

- Where visitors might see and use the product.
- How what the consumer wants influences what is produced.
- Animal husbandry as a business. (This is how we earn our income.)
- Technology and new techniques used in the operation (computers, genetics, modern equipment, etc.)
- Environmentally-friendly activities on the farm; farm as ecosystem and wildlife habitat.
- Weather and seasonal cycles.
- Any community service the operation might be involved in.

**LEARN  
HAVE FUN  
BE SAFE**



### Introduction

One of the best ways for students to learn about production agriculture (farming and ranching) and producers (farmers and ranchers) is for them to visit a working farm. It allows them to gather first-hand information and to talk directly to the people who know about agriculture. At the same time they are developing the skills of an independent learner as they plan, question, observe, record and discuss.

This document provides some general guidelines and ideas regarding the planning and execution of hosting a field trip to your farm. A farm field trip is a great culminating experience to any in-school program you may offer to local schools. The specifics of a trip must be clear to all parties involved to assure it meets any expectations and satisfies the needs of the participating students. Specific examples cited may not fit the level at which you work, but ideas can be easily adapted.

Although fewer than 2 percent of the people in the United States are actual producers, nearly 20 percent of jobs in the country are directly related to the food industry. While a farm field trip will help students understand and appreciate the production of food, fiber and fuel, you may wish to also encourage a school visit to one of the many industries or businesses related to agriculture as an extended learning opportunity (i.e ethanol plant, feed mill or elevator, research center, grocery warehouse, plant nursery or greenhouse, etc.)



[www.mda.state.mn.us/maitc](http://www.mda.state.mn.us/maitc)

### Core Objectives for the Producer

To provide a real-life learning experience for both students and teachers; satisfy your personal desire to be a "champion" for agriculture and promote agricultural literacy; possibly offer a "valued-added" sales opportunity if you have a pick-your-own, farm market or direct marketing operation; to use the field trip as a culminating activity to a recent school presentation/program.

### Hosting Kids and Families

#### Know why you want visitors

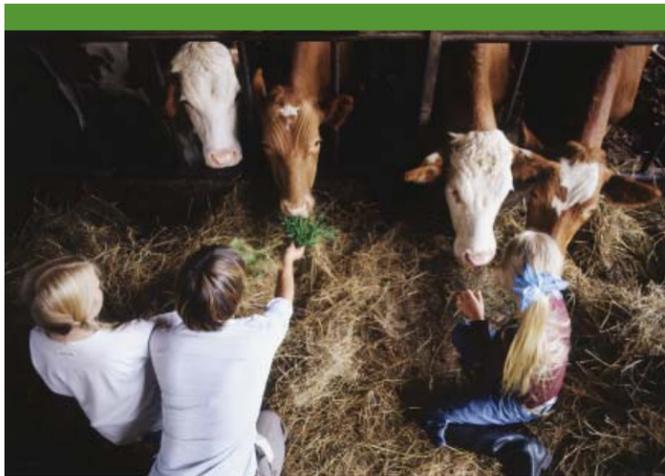
- Know your objectives and write them down.
- Who do you want to come?
- What do you want people to know, do, feel when they leave?
- How will your activities lead to this?

#### Set the stage

##### First Impressions

Drive up to your own facility, as though you have never been there before.

- What do you see?
- What first draws the eye?
- What is the general impression?
- What are the best features to set the ambiance? (i.e. crops, animals, barns, yard, picnic benches, flowers, interesting signs, lawn displays)
- Are there visual distractions? (junk, unpainted buildings)
- Is there an organizational flow? (Signs-parking, what's here, where to start, etc.)
- Are there obvious safety issues?
- What do you have to offer?
- Why are you hosting this group?



### Create a coordinated experience

- Signs (as needed)
- Photographs (enlarge to poster size at many photo shops and laminate for durability.)
- Displays (historical equipment, models, breed varieties, seasonal decorations, crop/product varieties)
- Product samples
- Sales area if appropriate (pick-your-own operation for berries, apples or pumpkins, holiday wreath or tree activity, etc.)
- Take-home literature
  - Logo, phone number, address, hours of operation
  - Invitation to visit another time
  - Restate: What people can see, do and buy (i.e. fresh produce at the source)
  - Value-added components:
    - Association and industry literature
    - Handling and caring for your purchases
    - Coloring or pencil-play activity
    - Story or anecdote about operation
    - History of land, business
    - Fun facts
    - Nutrition information
    - Cents-off coupon for next visit
    - Earth-friendly things you do

