



Farming and Countryside

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Definition

Farms are as varied as the food we eat, providing opportunities for learning both in a formal context and as an opportunity for enhancing the social and emotional aspects of development. They may focus on livestock or arable production, or a combination, and be self-contained units or part of huge estates.

There are also a number that have developed as community and city farms. These may be working farms, or smaller organisations that form a part of a community which can be visited by schools.

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Learning opportunities

Every aspect of a visit to a farm gives opportunities for both direct and indirect learning, to be surrounded by the sights, sounds, and the unique smells of a farm. A visit to a farm gives young people the opportunity to understand where the food we eat comes from, and an understanding how food production affects the countryside.

Farms offer many unique learning opportunities, from the power of simple first-hand experiences, such as witnessing the birth of a lamb in spring or walking through a field of wheat which stretches to the horizon, to getting to grips with microbes in action in a dairy as milk turns into cheese, and getting a glimpse into the many varied careers involved in keeping the countryside flourishing.

A farm visit might focus on:

- ‘from field to plate’ — the journey made in the production of one food item such as milk, wheat or potatoes
- the impact on the landscape of farming operations
- the people and the diversity of farming roles — from agronomist to game-keeper, from agricultural engineer to shepherd



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- farm technology
- farming methods, perhaps comparing organic with conventional farming
- the natural environment
- geography and map work.

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Range of provision

The farm you choose may offer some or even all of these learning opportunities. If it is a small farm, you may work with the farmer on your visit; if an estate, perhaps one of the farm workers or the estate manager. Farmers across the country welcome groups onto their farms to give them an opportunity to share their passion for the food and animals under their care.

In addition to farm visits there are country and county shows, organised both on local and regional levels. These may be either open to the public, such as the Royal Show in July each year, or those organised by local agricultural societies.

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Learning support

Many farms offer groups materials they have produced to support a visit to the farm, be this in the form of worksheets or activities to be carried out during their visit or on return to the classroom.

Farming and Countryside Education (FACE) offers access to resources through its website and its network of regional education coordinators. It also provides signposts to many different organisations who offer support both in terms of resources to support your visit and other possible visits by people to the school or setting.

There are also shows run specifically for schools such as the show organised by the Countryside Foundation for Education and the Suffolk Agricultural Association.

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More guidance for farm visits

Farm visits can play a valuable part in the education and development of young people. They are invariably enjoyable experiences, during which younger children in particular develop their



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understanding of where food comes from and the rural environment. When organised in accordance with sensible guidelines, ill-health as a consequence of a visit to an open farm is unusual.

Check that the farm is well-managed; that it has a good reputation for safety standards and animal welfare; and that it maintains good washing facilities, clean grounds and public areas. This is most effectively done at a preliminary visit.

Farms can be dangerous even for the people who work on them. Taking young people to a farm should be carefully planned. The risks to be assessed should include those arising from the misuse of farm machinery and the hazards associated with *E coli 0157* and other infections.

There is a seasonal increase in the number of cases of *E coli 0157* infection, and there is a link between farm visits and infection in young people. This means that some simple and sensible precautions should be taken.

The vast majority of accidents to young people involve the farming family **and not visiting groups**. Of these accidents, moving vehicles and open slurry pools have proved to be significant hazards.

Group Leaders should check the provision at the farm to ensure that:

- eating areas are separate from those where there is any contact with animals
- there are adequate clean and well-maintained washing facilities
- there is clear information for visitors on the risks and the precautions to take
- slurry pools and sheep dips are fenced off and areas containing chemicals are secured
- there are traffic-free areas for groups to meet and be briefed
- supervision ratios have been risk-assessed, taking into account the age and ability of group members
- there is adequate trained adult supervision wherever young people can come into contact with animals and need to wash their hands
- all young people wash their hands thoroughly, immediately after touching animals and before any eating or drinking
- on leaving the farm, wellingtons are cleaned and hands washed.

Never let young people:

- place their faces against the animals
- bite their nails, suck their fingers or put their hands in their mouths



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- eat or drink while going round the farm
- eat or drink until they have washed their hands
- sample any animal foodstuffs
- drink from farm taps (other than in designated public facilities)
- touch animal droppings — if they do, hands must be washed
- ride on vehicles which have not been modified to carry passengers
- play on tractors or other machines
- play in the farm area, or in other areas which are out of bounds such as silos, slurry pits etc.

Further information can be found via the FACE website from which the CEVAS (Countryside Education Visits Accreditation Scheme) site can be accessed, together with useful resources such as the HSE Agricultural Information Sheet AISNo 23, Avoiding Ill Health at Open Farms.

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Farming and Countryside Web resources

www.face-online.org.uk

Farming and Countryside Education (FACE) is a national charity working with schools, farms and member organisations. It aims to stimulate interest and excitement in young people and teachers through visiting and understanding the countryside. The site offers a wealth of resources to request or download, including farm profiles, and *Why Farming Matters*, available both for primary and secondary schools. Guidance and reassurance for teachers to help ensure that a trip will be well-planned and safe can be found on the 'farm visits' pages within the resources section.

www.farmgarden.org.uk

The Federation of City Farms and Gardens represents the many community-owned farms and community gardens across the country. These are mainly found in urban areas and range from small vegetable plots to larger farms with a range of animals. Many will have an education officer eager to work with schools.

www.defra.gov.uk

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs' website pages on Walks and Rides list details and maps for more than 1800 walks, rides and areas of open access provided under the Countryside Stewardship, Environmentally Sensitive Areas and Environmental Stewardship Schemes. There are also links to farms that can be visited and details of the Growing Schools project.

www.teachernet.gov.uk/growingschools/

Growing Schools is a government programme which aims to encourage and inspire all schools to use the outdoor classroom, both within and beyond the school grounds, as a context for learning across the curriculum. It focuses in particular on food, farming and the countryside. The website has extensive resources with links to places to visit, news and events.

www.countrysidefoundation.org.uk

The Countryside Foundation for Education aims to provide opportunities for schools to experience all aspects of the countryside by organising events specifically for schools; see also www.countrysidelive.org.uk.



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www.leafmarque.com/leafuk/consumers/visit.asp

Linking environment and farming (LEAF) is a national organisation which promotes a system of farming that balances environmental concerns and the needs of the farm as a business through integrated farm management. Many of the member farms are keen to work with schools to help arrange visits.

www.soilassociation.org/web/sa/saweb.nsf/farmshome!openform&cat=all

The Soil Association is the national body overseeing organic farming in the UK. Many of its farms across the country are keen to host school visits. The association has a number of education officers who may be able to help arrange a visit to your school.

www.nfuonline.com/documents/Publications/farm_food-country_proofs_30_03.pdf

Farm, Food and Countryside is an online publication produced by the NFU to help develop a deeper and more balanced understanding of the countryside.

www.tractorman.biz

This is a unique resource giving cross-curricular ideas based around the tractor. The resources have been designed to promote a greater understanding of the tractor, not just as simply a piece of machinery but to promote further investigation.

www.grainchain.com

This site has been produced by the Home Grown Cereals Authority (HGCA) to help young people understand how their food is produced. It suggests ways to investigate food in the classroom with a number of resources that can be ordered free through the site.

www.potatoesforschools.org.uk

This site is produced by the Potato Council.

www.buzzgame.org.uk

This is an online resource produced to help young people understand the challenges farmers face when balancing different factors.

www.countrytrust.org.uk

The Country Trust is a small organisation which aims to arrange for schools from inner-city areas to visit farms and estates and to come into contact with those working in the countryside.

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