluate the success of your public relations efforts with neighbors.
  - e) Establish a complaint system. Encourage them to contact you first before taking other actions.
  - f) When mistakes happen, take responsibility and appropriate corrective actions.
  - g) Recognize the importance of good neighbors to the long term success of your operation.
5. Use available resources and inform yourself. Consultants in the private and public sectors can help you with both technical and human relations information necessary to achieve effective community relations.

Probably the most important concept is to realize that environmental responsible behavior and good public relations will be necessary to operate successfully in the future. By careful attention to these principles it may be possible to avoid situations that could threaten the existence of your operation. It is also necessary to realize that even with the best intentions and plans, your treatment may not always be fair or as you want.

### **Projecting A Positive Visual Image**

The appearance of your livestock production facilities and farmstead is a vital component in projecting a positive image of your operation and of the industry in general. Joan Nassauer, Morse Alumni Distinguished Teaching Professor of Landscape Architecture at the University of Minnesota, suggests that to be perceived in a positive manner, livestock facilities and farmsteads

need to portray an "ecologically healthy landscape." An ecologically healthy landscape visually communicates such things as non-polluting, balanced, and in harmony with surroundings.

Viewers will connect what they feel to be good, attractive, and well cared for to ecological health. If you ask passers-by what constitutes an attractive, well cared for farmstead you might receive answers such as neat, clean, painted (white may be associated with good care), balanced, productive (as evidenced by dark green color in plants and crops), appropriate for and blended into local surroundings. To project an image of ecological health, incorporate those factors considered "good" by your viewers. In this way facilities will look "good" in a way people understand.

Ethical responsibility implies that an operation should in fact attempt to be what it appears to be. If an attempt to project a positive image is accompanied by irresponsible behavior, public trust will be destroyed.

Appearance may also be enhanced by such things as capturing heterogeneity in the landscape where possible, making non-productive areas larger, and connecting them where possible.

The actions suggested here are similar to the ways the appearance of modern manufacturing plants have been designed and landscaped to make them attractive and consistent with a variety of attractive settings.

### **Understanding the Impacts of Appearance**

It makes sense that the public would be more likely to be favorably impressed by neat and clean facilities that are aesthetically pleasing and that they would have more confidence in food products produced in such surroundings. Also it appears that much of the public feels more attached to "family farms" than to "factory farms". Therefore, given these public attitudes, facilities that are neat and clean, and that project a "family farm" image, will most likely be broadly accepted. The following drawings depict these concepts.

Figure 1. Facilities that are messy and not consistent with common values about food production are a detriment to the industry.

