

Avoiding Spray Drift on Organic Farms

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Spray drift can have a devastating effect on an organic farm operation. It can result from ground or aerial pesticide applications that drift on to organic yards or fields by wind, by accident or by carelessness.

Prevention is the best solution to dealing with potential problems resulting from spray drift. There is no specific protocol for prevention, but generally the onus is on the organic farmer to try to make sure drift is either minimized or doesn't happen at all. There are some preventative measures that organic farmers should take every year:

- Contact all neighbours that have land adjacent to your organic land. As you well know, some "neighbours" often need to be hunted down, as they may live far away. This contact is probably the most effective thing the organic grower can do. By communicating personally with all neighbours before the growing season, the organic grower can explain how they do things and why it's important that his/her land not get sprayed. The minimum buffer is 8 metres (25 feet) between organic and conventional properties.
- Contact your certifying body to have the land location of every organic and transitional field recorded, if it isn't already.
- Contact your local Rural Municipality office. Most RMs keep a list of those who don't want to be sprayed. Besides being good information for custom applicators and other taxpayers, the RM itself will use this information when spraying for weeds, grasshoppers, mosquitoes or whatever. Organic farmers generally make an agreement with the RM to control their own roadside weeds and other pests.
- Contact the Manitoba Aerial Applicators Association (MAAA) to get on their "no fly zone" list. The MAAA contact person is Steven Kiansky at 204-324-1300 in Altona (e-mail: seas@wiband.ca). The MAAA can also tell you who the primary aerial applicators are in your area and you can then contact each one individually to inform them of your land location.
- Contact all farm input suppliers and custom applicators that operate in your area.
- Contact the Weed Supervisor for the Weed District that covers your area. If you don't know this person, your RM office can tell you (note that not all rural areas have Weed Districts).
- Contact your nearest MAFRI GO office:
<http://www.gov.mb.ca/agriculture/contact/agoffices.html>

The more people that know that you have organic land and where it is located, the better it is for everyone. There are some other good pointers and an example of a "neighbourly letter" in the website from the Northern Plains Sustainable Agriculture Society, an organic organization in North Dakota. <http://npsas.org/newsletters/spraydrift.html>

Wishing you a drift-free organic year!