



Is Our Town Farm Friendly?

A Skit of Rural Characters

A great way to get people talking about agriculture, rural character and land use is to host a program: IS OUR TOWN FARM FRIENDLY? using the *Checklist* and the following skit. The video and other materials in the Kit are program resources as well.

Program Preparation

Prior to the meeting make five copies of the skit and enough copies of the *Checklist* for each participant. Gather together a few props for the characters in the skit (see below) to help set the stage: a hammer and perhaps a hat for Ima, a bag of apples, a shopping bag for the Mom, a baseball cap for the Kid, a huge notebook for Nada. As the meeting is gathering, recruit four people to be actors and give them a few minutes to read over the script and become familiar with their characters. Note that Program Leader's introduction of the skit is built into the script: adapt as needed.

Follow the skit by asking the audience whether they think their town is farm friendly. Ask whether anyone can think of examples where town policies or regulations have inadvertently made it difficult for farming. Have participants complete the *Checklist* entitled IS YOUR TOWN FARM FRIENDLY? and discuss the results. Close the meeting with these questions: What can we do to make our community more farm friendly? Who needs to be involved? What do we need to do next? Use other Kit materials and contact resource agencies for assistance in making your town farm friendly.

The Skit: *Is Our Town Farm Friendly?*

The Characters: Actors read from their scripts and have fun with their parts: exaggerate for maximum effect. Note that an introduction and closure by the Program leader is built into the script.

Ima Goodfarmer, apple farmer: Reasonable guy, hardworking, independent with a strong sense of community; not quick to anger; patient, and though frustrated, remains calm through entire ordeal; has faith that things will work out okay.

Mom, a non-farming neighbor: Thrilled to be on the farm; thinks of herself as environmentally conscious; recycles; community minded; living in a rural place is a conscious decision and important to her sense of well-being; should act passionate and enthusiastic: the kind of person you're glad is on your side.

Kid, a young son or daughter: Really likes apples; had a good time recently going to farm stand on class field trip; is confused that such a nice guy as Mr. Goodfarmer would have trouble, and is very concerned.

Nada Badguy, Zoning Compliance Officer: Nada is not a bad guy – he just can't see the consequences; has a "Don't shoot me; I'm just the messenger" attitude and assumes somebody else will take care of the situation; is blind to the problems he is creating for Ima. Nada should carry a big notebook. The actor should take care not to portray Nada as bad, ignorant, or mean; he has to be believable as a well-intentioned public servant who just wants to do what's right; that is, what the rules say.

The Setting

The skit opens with Ima Goodfarmer busily hammering away on his farm stand getting it ready for opening of apple season in a few days; a bag of apples sits on the floor. A neighbor comes by with her son/daughter to buy fruit; she is very happy to be able to buy fresh fruit thinking "What a great day to live in the country"! Her son/daughter loves visiting the farm for fresh apples each fall and on school and Scout outings. Eventually they are joined by the Zoning Compliance officer, Nada Badguy who brings news that the farm stand is not in compliance with local regulations and is to be shut down immediately.

The Introduction

Program Leader: Welcome to a dramatic enactment of unintended consequences featuring Mr. Ima Goodfarmer, an apple grower, and Mr. Nada Badguy, a Zoning Compliance Officer. We join the story as Ima Goodfarmer is putting the finishing touches on a addition to his farm stand in anticipation of a good apple season to begin in earnest on the weekend. A mother and her son/daughter stop by to see if the apples are ready yet. (Exits scene)

The Dramatic Enactment

Mom: Hi Ima!

Kid: Hi Mister Goodfarmer!

Ima: Glad to see you folks. It's always nice to have neighbors stop by. Want an apple?

Mom: Thanks! I'm glad to see you have a good crop this year. Do you have any Macintosh?

Ima: You betcha! We have a bumper crop this year, and I'm looking forward to a big crowd at the farm stand this weekend. We're hoping to have our best season in a long time what with last year's drought and the frost damage the year before.

Mom: That's good news Ima. It's always a sign of fall when we see your sign down by the highway. We always want to know when the apples are ready.

Kid: Look Mom, there's the thank you note that my class sent to Mr. Goodfarmer after our school visit. We had fun learning how cider is pressed and seeing all the apple trees.

Mom: Good for you! What are you building, Ima?

Ima: I'm putting a bigger door on the farm stand so that more people can get inside. It tends to get so crowded here on weekends. We are also thinking of adding onto the back so we have a bigger sales room for more vegetables in the summer.

