



Hosting School Groups on Your Farm

FARMER CONSIDERATIONS

Why open your farm for field trips?

For many farmers, opening their farms to school groups is a daunting concept. In addition to the time, planning, and organization involved, issues of insurance and liability are usually at the forefront of considerations. Although these are important issues, the benefits can far outweigh the hassles for many farms. With a well-organized plan in place, hosting school groups can be a source of income or a key part of a marketing plan for farms. Hosting field trips can also meet a farms' goal of community service. Offering educational activities and programming on farms is an important piece of reconnecting children to their food and agricultural heritage and building future generations of citizens that care about farms and farming. Ideally farm field trips can be a source of income for farmers, while at the same time offering valuable real life experiences connecting students to food and community.

Is hosting school groups right for you and your farm?

Ask yourself the following questions to help determine the answer:

- 1. Who are my customers or who do I want them to be?** If "families" is a part of your answer, then hosting school groups may be a viable part of your business plan. By hosting children and sending them home with brochures and flyers, you'll be developing connections and potential new customer relationships with dozens of families.
- 2. Do I enjoy organizing events? Have I hosted successful tours or events on my farm? Am I or is one of my staff particularly good at the logistics of event planning?** If you answered yes to one or more of these questions, hosting school groups might be right for you. Successfully hosting school groups requires attention to detail and logistics that are very different from day to day farming. If you enjoy hosting events on your farm, you'll most likely like hosting school groups too.
- 3. Do I have a plan for how field trips will benefit my farm?** Understanding how farm field trips will benefit your farm is step one in determining if they are right for you. What do you need to charge so that the field trips are profitable to your farm? Will the field trips be a part of your marketing goals?

Preparing for Farm Field Trips

Before you begin advertising your farm as a field trip destination you may want to consider some logistics and what your focus or goals may be. If you decide that hosting farm field trips is right for you, there are many steps to preparing for successful farm field trips. Below, you'll find an outline of points to consider.



Farm Infrastructure

- Understand your parking capabilities -To cater to school groups you need to make sure there is a site in which school buses have space to turn around, load and unload. What would be the flow of traffic? How much space do you have available for car parking?
- Plan for restrooms and hand-washing. These may be permanent or temporary facilities but are a must for having a group at your farm. Make signs to clearly indicate where appropriate restrooms and/or hand-washing facilities are.
- Prepare a safe, covered place to talk with children, out of the rain and hot sun.
- Secure a space to eat lunch or a snack (can be the same covered space) or simple picnic tables.
- Be sure you have agritourism signs posted and an insurance policy that covers tours and general liability.

When exploring your farm infrastructure, be sure to ask yourself: What infrastructure do you already have in place that would work for farm field trips? What are you missing? Given your current infrastructure, how many children can you handle at one time?

Make farm field trips a part of your business plan

- Determine the real cost of farm field trips to your farm and develop farm field trip expense and income predictions. Include your time preparing for, leading, and cleaning up after the farm field trip. What do you compensate yourself or your staff for their time? What are your marketing costs? Will you make infrastructure improvements only for the purpose of hosting tours? If so, what are those costs? Will you use any materials for the field trip activities or will you give students something from the farm (a farm product) to take home? Starting with a realistic understanding of costs of farm field trips is an important starting point.
- Given the real costs of farm field trips for your farm, determine how much you need to charge per child for farm tours. Which costs (such as infrastructure improvements) can you amortize over many years? What other benefits will your farm get from hosting groups? Will you need to have a minimum group size for your tours to make them profitable?

Sharpen Your Skills

- Gain a basic understanding of children and abilities of different age groups.
- Develop some experience leading tours on your farm. Bring a group of trusted customers to the farm and try giving them a tour, invite the children of friends or family for a tour. Practicing will help you understand possibilities and challenges of hosting school groups.



- Ensure you have the time and skills to communicate successfully with teachers and or parents. Organizing school groups takes lots of planning and willingness to communicate with people frequently. Is this something you like to do and have had success with in other projects?

Assess and mark hazards. Make rain and emergency plans.

- Assess potential farm hazards – brainstorm all of the potential things that could be hazardous and fix or avoid them. Use flagging to rope off hazardous areas.
- Have a rain plan. Where will people go if it suddenly starts raining? Are there farm activities children can participate with indoors? Plan several make up rain days when teachers can come to the farm if rain causes a cancellation.
- Have a plan for emergencies. Have farm staff keep a cell phone or walkie talkie on them throughout the tour. Make sure that you have a full first aid kit easily accessible to staff.
- Make a list of “rules” specific to your farm and share them with staff and volunteers to cover with teachers and students. The rules can be framed in a positive way, but be sure to reiterate important safety rules (a.k.a. Don’t stand behind the donkey, pick up the rooster, etc.).

