

# *Rock Island County*

## **Rural Living Contract**

- **Introduction:** Life in the rural areas of the county is different from life in the city. County governments may not be able to provide the same level of service that city governments provide. To that end, we are providing you with the following information to help you make an informed decision before you purchase a parcel of land in rural Rock Island County.
1. **Agriculture:** Some of the people who feed this nation (and the world) work right here in Rock Island County. If you are going to move your family into their work area, it is important you understand how their job, work environment, and hours of operation may affect you.
    - Farmers often work around the clock, especially during planting and harvest time. It is possible that adjoining agriculture uses from lighting and noise may disturb your peace and quiet 24 hours a day.
    - Land preparation and other agricultural operations, as well as rural roads, cause dust, especially during windy and dry weather.
    - Farmers occasionally burn ditches and fields to keep them free of debris and weeds. This is a normal part of a farming operation, and this may create objectionable smoke. During these burns it may be necessary to stay inside or leave your residence for a short time if you have a sensitivity to it.
    - Chemicals (mainly fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides) are often used in agricultural activities and may be applied via irrigation systems, ground vehicles or various aircraft. You may be sensitive to these substances and some people may actually have allergic reactions. They may “drift” causing damage to your landscaping. Make sure you leave enough of a buffer area from YOUR property line to avoid damage. These are necessary tools for agricultural areas of our county, and you must be aware of/ prepared to deal with their application.
    - Farm animals are raised in the country and they can generate odors that can be very strong at times. They also make noise, draw insect populations, and sometimes get loose from their pasture or holding areas. In the city, large numbers of animals near your residence would be a nuisance, in the rural areas, your residence is the nuisance as large numbers of animals belong here. If you build a home 15 ft. from your property line, the farmer has the right to place a large number of cattle or hogs on his property. Please be aware that farmers are within their rights, and you have accepted the consequences by choosing your proximity to the property line.
    - Agriculture is an important part of the Rock Island County economy. If you choose to live in the work area of farmers, you cannot expect county government to intervene in the normal day-to-day operations of your agri-business neighbors. In fact, we are more likely to require you to stay out of his or her way as this is their workplace and you have made the decision to build a home in their work area.
    - Farmers must move their equipment between fields. Every time you are running late, a large piece of slow-moving farm equipment will be on the road in front of you. They may take up both lanes so you cannot pass. Anticipate these delays and be patient, keeping their, your, and other’s safety at the forefront.

- Farm animals can be dangerous and can attack humans. Children need to know that it may not be safe to enter pens where farm animals are kept, even the little cute ones. It is **your responsibility** to teach your children respect for livestock, property and property lines of your neighboring farmer.
- Livestock animals being herded from one location to another have the right-of-way on county roads and highways. You **MUST** yield to them even if it delays you.
- Insects may be more of a problem in the country than they are within city limits. Insects feeding on actively growing crops or emerging from cropland can migrate to landscaping and gardens adjacent to cropland. It will be your responsibility to control them if they become a nuisance.
- Farm, hay, pasture and timber ground is not open for your use to hunt, ride ATV's, etc. unless you have requested and been given permission to do so by the owner or tenant. These areas are also not to be used as dumping grounds.

2. **Access:** The fact that you can drive to your property does not necessarily guarantee that you have legal ingress/egress or that your guests and emergency service vehicles can achieve that same level of access at all times. You cannot assume that you have an automatic easement across someone else's property to enter your property. Also consider:

- Emergency response times (sheriff, fire suppression, medical care, etc.) may be much longer than in an incorporated city. Under some extreme conditions, you may find that emergency response is extremely slow due to circumstances beyond their control. Some fire, ambulance and search and rescue services in Rock Island County are volunteer and may provide limited services. Check with the departments or organizations that provide these services if you are contemplating residing in their jurisdictions.
- Rock Island County has its own road system to take care of, and there are also 18 Township road districts totaling hundreds of miles of roads, ranging from paved to unimproved dirt roads. There are also a number of roads that are Private Drives, and these may have a homeowners association to whom you pay dues, which is responsible for the maintenance of roads, bridges, plowing etc.
- Rock Island County can experience adverse weather conditions that may cause damage to roads. It is wise to determine who is responsible for the maintenance of the roads providing access to your property.
- Many large construction vehicles and some fire and rescue vehicles cannot navigate small, narrow roads. If you plan to build, it is prudent to check out construction and emergency vehicle access. Remember, it may be more expensive to build a rural residence due to delivery fees and the time required for building materials to reach your site.
- School buses travel only on maintained public roads that have been designated as school bus routes by the local school district (some subdivision roads are private). In order for your child or children to get to school, you may be responsible to drive your children to the nearest county road or designated school bus route. Please check with the appropriate school district for school locations and routes.

