

Farm Field Trips as a Source of Farm Income

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 that farmers must consider, the benefits can outweigh these hassles. If a farmer is interested in farm field trips as a source of income it can be a viable supplement if there is a market in their community. Urban and rural students alike are disconnected from where their food comes from and lack experiences on a farm. 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.

Before you begin

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.

What you will need:

- **A Plan**-What activities do you plan to do?
 - What age group(s) would you like to work with?
 - What do you plan to charge per child? Per group?
 - Do you plan on having a group minimum or maximum?
 - Make a rain plan – have strategies for handling surprise weather changes and a cancellation policy due to weather.

The more specific your plans are for your farm field trips the smoother they will run.

- **Personnel** - How many groups do you expect to serve during a season? Are you and your family capable of providing the time for each group or does seasonal help need to be hired? Personnel can sometime be difficult to find on a seasonal basis, depending on the hours you plan to be open for visitors and the number of groups you can or are able to manage.
- **Parking** -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?
- **Facilities** -At a minimum you will need a bathroom available. Many farms rent port-a-potties. If students will be petting farm animals or eating food, sites for hand washing should also be made easily accessible.

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- **Insurance** – Find out what activities you are covered for and plan accordingly. Students may be covered through their schools. You may want to ask teachers to provide a letter from the school or school board saying the schools liability insurance covers students during field trips.

In 2005 the NC legislature passes “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 .

Approaching Schools

Typically teachers are going to be interested in field trips during the spring and fall months, unless you have some greenhouse or indoor programming available. Word of mouth is probably the best advertising in the school community. To inform teachers of new opportunities available you may want to send a brochure or flier, along with a cover letter, to have posted in the teachers lounge or office. Other avenues for advertising may include distributing brochures at local events or presenting to staff/PTO meetings. Teachers at public schools in this area are often limited to two field trips a year, and have their favorite sites established. Having a unique focus, a wide range of options and activities and correlated to standard course of study objectives may be ways to attract groups to your farm.

Communicating with teachers

It is important to establish good lines of communication with teachers so that they know what to expect when they come to your farm and you understand their needs and expectations. Talk with teachers directly or send out a letter clarifying the number of adults you may want or need on the trip and what their role should be, when and where students will be eating lunch or snack, your cancellation policy in case of rain or inclement weather, and rules for your farm. Ask about allergies or any special needs students and discuss how you might accommodate them. Make sure you both understand the timeframe for the field trip (most field trips range from 1-2½ hours) and if that includes time for lunch or not. Laying out expectations and clarifying details will make field trips run more smoothly and be more enjoyable for everyone involved.

Creating an Educational Experience – what schools are looking for

Schools are looking for hands-on experiences for students that they can not offer in a classroom setting. The more field trips are tied to educational standards and requirements the more appealing they are for teachers. Some farms go as far as creating farm activities that are designed to cover standards for particular subjects or grade levels. This can be as simple as incorporating math concepts of measurement when planning the spacing of seeds or as in depth as preparing pre and post activities for teachers to tie the field trip into classroom studies. The

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most important part of creating an educational experience for students is that it is hands on and gives students a true farm experience. Having a variety of activities for different age groups can make a field trip a unique learning experience. For more information including suggested activities, safety and group management tips, and examples of evaluation or waiver forms visit: <http://www.caff.org/programs/f2sManual.shtml>

Some programs include one or more of the following:

- Wagon rides
- Observational bee hive
- Farm animals
- Storytelling
- Take home a pumpkin/plant
- Planting seeds and take them home
- Corn maze
- Hay maze (younger children)
- You pick – berries/apples
- Pollination activities/games
- Heritage activities - seed saving, weaving, quilting, doll making
- Pony rides/horseback riding
- Picnic shelter/area
- Agricultural classes
- Farm tours
- Produce/product stands
- Taste testing/cooking
- Gifts/souvenirs
- Seasonal activities – pumpkin carving/egg painting
- Campfires
- Cut your own flowers
- Face painting
- Square dancing
- Scavenger hunts
- Bird watching
- Hiking
- Nature walks
- Farming demonstrations – sheep shearing, spinning wool, grinding corn, sheep herding, milking
- Pressing cider
- Farm/garden chores
- Sketching and painting
- Fishing

For more information about creating educational programming for your farm, please contact:

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