



How to Make a Local Farm a Classroom for a Day

A WSU King County Extension Fact Sheet

Organizing a school field trip to a local farm is a great way to expose kids to the local food system, learn, and have fun at the same time. Field trips help kids identify nutritious, wholesome food and encourage them to begin connecting local farms and farmers with good food. Plus, field trips have the added advantage of being interactive and fun for kids! This fact sheet provides tips and guidelines to assist with planning a successful farm field trip. Planning considerations include timing your farm visit, finding a farm to visit, meeting school requirements, getting to the farm, understanding farm etiquette, activities and their safety measures, and identifying educational themes. Whether you are a teacher, farmer, parent or community member interested in helping kids learn about farming, you will find helpful information here.

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Timing

Early fall is the best time for a farm field trip because a wide variety of crops are still in the ground and it is the end of the growing season when things are calmer for farmers. Although it is early, it is important to contact farmers in early June (before the end of the school year) to begin planning a fall field trip. Teachers should be contacted before summer break. Teachers need to be alerted before the end of the school year so that they can start planning the field trip as soon as school starts in the fall. Many schools plan a fall pumpkin field trip early in the school year anyway, so it should be easy for the school to accommodate an outing.

Field trips can also be planned for spring. Spring field trips can highlight soil preparation, plowing, sowing seeds, and planting. For a spring field trip, contact with both the farmer and teacher should be made in the fall or during the first quarter of the school year so that there's adequate planning time.

Finding a Farm

It is important to find an appropriate farm to visit -- one that is kid-friendly and enthusiastic about hosting school visits. Often farms that are already set up for visitors or agri-tourism are good candidates for field trips. Be sure to ask the farmer ahead of time what facilities are provided on the farm and how many students they can accommodate; you'll likely need restrooms, hand washing areas, and a covered area for lunch.

School Requirements

Once you have found a farm to visit, there are several school requirements that must be considered.

Permission Form

All students need to return a parent or guardian-signed permission form in order to attend field trips. The form should cover liability issues that may arise. Many schools have a standard field trip permission form.

Photo Release Statement

A photo release statement should be included on the permission form if you plan on taking pictures. Specific wording about photos can often be added to permission forms. It is a good idea to have two signature areas on the slip so that parents who do not want their child photographed can still allow their child to go on the field trip. If you plan on taking photos, it is a good idea for the teachers to determine a means for distinguishing students who should not be photographed.

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Chaperones

The school should arrange for an adequate number of chaperones. Older students may require fewer chaperones than K-2 students.

Lunch

Arrange for students to bring lunch from home or have the school provide a sack lunch. Find out whether the farm is able to provide drinking water, and if not, include water in the sack lunch. Talk with the farmer about the garbage that will be generated from lunch, and be prepared to bring garbage bags to carry with you. It is also important to ask the farmer to identify a covered space for lunch in case of rain.

Transportation

Teachers and administrators should know who to contact to secure busses. Bussing is the largest financial consideration. For example, the cost of taking students from an elementary school in White Center to a farm in Fall City averaged \$250 (in 2005). Grouping classes together could lower costs—five classes, or 130 students and chaperones, fill roughly two busses. However, having more than 130 students on a field trip can be very difficult. Grants may be available to fund transportation: Steps (STEPS to a Healthier US), PTA, private foundations or businesses are examples of some potential funding sources

It is also very important to plan and discuss with the farmer ahead of time where to park the school busses.

Bus Travel

Establish early on how long it will take to travel to and from the farm, including arrival and departure times. This will be helpful in determining the activity schedule for the farm visit.

On the Farm

Farm Rules and Safety

Ask farmers to provide a list of farm rules at least a week before the visit. Teachers need to communicate the farm rules with students prior to the visit and again at the farm before activities begin.

Activities at the farm

Although some farmers may like to lead activities for kids, field trip organizers and teachers should be prepared to lead the activities while at the farm.

Here are some suggested activities: pressing cider; identifying and washing vegetables; making scarecrows; petting (when at eye level), feeding and drawing farm animals; learning about bees; planting, transplanting or harvesting; pruning or weeding; creating a salad bar and tasting; going on a hayride; composting; weaving or spinning; and running activities (through corn rows). These activities may help build vocabulary and encourage students to work in groups. Also, a scavenger hunt may incorporate school learning concepts and invite students to interact with the farm.

Suggested Activity Schedule

Once you know the bussing schedule, you will be able to determine the length of each activity. On average, three to four hours are spent at the farm. Thirty minutes per activity and a 1-hour lunch break works well. Walking distances should be short in order to keep the rotation schedule. The farmer needs to have information about each rotation and each activity, including a schedule for the day.

