

So You Want to Move to the Country?



 **North Dakota
Farm Bureau**

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Introduction

Many folks are looking to move to a more rural setting. And why not? Living in the country can be a wonderful way of life, if your expectations are in line with reality. Reality seldom measures up to the idyllic, pristine vision of rural living. The rural lifestyle can be very different from the hustle and bustle of a more urban setting. People intending to “get away from it all” may likely find they are trading one set of benefits and drawbacks for another.

In rural North Dakota, you will find working farms and ranches. You’ll also find a level of infrastructure and services generally below that provided through the collective wealth of an urban community. Many other factors make the country living experience very different from what may be found in the city.

This booklet is provided to help you make an informed decision about purchasing a home or homesite in rural North Dakota. Though it cannot convey the entirety of understanding borne from a lifetime of rural living, it can give you a glimpse of what it takes to live by what might be called the Code of Rural North Dakota Living.



Chapter I

Access

You'll enjoy lower traffic volumes on rural roads. That makes hiking, biking and the like more enjoyable. It will allow you to observe growing crops, grazing livestock and the beauty of North Dakota sunrises and sunsets. But there are many things to remember.

Rural Roads

Don't expect rural roads to be maintained at the same level as city streets. Counties and townships have primary responsibility for road maintenance in rural areas. Seldom do rural roads include the amenities found in urban settings such as: wide lanes, curb and gutters, striping and lighting. Funding to build and maintain roads in rural areas are limited, and most of that funding will come from property taxes you and your neighbors pay.

Gravel roads generate dust and dings. Generally, dust and mud are a fact of life on gravel roads. Loose gravel on these roads regularly chip vehicle paint, may at times crack windshields and can pose dangerous travel conditions. If your homesite is located along a gravel road, know that dust will invade your home and vehicles.

Whatever the design of your road, don't expect that it will be improved in the foreseeable future. Check carefully with officials of the road jurisdiction to verify any claim that a road will be paved, bridges replaced, or other improvements made in the near term.



Weather Impacts

North Dakota's ever changing weather conditions can wreak havoc with rural roads. Spring freeze/thaw cycles can subject roads to heavy damage and can even temporarily close roads. Vehicle weights are severely restricted during the spring thaw period.

A summer rainstorm can leave a gravel road muddy and slick. In extreme conditions roads may be flooded. It is advised that you not drive on any road that is covered with water as they may be washed out. When moisture is lacking, the road can become "washboarded." Both situations can make the road hazardous and require reducing travel speeds to a minimum.

In extreme winter weather, rural roads can become impassible. North Dakota prairies are subject to drifting snow that can close roads, cause

delays and create serious travel hazards. Depending on the degree and duration of drifting, it could be days before roads are cleared. Freezing rain can also cause dangerous travel conditions. Roads are generally narrower and the use of materials to alleviate icy conditions is generally not employed due to costs.

Private Drives

Access to and from public roads is regulated by the state, county or township jurisdiction responsible for the road. If planning to build, be sure to check in advance with the proper officials about authorization and placement of private drives and culverts.

Emergency Service Access

Response time of emergency service providers (sheriff, fire fighters, medical care, etc.) will likely be longer than in the city. Distances traveled and the volunteer nature of most rural services can add to response time. Under some extreme conditions, you may find that emergency response is slow and expensive.

A few rural areas are not covered by fire protection or ambulance services. Besides the obvious problems that could create, your property insurance premiums might also be higher because of it.

Pickups and Deliveries

School buses generally can reach the most rural homes, though long private drives or rural subdivision settings may force school children to walk to the pickup sites. Those trips can be long and arduous, particularly in the winter months. Consolidation of school districts in rural areas means your children's school could be half a county from your home. Learn which school district serves your area.



Mail delivery is generally available in all rural areas though timing may suffer in some locations. You may also be required to travel some distance to a pickup site. Direct, daily delivery of newspapers is not always available in rural areas. U.S. Postal delivery of newspapers is an option, but generally causes a one-day delay. Check with your newspaper of choice before assuming delivery and availability.

Standard parcel and overnight package delivery in the country may vary from city standards. Check with the carrier to find what service level can be expected.

Chapter 2

Utilities

The fresh air and sunshine in the country is plentiful and free. And when utilities are functioning properly, they help to make life in the country as comfortable and modern as anywhere. But water, sewer, electric, telephone and other utilities may be unavailable, operate at lower than urban standards, and they can often cost you more.