In 2005 the NC legislature passed “Limited Liability Arising from Certain Agritourism Activities”, a law intended to discourage lawsuits against agritourism operators. Signs were recommended as a way to make participants or visitors aware of the inherent risks of agritourism activities. For more information about this legislation, go to the limited liability section of the NCDA agritourism page www.ncagr.com/agritourism . For more information about how to purchase limited liability signage for your farm go to the NC Agritourism Networking Association page http://www.ncsu.edu/project/calscommblogs/archives/2005/12/agritoursim_ass.html.

Leading Tours

- Determine how you would like students to tour your farm. What points of interest on the farm do you want to highlight? What activities will you prepare for students? What age group(s) would you like to work with?
- Plan interactive activities: taste tests or cooking demos, art activities, hiking, farm tasks, demonstrations (milking, harvesting, cheese production, wool processing, etc.). Consider breaking large groups into two or three smaller groups that rotate through activities.
- Remember that folks are visiting to learn about how food is grown and to meet you! This is a great opportunity to build relationships with members of the community who are interested in purchasing local foods.
- Talk slowly and loudly – be sure everyone can hear you.
- Send students home with a farm brochure or flyer to share with their parents and include ways to engage with your farm again – an invitation to a farm dinner or class, a coupon for your product at market. Give them a reason to come back and support you again.

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Farm Staff

- If interns or farm staff will assist with leading farm field trips/tours, be sure to train them on working with children and give them as much information as possible to share with visitors. Go over the information, history, stories, activities to cover. Share ideas among farm staff.
- Be sure your staff knows about logistics. Tell them where guests should park, how long the farm visit is scheduled to take and where to find restrooms, hand-washing, products for sale, etc. Also let them know if there are buildings or areas you do not want guests to enter.
- Ask your staff to take a few pictures during the farm field trip. You may want to use them for marketing in the future. Make sure to check with teachers before snapping photos.

After the Farm Field Trip

- Reflect on what went well and what did not and record this information for future reference.
- Provide the teacher or chaperones with evaluation cards to complete. Use every farm field trip as an opportunity to gain information that will help you improve future tours!

MARKETING YOUR FARM TO SCHOOLS

Now that you have a farm field trip program and plan for your farm, you'll need to market your services to teachers, schools, and parents. We have included several strategies for getting the word out about your farm field trips.

- Create a farm field trip brochure or flyer that clearly describes your farm and your farm field trips.
- Post information about your farm field trips on your website.
- Make a list of all the teachers you know personally. Send them all letters or emails introducing them to your farm field trip program. Include your flyer or brochure and direct teachers to your website.
- Display your brochures or flyers in places where you sell your products, whether that means putting them out at a tailgate market or passing them along to restaurant owners or grocers you work with.
- Identify the schools in your community who may want to participate in a farm field trip. Ask the principle or director of the school if you give a presentation at a teacher's meeting.
- Put up brochures on bulletin boards in schools and teachers' lounges.



COMMUNICATING WITH TEACHERS

Be sure to communicate all farm tour details with the teacher or chaperone extensively. Below, we have listed several points you should be sure to cover with teachers.

- Clearly communicate what you offer. How much does your farm field trip cost per child/chaperone? What activities do you offer? How long does your farm field trip last? What months/weeks of the year do you offer farm field trips and on what days of the week?
- How many children will be going on the field trip? What is their age/grade level? What will their transportation be? A bus? Vans? Multiple cars? Communicate details about where to park and clearly designate parking areas.
- Is there anything in particular he/she wants the children to see or learn? A particular agricultural practice or animal? Tell the teacher what you can and cannot do, be very clear about what you offer.
- How will the teacher integrate the farm trip into classroom studies?
- Will they bring a snack or lunch to the farm?
- Does the class have any children in wheelchairs or with other special needs that the farm would need to accommodate?
- Communicate your policy/plan for inclement weather with the teacher so he/she fully understands what will happen if it rains/snows. (It's a good idea to discuss this with your farmer before the trip.)
- How many chaperones will attend with the group? Is there a cost for chaperones?
- Suggest that teachers and students bring:
 - Good sun hats
 - Sturdy shoes (no open toes)
 - Water bottles
 - Wind parkas or rain gear (if rain is likely)
 - Notebooks, art paper, pens
 - Recyclable or reusable eating utensils and plates
 - A bag lunch (minimal waste please)
 - Clothes they can get dirty
 - Weather appropriate clothes





EXAMPLES OF FARM FIELD TRIP ACTIVITIES

- You pick – berries, apples, and even carrots and green beans!
- Farming demonstrations – sheep shearing, spinning wool, grinding corn, sheep herding, milking
- Learn about and interact with farm animals
- Helping with farm tasks and chores—harvesting potatoes, planting onions, watering, etc.
- Planting seeds in a cup to take home
- Soil explorations
- Taste testing/cooking
- Storytelling
- Corn maze/ Hay maze (younger children)
- Wagon rides
- Pollination activities/games
- Observational bee hives
- Heritage activities - seed saving, weaving, quilting, doll making
- Picnics
- Arts and Crafts Projects
- Cut your own flowers
- Square dancing
- Scavenger hunts
- Bird watching
- Hiking/ Nature walks



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