Prior to the farm visit the farmers and teachers should discuss and plan activities to ensure that proper equipment is available. For example, if you have activities like drawing, make sure that you bring the supplies. It is a good idea to plan an alternative activity schedule in case of rain. You will also need a method, such as the use of an air horn, for switching activities.

Age Considerations

To prepare for appropriate farm activities, consider the age and grade level of students participating. In general, shorter, simpler activities are best for younger students. Even a simple task like weeding can be adapted for different age levels -- for example young children are better suited to clearing away big weeds, whereas weeding in beds may be more appropriate for older children.

Farmer Compensation

Farmers work long and hard to produce their products, so they should be compensated, whenever possible. Work with the farmer to determine this cost and the payment method; both their time and any product students take from the farm should be compensated for.

Restrooms and Hand Washing

Don't forget to ask the farmer if restroom and hand-washing facilities are available. Soap, water and paper towels are the ideal facilities for hand washing, especially when there is visible dirt on the skin. An alternative, however, is hand sanitizer, but note that it should be 62% or more alcohol to be effective. Hand sanitizers do not work as well when there is visible dirt on the skin because they do not release and rinse away dirt as occurs with soap and water washing.

"Kids get excited when they try nutritious new food and they like it. They often try out the food at home."

Gail Topper, ELL Kindergarten teacher at White Center Elementary School

Resources

A Farmer's Guide to Hosting Farm Visits for Children

A project of the Center for Urban Education about Sustainable Agriculture (CUESA). 1998.
www.sarep.ucdavis.edu/Grants/Reports/Kraus/97-36FarmersGuide.htm

Child Care Health Program Summer Safety -- Field Trips

Provides suggestions for developing a field trip safety plan. www.kingcounty.gov/health/childcare/fieldtrip.htm

Puget Sound Fresh Farm Guide

Lists farms and farmers' markets as well as products grown by season. www.pugetsoundfresh.org

Farms

The following local farms have expressed an interest in hosting a field trip or have hosted in the past. Be sure to contact them to find out if they are available and a good fit for your visit.

Deborah Arenth -- Fall City Farm
3636 Neal Road
Fall City, WA 98024
425-222-4553; daarenth@centurytel.net

Erick Haakenson -- Jubilee Farm
229 W. Snoqualmie River Rd. NE
Carnation, WA 98014
425-222-3738; jubileefarm@hotmail.com

Andrew Stout-- Full Circle Farm
P.O Box 608
Carnation, WA 98014
425-333-4677; info@fullcirclefarm.com

Susan Beckler-- Mosby Brothers Farm
127 SE Green Valley Road
Auburn, WA 98092
(253) 939-7666; mosbyfarms@earthlink.net

Carolyn N Elliott-- Trees 'n Bees, Inc.

PO Box 1796
Auburn WA 98071
253-939-1149; info@treesnbees.com

Roger Calhoon
The South 47 Farm
Redmond, WA 98052
www.south47farm.com

Cindi Stinson, Education Coordinator, 425-753-0756
Kelsey Creek Farm
410 130th PL SE
Bellevue, WA 98005
For information regarding animal viewing, farm tours, or children's programs, call 425-452-7688.

Considerations for choosing a farm

- Has the farm hosted field trips in the past?
- Do they have restrooms and hand washing facilities?
- Is there a covered area for gathering or eating lunch?
- Is there a place to park busses?
- What kinds of activities are available?
- What kinds of crops and animals live there?
- What time of day is best for them?

See list of potential farms to contact at the end of this document.

Examples of Farm Rules

- Keep your feet on the ground.
- Go through a gate only if you are invited.
- Don't pull on the animals.
- Observe but don't surround or pick up any animals.
- Don't pick any fruits or vegetables (unless instructed to do so).
- Stay away from and do not touch electric fences.
- Listen when someone is talking.
- Scream and run only in open spaces.
- Only pick pumpkins as big as your head.
- Stay away from hoop houses.

Essential Academic Learning Requirements (EALRs)

Selected Washington State Science and Health & Fitness Essential Academic Learning Requirements (EALRs) that can be met through farm field trips can be downloaded at:

<http://www.king.wsu.edu/foodandfarms/farmtoschool.htm>. Learning activities on farm fieldtrips are likely to fit these identified EALRs. Use them to help plan your activities and schedule on the farm.

Written by S. Kantor and A. Meyer. WSU King County Extension. 2007.

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Disclaimer: WSU King County Extension intends no endorsement of any businesses listed in this fact sheet, nor implies criticism of unnamed businesses.

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