Locating Utilities

In order to get electric power and/or other utilities to your property, it may be necessary to cross property owned by others. It is important to make sure that the proper easements are in place or can be secured to allow lines to be built to your property. It is advisable to get legal advice prior to purchasing or securing easements.

Electric power lines, telephone lines and pipelines may cross over, under or very near to your property. Before purchasing property, be aware of any easement on the property and what that easement allows pertaining to access, maintenance and/or expansion.

At least 48 hours prior to doing any digging, contact the North Dakota One-Call System (1-800-795-0555) to locate underground utility lines. It's the law and you could be liable for any damages if you fail to make the call.



Water Supply

You will have to locate a potable supply of water adequate to serve your needs. This may be a very simple process or a very expensive, difficult task. Be advised to research this issue before purchasing!

The most common water supply in rural areas is through the use of a water well. Permits for wells may be required in some counties or a local water authority serving your area. The cost for drilling and pumping can be considerable. Be sure to use a licensed well driller. In some areas, water wells are entirely impractical or unreliable. You might have to haul and store potable water. This can be quite expensive and may prove to be unreliable.

The quality and quantity of well water can vary significantly from location to location and season to season. Most often well water will require some form of treatment. Mineral, bacterial and other quality issues should be

assessed to see what corrective measures are needed or are feasible. A water softening system is generally advisable and in some cases, chemical

treatment may be necessary. Another option may be a rural water supply. The cost to hook up to a rural supply system will depend on your proximity to a main supply pipe and possible tapping charges. You will also pay a monthly fee that may be more expensive than urban systems. Check with the water authority in your area for information on accessing a rural water system.



Sewer & Septic

Sewer service is rarely available. If available, it may be relatively expensive to connect to the system and monthly charges can exceed those of urban systems.

If sewer service is not available, you will need to use an approved septic system or other waste treatment process. These can add substantial costs to establishing your homesite. The type of soil available for a leach field will determine the functionality and cost of your system. Ask for assistance from the county health authority if one exists. You should have existing systems checked – or a new system installed – by a reliable installer.

Septic system requirements vary. Some counties have extensive regulations stipulating the type and size of the septic system that must be used. Soil conditions or proximity to wells, water bodies or aquifers may restrict where the system may be placed. Access to the septic tank for future clean out operations must also be considered along with places to dispose of the septic sludge. In some housing developments, individual septic systems may not be allowed.

Telephone

Rural telephone service can pose certain problems or limit options. You may be required to pay a substantial fee to get telephone service to your property. It may be difficult to obtain a second line for phone, fax or computer modem uses. Links to Internet provider services via phone line may require long-distance phone connections. DSL connections are not



available in many rural areas. Even cell phone service can be restricted due to greater distances to cell phone towers.

Electricity

Electric service is readily available in most rural areas. However, you may be asked to bear the costs of extending power lines to your property. Be sure to determine the proximity of your property to an electrical power supply. If you have special power requirements (single-phase vs. three-phase), it is advised to find out what level of service is available and at what cost.

Monthly fees, hook-up charges and per kilowatt rates are generally higher in rural areas. Check to see what power supplier serves the area and ask what costs you might incur.

Power outages are infrequent, but may happen more often than in the city. A loss of electric power can interrupt your well, furnace or other equipment vital to your well-being. Service may be interrupted for extended time periods. If you live in the country, you may want to consider having an alternate electric power source – an electric generator – to ensure your safety and for the protection of your household. The size of the generator will depend on your electric consumption and survival needs.



Home Heating

Natural gas lines are uncommon in rural settings. More likely is the use of liquid propane gas or heating oil for your furnace or other home heating devices. These are usually supplied by truck and stored in a tank on your property. You can rent the tank from your supplier or, in some instances, you can purchase the tank. In either case, the tank cost will increase the fuel expense, as will delivery charges.

You will need to ensure that you have an adequate gas or fuel supply to get through periods of extreme cold and periodic snowstorms when access for replenishing supplies may be limited.

If you chose to use LP Gas make sure that appliances are not set up to operate on natural gas. The appliance will not operate properly until it is converted to use LP gas.

