

Neighbor Outreach – It’s Your Responsibility
BY Joe Browde, Project Coordinator
California Winegrape Pest Management Alliance

It’s no mystery that agriculture today differs from that of even a few years ago. For example, urbanites are rapidly moving into rural areas, increasing points of conflict often resulting from lack of knowledge and misunderstandings.

Although winegrowers are increasing uses of practices that minimize risks and preserve natural resources, this kind of information isn’t well known by the general public. Growers today should take the initiative to be their own spokesperson, reaching out to improve understandings and relationships with neighbors. Here are suggestions for doing this:

- Talk to neighbors, be considerate and courteous. Share the history of your farm and why you enjoy farming. Provide an overview of vineyard practices and challenges. Enlighten them to how you care and act to protect humans and the environment. Anticipate questions and prepare answers before asked (e.g., dusting sulfur).

	Question	Answer
What?	Is being applied?	Sulfur dust. Sulfur is approved for use on organic vineyards.
Why?	Is it applied?	Sulfur prevents powdery mildew on the grapes.
How?	Will it be applied?	It is applied with a dusting machine pulled behind the tractor. We have bought a special machine that can be turned off at row ends.
When?	Will it be applied?	Applications start in April and re-occur every 10-14 days through June. An index based on weather is used for scheduling. We dust at night because of less wind.

- Notify neighbors in advance of operations that may cause concern or interest, e.g., dusting, spraying, and harvesting. Tell them the likely interval for the work and changes in scheduled operations and why (e.g., too windy, too wet). Make compromises for simple requests but don’t make promises you can’t keep.
- Consider providing your contact information. Often, it is better for neighbors to first contact you with questions or concerns before the agricultural commissioner or police. Promptly return phone messages. Most problems can be resolved through reasonable explanations or apologies if warranted.
- Lower vineyard noise by limiting numbers of tractors in one field, buying relatively quiet equipment and keeping it in proper working order, having employees park cars away from residential areas and talk quietly during late night/early morning, and filling tanks away from neighborhoods.
- Actively participate in neighbor and community meetings, forums, and groups. This shows your commitment to the betterment of the community and enables you to affect perception and policy.

- Consider inviting neighbors to your vineyard for discussions and tours. Schedule events prior to intense activities to subtly alert them and secure their understanding and cooperation. Inviting them to a post-harvest celebration shows your appreciation for their support. Share wine and food, if feasible.

Neighbors can be your biggest headaches or greatest fans. Most conflicts arise out of lack of knowledge. Be proactive and communicate with your neighbors now even if no problems exist and ensure your reputation as good stewards of the land and role models for the community. You will be surprised with the results.