NURSERY/NEIGHBORHOOD INTERACTION[1]

John R. Scholtes[2]

Abstract. --The following paper discusses a few social and political factors which a manager should evaluate about his or her site to better understand public actions and reactions which may affect your nursery operation. Examples are provided of reactive and proactive responses to situations which affect neighbors and the community. Finally, a bit of management "philosophy" is presented about being a good neighbor.

INTRODUCTION

During this presentation, I will utilize the J. Herbert Stone Nursery as an example to illustrate the factors one should examine to better understand the political and social climate within which a nursery must operate.

I will describe a few examples of reactive and pro-active efforts we have made to work with our public and neighbors.

Finally, I will share a bit of my philosophy about neighbors, and end with some concluding words of advice.

SOCIO-POLITICAL FACTORS

Each manager should develop a sense of the social and political factors which affect your site. I call this Taking Stock.

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[2]John R. Scholtes is Nursery Manager, U.S.D.A. Forest Service, J. Herbert Stone Nursery, 2606 Old Stage Road, Central Point, Oregon 97502.

Location

The J. Herbert Stone Nursery is located in Southwestern Oregon, about 32 miles north of the California border. As the crow flies, it is about 80 miles due east of the Pacific Ocean (although the road mileage to the Pacific is closer to 150 miles). The nursery is located along the western edge of a broad valley in which Medford, Oregon is the hub. There are several outlying towns; Central Point, Phoenix, Talent, White City, Jacksonville, and Ashland. These all make up a total population of over 100,000 people.

Climate

The area enjoys a mediterranean type climate with a mild wet winter, long spring with frequent rain, hot dry summer and a long fall with warm days and cool nights.

Socio-political Environment

Several factors affect the socio-political environment of the area. The climate just described lends itself to a general out-of-doors involvement and awareness by the population.

Southwestern Oregon, again due to its climate, lack of development, relatively unsettled remoteness and natural beauty led to heavy establishment of the anti-establishment in the 1960s and early 1970s.

These factors also attract persons who are affluent enough to relocate here as their place of choice for retirement. These folks are generally well informed, socially aware and pro-active as individuals and within organizations.

Major cultural facilities including the Britt festival in Jacksonville and the Ashland Shakespearean festival draw politically aware and socially conscious workers, performers, and patrons.

Nursery Facts

The nursery consists of 312 acres. It has a perimeter of approximately 20,000 linear feet. Three major county roads pass along parts of its east, south and west perimeters. There are sixteen landowners adjacent to nursery including one small gas and convenience store located on one corner of the perimeter.

Status with Community and Neighbors

The J. Herbert Stone Nursery enjoys an overall good relationship with our neighbors. This does not mean that we never get crosswise of each other once in a while, because we certainly do.

Our ability to get along has been built on a long history of informing the public. From the time that the nursery was first conceived and site selection started, Don Smith, Rogue River National Forest Supervisor (Since Retired) began meeting with civic leaders and local government officials. Later on, during Nursery development plans, public meetings were held and public comments were considered and acted upon.

One example of a concession that was agreed upon was that we would not use any form of aerial application using either fixed wing or heli- copters. Even though we have little use for this method of application, this concession has proven to be a useful proclamation when visiting with concerned citizens. Especially since our adjacent property owners utilize it freely,

REACTIVE AND PROACTIVE

We have experienced a number of instances to which we have been <u>reactive</u>.

Flaming Near One Neighbor:

Faced with a court ordered injunction on the use of herbicides, we turned to flaming as a method of weed control along our field roads and open land. One neighbor became very concerned about the possible fire hazard created by flaming near his property.

While I did not admit to any danger, I did negotiate to stop any flaming adjacent to his ownership once grasses started to cure and dry.

To provide him better assurance, I suggested that, even though we would not flame once we determined that his grass had become flammable, we would welcome a call from him letting us know when he felt it was becoming dry.

We stopped flaming at our discretion as promised. We never heard from him.

I followed up with him later in the year when I saw him. He had to think a moment and then replied how well it worked. His concern was gone.

Diesel Engine Noise

We used to grind our cull seedlings using a large tub grinder powered by a diesel engine. I must admit that I was amoured by the guttural sound of that big engine taking on power when a charge of seedlings dropped into the grinder. It reminded me of the forest and logging trucks winding up and down forest roads.

Via a phone call from a neighbor above our facility, I learned that not everyone shared my feelings about diesel engine noise. However, through additional mufflers, a check on back pressure on the manifold, additional piping and bracing, we quieted our operation. A check back with the plaintiff assured us that we were back in her good graces.

A far better approach is to be pro-active.

Fumigation

We have long been pro-active when it comes to fumigation. Our field foreman or one of his people go door to door and visit face to face with each adjacent property owner prior to fumigation each year. Procedures are explained so the neighbor will not be surprised when they see men dressed in white coveralls wearing masks with huge canisters hanging on the sides of their faces.

These personal visits explaining the process, the precautions we take and the smells they will experience, and why we need to fumigate has prevented any serious problems in the past. We hope to maintain this relationship.

Environmental Impact Statement and Integrated Pest Management

One final example of being pro-active is our Integrated Pest Management program that has resulted from an Environmental Impact Statement.

We now have folders on each pest we need to consider. Weeds, insects, fungi, and even wild geese have a folder. We have enclosed what is known about the pest; its life cycles, known control methods, and documented levels of damage.

We have set threshold levels and predetermined treatment procedures once our threshold level has been exceeded. We also have pest monitoring and treatment monitoring plans.

Through integrated pest management, we have accomplished a dramatic reduction in use of pesticides (other than fumigants) per acre of crop land. Figure 1 at the end of this paper shows the large reduction in use of pesticides after a court ordered injunction on the use of herbicides at the end of 1983. Then pesticide use started back up as we began using insecticides and fumigants without good planning and monitoring. We initiated our Integrated Pest Management program after 1987. After that date, the chart shows a steady reduction of pesticide useage on crop land through 1991. We don't expect to reach zero and we may have problems needing treatment some years. However, the chart shows that our intigrated pest management system is working.

We have an annual meeting inviting neighbors and interested persons such as the news media and local environmental groups. So far, only a few neighbors have bothered to attend but I interpret this as an indication that our efforts and openness has assured most folks that we are doing our best and not running some kind of covert operation against them and the environment.

PHILOSOPHY

Neighbors have not changed. There have always been "good" and "bad" relations between neighbors. And the probably always will.

Being nostalgic souls, most of us recall visiting over the back fence with our "good" neighbors. This process of bonding and communicating is still a good policy today. A policy that we can practice at each of our nursery sites. Realize that we are the suspect ones. We seldom live on the site. We and our crews arrive at the site in the morning, do what ever our program dictates during the day, and then we all drive off in the afternoon leaving the neighbors wandering about what they see and smell. What we do is naturally viewed critically by those folks who live in the neighborhood.

We are sometimes just as apprehensive about visiting or meeting our adjacent property owners as they are about what we are up to across the fence.

Experience has shown that overcoming this natural apprehension and visiting with each one of those owners pays off. They may not be friendly, they may still dislike our dust, smells, noise, etc. but at least we have become a face, a human being who has shown that we do care.

Rules by which to operate

Visit and inform your neighbors:
In addition:
* Write letters
* Hold open houses
* Issue news releases
* Celebrate accomplishments

Try to settle issues:
* Meet demands if you can. At least negotiate something to try to satisfy the issue.

Don't give away your basic needs.
* Do look for opportunity to change those needs to protect the environment.
* Do not agree to untested methods or Rube Goldburg solutions.

Figure 1. --Pesticide use at J. Herbert Stone Nursery