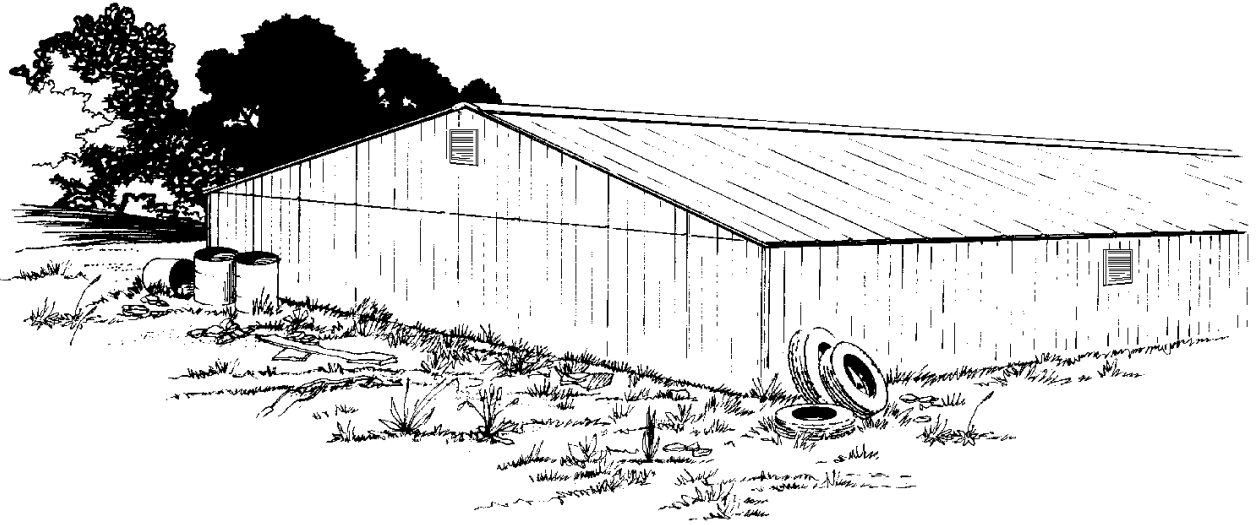


Figure 2. A neat and clean facility, but one that does not blend into the surrounding environment, projects a "factory" image.

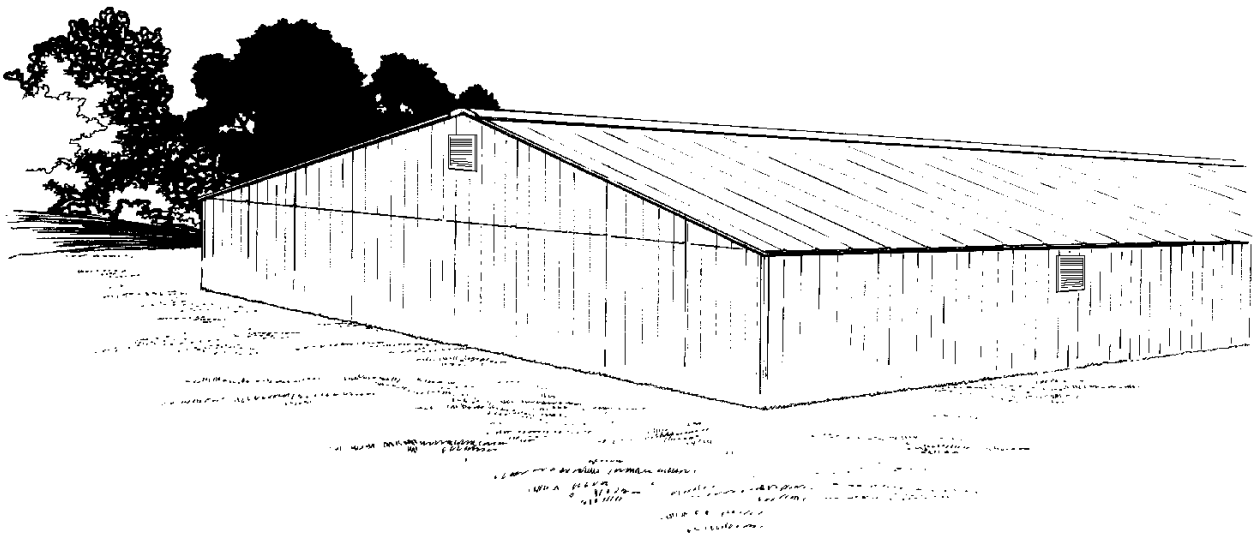


Figure 3. Landscaping improves the aesthetics swine facilities.