- In extreme weather, even the best county maintained roads could become impassable. You may miss work or appointments.
  - Dust, again, is an unpleasant fact of life for most rural residents. If your road is unpaved, it is unlikely that any one of the nineteen highway districts will pave it in the foreseeable future. Remember that unpaved roads are not always smooth and you may experience increased vehicle maintenance costs when regularly traveling on rural county roads.
  - Mail delivery may not always be available to some rural areas of the county. Ask the postmaster to describe the system for your area. This may also apply to package delivery services as well.
- 3. Services:** Water, sewer, electric, fire, telephone and other services may be unavailable or have more frequent interruptions. Repairs may take longer due to their rural nature.
- Cellular communications may be a problem in some areas of Rock Island County.
  - Sewer service is not available to sites located outside city limits. You will need to use an approved subsurface sewage (septic) system or other treatment process. The type of soil, depth to ground water or bedrock, slope, etc. will be very important in determining the cost and function of your subsurface sewage system. Ask for assistance from the Rock Island County Health Department (309-794-7061) for information on how to get a system approved or inspected.
  - Most unincorporated areas do not have access to a water supply for domestic use, so you will need to locate an alternate supply. The most common method is use of a well. The cost for drilling and pumping may be considerable and the quality and quantity of water (also known as the yield) can vary considerably from location to location and seasonally.
  - It is important to determine the proximity of electric power because it can be expensive to extend power lines to very remote areas. In addition, if you have special power requirements, it is important to know what level of service can be provided to your property. Natural Gas may not be available and Propane is more expensive.
  - Power outages can occur in outlying areas with a greater frequency than in cities. A loss of electrical power can also interrupt a private water supply from a well. Extended power outages may also cause a loss of food in freezers or refrigerators and power outages may cause problems with computers. It may be important to be able to survive temporarily in severe weather with no utilities if you live in the country.
  - Trash removal may be more expensive in rural areas. It is illegal to create your own trash dump, even on your own property. Know the cost for trash removal prior to making the decision to move into the country. In some cases, the only option may be to haul your trash to a local landfill (state and county law prohibits burning of domestic trash in a burn barrel). Recycling services may not be available in rural areas.
- 4. Your property:** There are many issues that can affect your property. It is important to research them before purchasing land in rural areas of the county.

- Easements may require you to allow the construction of roads, power lines, water lines, sewer lines, etc. across your land. There may be easements that have not been recorded by the county or as part of the original property. Check these issues carefully.
- You may be provided with a map of your property, but unless the land has been surveyed and pins placed by a licensed surveyor, you should not assume that the map is accurate.
- Fences that separate properties are sometimes misaligned with the actual property lines. A survey of the land by a licensed surveyor is the only way to confirm the location of property lines. Illinois law can require you to pay for half of your agricultural neighbors fence if it needs repaired or replaced. (Illinois law says you may be responsible for the right half of the fence line as you are facing it from your property.)
- Before you purchase that home with the beautifully manicured 5 acre yard, (or 10 acres or 2 acres) you should consider the effort required to maintain it. A large yard requires a lot of time and work, and if you decide to split your acreage to make the yard smaller, the county may not allow it. (There are areas where 40 acres is the smallest lot size allowed, and parcels of five acres or less cannot have grass higher than 12 inches.)
- The surrounding properties may not remain as they are indefinitely. If you are moving to the country on a small piece of ground, anticipate that others will do the same thing, even right next to your property. Also, be aware that vacant ground or crop ground may have cattle or hogs on it next year.
- Flowing water can be a hazard, especially to young children. Before you decide to locate your home near an active ditch, canal or other water conveyance, consider the possible danger to your family and your responsibility to take safety measures.
- If you are purchasing a parcel close to a city or within a city area of impact (1.5 miles from the city border), annexation in the future is a possibility. If you live near a school, future development is likely, and will be encouraged by the county.

**5. Mother Nature:** Residents of the county may experience more problems when the elements and earth turn unfriendly. Here are some thoughts for you to consider:

- Black ice or icy conditions on rural roadways is always a probability.
- The topography of the land can give you an indication of where the water will flow during large precipitation events. When property owners fill in natural drainages, they may cause the water that once drained naturally to drain through unwanted areas potentially causing property damage to you or your neighbor's property.

- Floodplains have been designated by the United States Geologic Survey (USGS) within the county. Portions of the county require special building considerations if located within the floodplains. It is advisable to consult Rock Island County Zoning & Building Office before buying or building.
- Nature can provide you with some wonderful neighbors. However, even harmless wildlife can cross the road unexpectedly and cause traffic accidents. Rural development encroaches on the traditional habitat of animals that may be dangerous. In general, it is best to enjoy wildlife from a distance. It is important that you handle your pets and trash properly so that they will not create problems for you and/or the wildlife.

**In Conclusion:** Rock Island County is a wonderful place to live, work, and raise a family. This contract is designed to provide information that will help enhance the quality of life here. Respect your agri-neighbor's livelihood and property, and be aware that your actions may impact your neighbors, human and otherwise. While the information presented here is intended as a guideline and an introduction into some of the realities of rural living, you may discover other issues that have not been covered by this document. We encourage you to research and examine all aspects of country living prior to moving to a rural setting so you will enjoy the country and not have any unpleasant surprises.

Rock Island County elected officials, administration and staff pride themselves on their accessibility. By participating in the publication of the Rural Living Contract, Rock Island County is in no way divesting itself of its responsibility to its constituents, rather, is attempting to make clear to constituents what those responsibilities are. We offer this publication in the sincere hope that it will help you better understand how things work in Rock Island County.

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I/we have read the above and not only understand the items mentioned, but understand the more general concept of rural living, and I/we hereby agree to live according to these concepts, whether specifically mentioned or implied.

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