



# The National Agricultural Law Center

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States' Right-To-Farm Statutes:

*Virginia*



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# A National Agricultural Law Center Research Publication

## States' Right-To-Farm Statutes: Virginia

[Va. Code Ann. §§ 3.2-300 to 3.2-302](#)

Current through the Act 2 of the 2022 Regular Session

### § 3.2-300. Definitions

As used in this chapter, unless the context requires a different meaning:

“Agricultural operation” means any operation devoted to the bona fide production of crops, or animals, or fowl including the production of fruits and vegetables of all kinds; meat, dairy, and poultry products; nuts, tobacco, nursery, and floral products; and the production and harvest of products from silviculture activity.

“Production agriculture and silviculture” means the bona fide production or harvesting of agricultural or silvicultural products but shall not include the processing of agricultural or silvicultural products or the above ground application or storage of sewage sludge.

### § 3.2-301. Right to farm; restrictive ordinances

In order to limit the circumstances under which agricultural operations may be deemed to be a nuisance, especially when nonagricultural land uses are initiated near existing agricultural operations, no locality shall adopt any ordinance that requires that a special exception or special use permit be obtained for any production agriculture or silviculture activity in an area that is zoned as an agricultural district or classification. Localities may adopt setback requirements, minimum area requirements, and other requirements that apply to land on which agriculture and silviculture activity is occurring within the locality that is zoned as an agricultural district or classification. No locality shall enact zoning ordinances that would unreasonably restrict or regulate farm structures or farming and forestry practices in an agricultural district or classification unless such restrictions bear a relationship to the health, safety, and general welfare of its citizens. This section shall become effective on April 1, 1995, and from and after that date all land zoned to an agricultural district or classification shall be in conformity with this section.

### § 3.2-302. When agricultural operations do not constitute nuisance



A. No agricultural operation or any of its appurtenances shall be or become a nuisance, private or public, if such operations are conducted in substantial compliance with any applicable best management practices in use by the operation at the time of the alleged nuisance and with any applicable laws and regulations of the Commonwealth relevant to the alleged nuisance. No action shall be brought by any person against any agricultural operation the existence of which was known or reasonably knowable when that person's use or occupancy of his property began.

The provisions of this section shall apply to any nuisance claim brought against any party that has a business relationship with the agricultural operation that is the subject of the alleged nuisance. The provisions of this section shall not apply to any action for negligence or any tort other than a nuisance.

For the purposes of this subsection, "substantial compliance" means a level of compliance with applicable best management practices, laws, or regulations such that any identified deficiency did not cause a nuisance that created a significant risk to human health or safety. Agricultural operations shall be presumed to be in substantial compliance absent a contrary showing.

B. The provisions of subsection A shall not affect or defeat the right of any person to recover damages for any injuries or damages sustained by them on account of any pollution of, or change in condition of, the waters of any stream or on the account of any overflow of lands of any such person.

C. Only persons with an ownership interest in the property allegedly affected by the nuisance may bring an action for private nuisance. Any compensatory damages awarded to any person for a private nuisance action not otherwise prohibited by this section, where the alleged nuisance emanated from an agricultural operation, shall be measured as follows:

1. For a permanent nuisance, by the reduction in fair market value of the person's property caused by the nuisance, but not to exceed the fair market value of the property; or
2. For a temporary nuisance, by the diminution of the fair rental value of the person's property.

The combined recovery from multiple actions for private nuisance brought against any agricultural operation by any person or that person's successor in interest shall not exceed the fair market value of the subject property, regardless of whether any subsequent action is brought against a different defendant than any preceding action.

D. Notwithstanding subsection C, for any nuisance claim not otherwise prohibited by this section, nothing herein shall limit any recovery



allowed under common law for physical or mental injuries that arise from such alleged nuisance and are shown by objective and documented medical evidence to have endangered life or health.

E. Any and all ordinances of any unit of local government now in effect or hereafter adopted that would make the operation of any such agricultural operation or its appurtenances a nuisance or providing for abatement thereof as a nuisance in the circumstance set forth in this section are and shall be null and void.