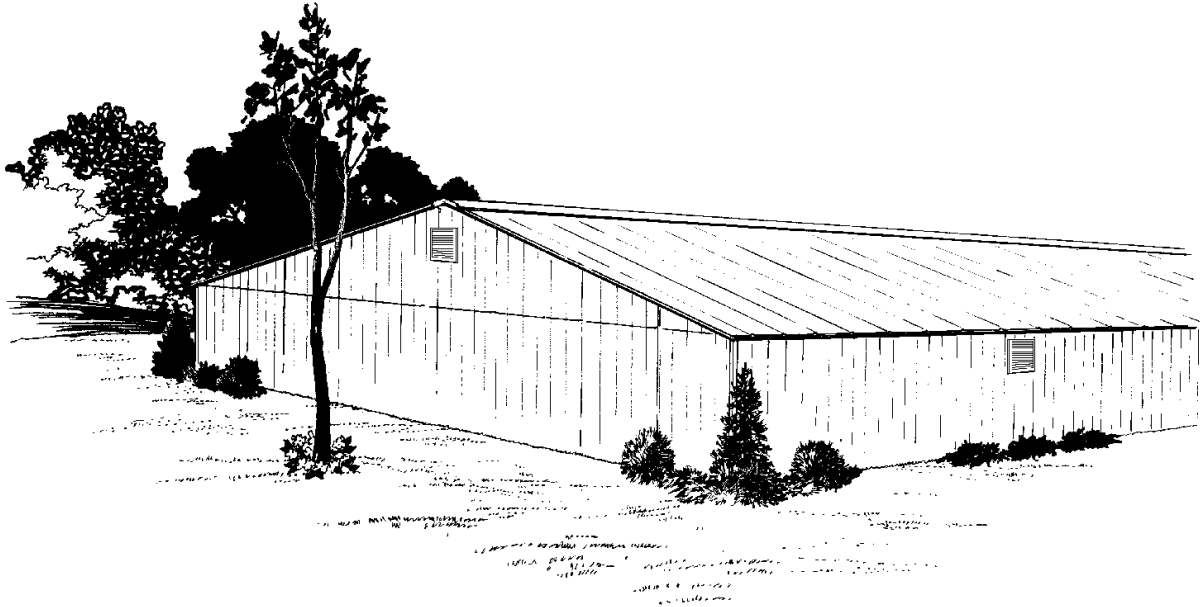
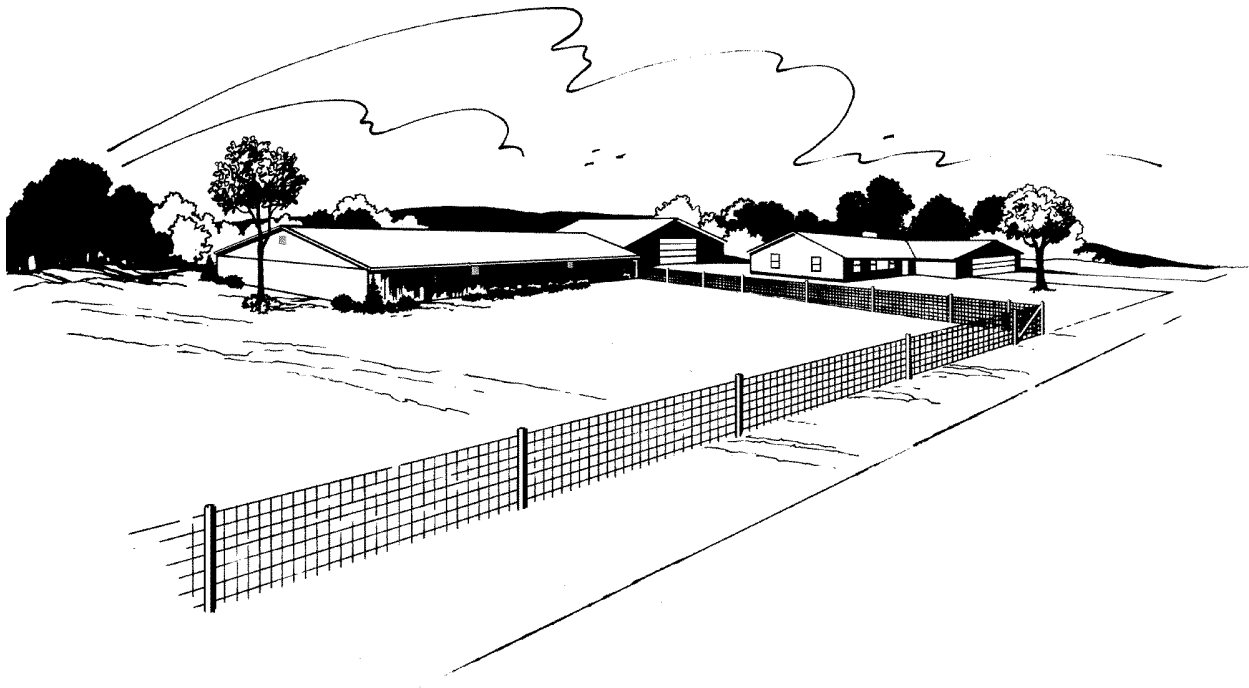


Figure 4. The same barn in a setting that is neat and clean is an environment that is consistent with the values of much of the public.