Trash & Recycling

Routine trash removal may not be available in all rural areas. Where it is, a separate fee is most often required. Burning of trash may be prohibited if fire danger is high. Your only option may be to haul your trash to a local landfill. Recycling may be difficult. Pick-up of recycled materials may not be available and few rural areas have recycling centers.

Chapter 3

Property

Property ownership is a treasured right in rural areas. The open space may allow you to own a larger tract of land and your sense of freedom can be greater than in urban settings. However, your rural property may be subject to a myriad of issues – some common to urban areas, and some unique to rural locales.

Zoning

Most rural areas of North Dakota are zoned for agricultural use. As such, rules and regulations may not prohibit or prevent the use of land or buildings for farming or ranching. A regulation may not preclude the development of a concentrated feeding operation, however, the township or county may set reasonable standards, based on the size of the operation, to govern its location. Regulations may not prohibit the reasonable diversification or expansion of a farming or ranching operation. It is best to know how the adjacent land is being used prior to purchase.

This will help alleviate future conflicts.

Some townships or counties may zone rural areas for development. You must check with the proper authority to know whether a parcel of land may be developed and a home can be built. A building permit may be required. In a township or county that is zoned as such, that requirement may apply to all buildings and structures. Check with the county or township zoning/ planning authority for additional information.

City zoning may apply in rural areas. A municipality may impose “extraterritorial” zoning for the planned expansion of the city. It is advisable to check with city planners to see what development plans are being considered for the area you are considering.

Easements

Easements could limit how you can use your property and may require you to allow access to your property for construction and/or maintenance of roads, railroads, power lines, gas lines, water lines, sewer lines and the like. There may be easements to protect wildlife habitat, to protect a view shed, or to insure no development takes place on the property. You must find out what easements are applied to the property. Be aware of easements on nearby or adjoining property. Those easements may impose limits on the use of your property as well.

Mineral Rights

Someone else may own the mineral rights under your property. Owners of mineral rights generally have the ability to change the surface characteristics

in order to extract the minerals. The surface owner may be able to require compensation for the disturbance or may be entitled to a portion of the extracted minerals. It is important to know what minerals may be under the property and who owns them.

Property Rights

One of the greatest satisfactions of owning property is the ability to control who can access your property and when. It is your responsibility to know whose land you are on, whether or not that land is fenced or otherwise marked. A survey of the land you are considering is the only way to confirm the location of property lines.

Floodplains & Drainage

Watch for areas designated as “floodplains.” Local, state and federal regulations may prohibit or limit the types of structures that may be built in floodplains. If building is allowed, certain – often costly – modifications may be imposed. Additionally, government “flood” insurance may be required.

The property might be part of a drainage district. If so, special tax assessments to build or maintain the drainage system may be applied to the property. Again, easements may be in place to allow access for maintenance.

You may want to remove water from your property. Generally, landowners must accept the natural flow of water onto their property and natural discharge of water from their property. Contact your local water authority or soil conservation district for information. You should be cognizant that any wetland disturbance will require proper permitting prior to beginning. Be sure to obtain the proper authorization before you drain any water.

Fire Protection

Fire protection is a serious property concern. Most rural areas are served by a local, volunteer fire protection unit. Fire insurance premiums for buildings and other structures on your property may be higher due to distance to the fire station and because of the voluntary nature of the service.

Volunteers are highly trained fire fighters, but they are not full-time professionals.



Chapter 4

Nature

It can be wonderful experience living in the country, but nature can wreak havoc on the unprepared. Rural residents can experience more problems than their urban counterparts.

Storms and Wind

Severe thunderstorms, blizzards and tornadoes can be more dangerous in rural settings. Warning sirens and/or other alert systems are rare in rural areas. Because of the wide-open vastness of our state, snowstorms and blizzards can be especially hazardous.

The predominant wind direction in North Dakota is southeast or northwest depending on the season. Situate and plan your home and buildings accordingly.

Animals

Wildlife can provide many hours of viewing enjoyment. However, they can also cause serious problems. Rural development encroaches on the habitat of wildlife. These animals can be dangerous if disturbed and they may carry diseases or parasites that are harmful to humans, livestock and pets.



Deer and raccoons can raise havoc with gardens and flowerbeds. Coyotes and skunks often harbor rabies or mange. Waterfowl can lay waste to crops. If you have a problem with wildlife depredation, contact the North Dakota Game & Fish Department for assistance.

