

Country Living

Code of the Urban West

By Gary Frasier

A few months ago I read in the *Denver Post* an article about the “Code of the West” developed for people that have moved from urban areas into the “country.” Many of these people are looking for open spaces and quiet living. They are looking for a rustic, secluded lifestyle.

What they do not realize is that this open space and quiet living comes at a price that they are not accustomed to. Depending upon the specific area and how “far out” they have moved, they may have to haul water, the roads are gravelled (at best), no garbage service, mail down at the corner of the County Road. Their friends do not just “drop in.” They live out too far. There may be cattle on adjacent land that tend to go where they want, perhaps into your garden or lawn. Some people have moved next to (within a few miles of) a cattle feed yard, dairy, or other large agricultural enterprise that generates dust or odors. These neighbors are now undesirable, even though they were there first.

All of a sudden, these new rural residents want the roads improved; they are rough and dusty in dry weather and muddy in the winter and spring (maybe impassable without 4-wheel drive). They want garbage pickup and other niceties that they had in the city. They don’t like the neighbor’s rooster crowing or donkey braying.

What about emergencies? With cell phones, most rural places can have a phone, even if there is no land line. If there is an emergency, you can call 911, but it may take minutes for a response vehicle to arrive. Many rural areas are serviced by

volunteer fire and rescue personnel. Many times these people are working or at home, and it takes time for them just to get to the emergency vehicles and then to travel to the site.

To counter these complaints, some rural areas have developed “Code of the West” guidelines that attempt to provide some information as to what to expect for living “in the country.” Several rural counties in Colorado, Arizona, Idaho, Wyoming, Montana, Washington, Kansas, and places in Canada have adopted the code. Some counties in Indiana and Ohio have a similar code. This “code” basically states that if you live in a rural area, there are some things you might need to know:

- If your road is unpaved, it may stay unpaved in the foreseeable future.
- In extreme weather, county-maintained roads may be impassable for periods up to several days. You may need 4-wheel-drive vehicles with chains on all 4 wheels.
- Recycling is on your own. Be happy if there is trash pickup within a mile or so.
- Repair the washing machine or dishwasher. Many repair people will charge a mileage fee just to look at it.
- Rural areas have creatures frequently referred to as pests—rattlesnakes, mountain lions, deer, elk, skunks. The rural area is their home too.
- In some areas, there is no electricity unless you have a home generator.
- Water—if you are lucky you can drill a well. In many rural

areas there is no suitable groundwater, and you have to haul all the water. This can amount to 10 gallons per day per person for cooking, drinking, and washing. If you have flush toilets and showers, 20–40 gallons per person per day is required. Many people who go to the country want to have animals. Horses use 10–12 gallons per day, sheep 1–2.5 gallons per day, and cattle 10–15 gallons per day. If you are hauling water, this can be a frequent chore—winter and summer, weekdays and weekends, holidays.

There are some people who can fit in very well with a rural environment. For others, it can be a big disappointment. I have told several people not to make a decision to move to the country in the summertime. Everything looks good then. Go to the area in the winter. See what the roads are. If you work in town, can you take driving over bumpy roads for periods of up to an hour or so twice a day?

For the right people, country living can be great. You can see the stars (if there are no clouds). Coyotes may howl, but they are part of the area. In most country areas, there is quiet (no street noises, no neighbors fighting, no kids screaming, unless they are your own). You may not have good, free TV reception, but a satellite dish can put you in contact with the world. You do not go down to the corner store for a bottle of milk. You plan your trips to town to get supplies that will last for periods of a week or more.

To some people, as the late Eddie Albert used to say on the TV show “Green Acres,” “country living is the place to be.” To others, it is a place to visit. ♦

Some Things I Learned on the Farm

Don't name a calf you plan to eat.

Country fences need to be horse high, pig tight, and bull strong.

Life is not about how fast you run, or how high you climb, but how well you bounce.

Keep skunks, lawyers, and bankers at a distance.

Life is simpler when you plow around the stumps.

Mortgaging a future crop is like saddling a wobbly colt.

A bumble bee is faster than a John Deere tractor.

Trouble with a milk cow is she won't stay milked.

Don't skinny dip with snapping turtles.

Words that soak into your ears are whispered, not yelled.

Meanness don't happen overnight.

To know how country folks are doing, look at their barns, not their houses.

Never lay an angry hand on a kid or an animal; it just ain't helpful.

Teachers, bankers, and hoot owls sleep with one eye open.

Forgive your enemies. It messes with their heads.

Don't sell your mule, buy a plow.

Two can live as cheap as one if one don't eat.

Don't corner something meaner than you.

You can catch more flies with honey than vinegar, assuming, of course, that you want to catch flies.

Man is the only critter who feels the need to label things as flowers or weeds.

It don't take a very big person to carry a grudge.

Don't go hunting with a fellow named Chug-a-Lug.

You can't unsay a cruel thing.

Every path has some puddles.

When you wallow with pigs, expect to get dirty.

The best sermons are lived, not preached.

Anonymous