## Dealing with Conflict

Even producers who have an environmentally friendly production system and a well designed public relations plan may at sometime find themselves in conflict with individuals or communities.

Experience would suggest that some producers may have brought on conflict with their actions, while others operating within accepted standards and practices may feel "unfairly" judged and attacked. Conflict arising from differing interests, values, and perceptions is very challenging but not impossible to overcome. Producers should develop an appreciation for and some skills in dealing with conflict.

The Iowa Peace Institute suggests the following core values to guide those seeking positive outcomes in conflict situations:

- 1. Resolving conflict on the basis of all parties' interests is preferable to resolving conflict through rights or power based approaches.***  
When decisions on issues that involve conflict are made through power based approaches such as litigation and court decisions, the way may be cleared for an action to occur, such as the construction of a livestock facility. However, conflict most likely has not been eliminated, and it will likely manifest itself vigorously in other ways that may continue to plague the producer.
- 2. Decisions made by consensus are preferred over decisions made by voting, deference to authority, unilateral power plays or default.***  
Decisions that all parties can support will reduce or eliminate the basis for further conflict on the issue in question.
- 3. Effective group processes require that all members participate by sharing relevant information and by raising questions and concerns in a manner that contributes to understanding.***  
Parties involved must reach a point where trust occurs and each is honestly seeking some new agreement or situation that protects their interests to a degree that they find acceptable. Each party needs to actively seek agreement that is "win-win" rather than seeking to "defeat" the other and impose their will.

The concept of moving out of polarized conflict to some new understanding and view of the situation, or "peace," has been referred to as "transforming conflict." Louise Diamond, Ph.D., Institute for Multi-Track Diplomacy, in a paper, *Beyond Win/Win: The Heroic Journey of Conflict Transformation*, defines deep rooted conflict situations as:

"conflict-habituated systems . . . (and transforming conflict) as different from managing or resolving conflict. To transform conflict is to work systemically to change the very assumptions, beliefs, and perceptions of the parties in the conflict, as well as open doors to creative solutions and new behaviors. To transform conflict is to deal with the needs and relationship issues being expressed in the conflict situation, not just bridge different positions. To

transform conflict is to release the energy bound in the intellectual, emotional, physical, and spiritual patterns of thought and action that have built up over time, and reshape that energy into new and more positive patterns of relationship. To transform conflict is to build peace."

Most livestock producers might find bringing such commitment and energy to a conflict situation warranted in order to save a valued relationship such as a marriage, or an institution such as a church or community. The suggestion that a disagreeable neighbor should be engaged with this approach might at first be viewed as a bit extreme.

However, in some communities, the conflict between livestock producers, especially those labeled as representing a form of new, non-traditional production, and those opposed to this change, has evolved to one of a conflict-habituated system. The principles of transforming conflict should serve well in these situations. Some suggestions to consider in these situations are:

1. Even though it is difficult, move to get all parties to define and recognize their "real" interests.
2. Create awareness of, and recognize yourself, that there has to be a better way for everyone involved than continuing the conflict.
3. Recognize that conflict resolution/transformation is about relationships. Seek to create a new relationship other than what currently exists in the conflict-habituated system.
4. Understand that the move to transform the conflict requires a counter intuitive action. Continuing the fight and resistance is the intuitive response to conflict. Transforming the conflict requires moving **toward** or **with** the perceived adversary.
5. The parties need to consider what each other sees and feels, avoid hurting each other, and join their energies and efforts to seek the new solution.

Efforts to deal with conflict that include these principles will be most successful in achieving lasting results satisfactory to all parties.