Mom: We are so glad your farm is here because we love to come. It is such a great part of living in the country. I remember when I was a little girl and worked on a farm: it was the best time of my life.

Ima: Well, I'm glad you folks live near my farm, because it's nice to have good customers and friendly neighbors. I grew up on this farm and things have really changed in the way we do business. When I was little, my father used to bring everything we grew into town and sell it at the general store; after I took over the orchard, things changed to where we shipped most of the crop to wholesalers out-of-town. Now we're seeing another change. People are happy to come out to the farm and buy things right here at the farm stand. So now we're expanding so folks can come to get their fresh fruit and vegetables and get a taste of clean country living while they're at it. Good for me; good for them.

Mom: You're right Ima. All of my friends like to come here. Your apples are so fresh and it's fun for everyone. You're so friendly to the kids; they always learn so much from you about the apples and how to take care of the land.

Kid: Yeah! And my Scout troop really likes camping out in the woods behind the orchard. Last year we heard a bear..... or maybe it was a deer. Whatever!

Ima: Oh look. Here comes Nada Badguy. He's an old friend of mine.

Nada: Good morning Ima. I'm glad to see you're doing such a good business. Things are looking good around here. How are the wife and kids? We missed you in church on Sunday.

Ima: Sorry we couldn't get to church on time. Our neighbors down the road are new to farming and they needed some help with a sick cow, so we went down to their place to help them, and ended up missing church.

Nada: Well I hope everything worked out with that cow. I swear Ima, sometimes you give your neighbors even *more* than the shirt off your back. Will I see you at the Rotary Club meeting on Wednesday?

Ima: Sure, you know I'm always involved in community affairs. What can I get you today, Nada? Want to try a fresh-picked Mac? (*hands Nada an apple*) What kind of apples are you looking for?

Nada: (*Takes the apple*) Thanks Ima; (*Takes a big noisy bite*) MMMMM that sure is good; nice and crispy.....As a matter of fact, I'm not here to buy anything. I'm here on official business as the Town Zoning Compliance Officer. Turns out this new building project you're doing doesn't fit these regulations. (*Holds up a big book*) It seems that if you want to change anything you have to get permission from the Planning Board by going through the site plan review process. Based on the size of your farm stand, you need to have 20 brand new parking spaces that are paved.

Ima: Are you kidding? I can't believe this. The town road you drove in here on isn't even paved. And now you're telling me I have to create a parking lot that's paved? This isn't a Shop and Save supermarket, you know: it's a farm stand!

Mom: Nada, that sounds excessive. One of the reasons I like to come to Ima's farm stand is the rural character. If you made Ima pave this parking lot, he would have to cut down those big old maple trees and it wouldn't seem like the country any more.

Nada: Don't shoot me, I'm just the messenger. I don't make the rules and I don't even pretend to understand them. I guess this is what they call progress. Anyway, I have to give you this Cease and Desist order and you'll have to close the farm stand until you solve this problem at a public hearing with the planning board.

Actors stop action and freeze like Twilight Zone. Then each character has one line to summarize the problem:

Mom: Good heavens! Nobody in town will be able to buy apples here anymore. Our women's club was going to come here this weekend and get apples to make pies for the soup kitchen.....I thought this town was farm friendly.

Kid: Oh no! I hope my Scout troop can still camp on Mr. Goodfarmer's land this weekend. I don't want the town rule makers to close this farm.....I thought this town was farm friendly.

Nada: Gosh! I don't understand what the big problem is. The town is trying to protect our rural character. We have local regulations that protect us from over-development. When we made these rules we didn't think they were anti-farming.....I thought this town was farm friendly.

Ima: By golly, I just finished picking my apple crop, and now is the *best* time of the year to sell apples. I can't afford any delays right now. I thought we had it in our Town Master Plan that we would protect rural character. Doesn't protecting rural character mean that farms can still be in business? I mean, what is rural character without farms?.....I thought this town was farm friendly.

PAUSE

Program Leader: (re-enters scene leading applause).

Well folks. What do you think? What about our town? Is our town farm friendly? Are we creating unintended problems and barriers for agricultural enterprises?

NOTE: At this point the Program Leader can begin discussion or distribute the *Farm Friendly Checklist* for participants to complete, to be followed by discussion. Conclude the meeting with a discussion of what needs to be done in order to make your town more friendly to agriculture.