It is a good practice to enjoy any animal from a distance. This is particularly true for wildlife. A mother animal will do most anything to protect her offspring. Don't assume that baby wildlife is abandoned or needs assistance just because you cannot see the mother. She is most likely very near. It is best to leave wildlife alone.

Chapter 5 **Agriculture**

North Dakota's number one industry is agriculture. Our farmers and ranchers are some of the best in the world. They make their living from the land and provide good stewardship to insure that the land remains productive for generations to come. Owning land in the country means many of your neighbors may be farmers and ranchers.

This is Farm and Ranch Country

If you chose to live in rural North Dakota, you choose to live among farms and ranches. Do not expect government to intervene in the normal day-to-

day operations of agricultural businesses. In fact, North Dakota has “Right to Farm” legislation that helps protect normal farming practices from nuisance and liable lawsuits. This helps our farmers and ranchers continue producing food and fiber for our nation and the world.



Agricultural equipment can pose another concern. Tractors and the equipment they pull are often enormous. Certain times of the year, particularly spring and fall can be extremely busy. Farmers use secondary roads to move tillage and seeding equipment from one field to another in the spring. Haying equipment and weed control machinery can be encountered during the summer months. Combines, trucks, and swathers are on the roads during harvest. Ranchers transport livestock on these roads or use them to drive livestock to pasture. Winter months may not be exempt as the roads are used to transport farm commodities to market.

These uses can cause delays in travel time. Don't be surprised or irritated if you confront this situation as you travel rural roads. Farmers and ranchers will generally take all available steps to lessen these delays. Just as you slow down and follow the snowplow until it can pull off the road, you should extend the same caution and courtesy when following or meeting farm implements or livestock.

A Slow Moving Vehicle (SMV) sign will alert you to reduce your speed. The SMV emblem has a red-orange fluorescent triangle at its center surrounded by a highly reflective red border. Farm machinery and equipment are required to display the SMV sign.

Sights, Sounds and Smells

Having a rural residence means you are a part of farm country. Here, farmers sometimes work around the clock. Your daytime and nighttime peace and quiet can be disturbed by common agricultural practices, especially in the spring seeding and fall harvest seasons.

Tillage, harvesting, haying and the like can result in dust, particularly in dry, windy weather conditions. Some farmers burn ditches and fields to rid them of weeds and excess crop residue. Smoke from these fires can restrict visibility and the smell may be objectionable. These are only temporary, however.

Crop protection products are used in growing many of North Dakota's crops. These products are applied by licensed applicators who take precautions to handle and apply them properly.

Animals and their manure can cause objectionable odors. Ranchers use Best Management Practices (BMPs) to limit odors and field apply the manure according to established guidelines to minimize any potential pollution. Manure is an excellent organic fertilizer when properly applied, but a sensitive nose may find the odor disagreeable. Check the proximity of any potential property to neighboring livestock operations. Keep in mind the prevailing winds.

Weed Control

Before buying land you should know whether it has noxious weeds that require control. North Dakota has a noxious weed law that requires the landowner to control and/or eradicate certain weed species on their property. Some plants can be poisonous to humans, pets or livestock.

Chapter 6

Neighbors

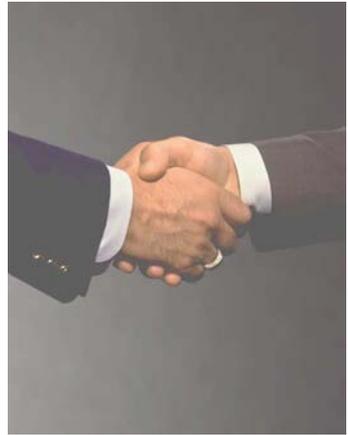
North Dakotans are generally friendly and outgoing. This is especially true in rural areas. Being a good neighbor is practiced and expected in return. They do ask that privacy and private property rights be honored and respected.

Interact

Get to know your neighbors. Meet those folks living nearby as soon as you decide to buy a home in the country, or even before. Knowing your neighbors will speed your acceptance in the community and will boost your comfort level.

Get Involved

The easiest way to get to know the people in your community is to get involved. Volunteering to help with youth activities, in school or out, is a quick way to get acquainted. Attending public meetings or offering to help with neighborhood events will indicate your willingness to become a part of the community.



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