### Activities (Evaluate Risk)

- Food tasting event
- Pick-your-own opportunity
- Milking demonstrations
- Animal feeding
- Animal showmanship demonstrations
- Products display with some sort of interaction
- Animal grooming
- Wool spinning/heritage events
- Shearing demonstrations
- Hay or wagon ride
- Animal contact area
- Musicians
- Art or craft events
- Picnic sites
- Coloring/art contests

### What do visitors want from you?

- Fun, safe, age-appropriate educational experiences.
- Adults want their children to learn, and they want to learn, too.
- They want enough child-appropriate activity so kids are engaged, freeing them to enjoy themselves. That means things to see, touch, taste, etc. rather than too much lecture. (Try to keep groups small (10-15). If a school is bringing a multi-class group, be sure and enlist volunteers and also ask the school to bring several parent chaperones.)

### Before your guests arrive

(Imperative: safety)

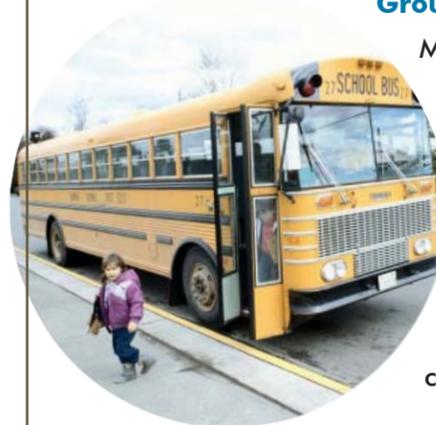
- Look for and eliminate hazards ahead of time (walking hazards, equipment, electrical, bees, animal behavior, etc.)
- Consider checking with a safety consultant.
- Have a contingency plan if there is an emergency.
- Pricing: Will you charge or won't you? (PR, general marketing, community service, income?)
- Plan a schedule, content and flow, parking, restroom facilities.
- Have a weather contingency plan.
- Identify "tour guides" and how they'll be trained. If it is a school or youth group, are some parents coming to assist the group? Be clear of any expectations before the visit.

**Note:** The farmer should NOT be expected to be responsible for student behavior.

- Know your insurance coverage liability.



### They're here!



#### Group visits:

Meet the bus and talk to visitors while they're still on it, or have them meet at a "staging area" immediately after getting off the bus. Give initial information while they are still settled, including appropriate behavior and safety reminders. You are in charge, it is your farm!

- Start in a "contained" area. Tell guests what they will see and learn.
- Be sure to reinforce your objectives. (See first item in this quick guide!)
- Have enough trained tour guides to handle the group.
- **Have fun!**

### How are you going to get them down on the farm?

#### More Specific Targets

- School and teacher contacts
- Teacher interests: How products are produced; curriculum enhancements; environment; science; history; health and nutrition; seasons and weather; careers
- Parent -Teacher groups
- Homeschool associations
- Community group contacts (Scouts, 4-H, church youth groups, latchkey programs, day care centers, senior citizens groups)
- Pair with other organizations, businesses (commodity and/or general agriculture groups)

#### For schools:

- How does this tie in with their curriculum... things they are already doing? What they already know?
- Encourage teachers to have kids develop lists of questions ahead of time.
- Suggest a few things teachers could do to familiarize students with your product ahead of time.
- Ask about the group itself, ages of children and supervision. How many total children? How many adults will accompany the children? Do any of the visitors have special needs that must be accommodated?

- What activities would teachers like kids to become involved in?
- Develop a flyer/invitation to the classroom touching on main points and "how your visit will be safe and fun". Consider pointing out appropriate clothing and behavior for the farm visit.
- Thank-you follow-up. (From you to them—or from them to you.)

### Talking Points

(Accompanied by photos, models, etc. as much as possible. Maybe a home video as an overview?)

- Brief history of farm/land, of business
- Who are the people involved today?
- What are their lives like?
  - \*What is their work like?
- From field to you (adapt for situation)
  - Plant or product varieties on the farm.
  - Animal breeds on the farm.
  - Special characteristics of the animals.
  - Names of animals and group terms.
  - Animal care, health and welfare. (A vet's bag is intriguing to kids.)
  - What animals eat and how it's produced (soil prep, seeding, caring for growing crops, harvesting). Include food samples, nifty tools and equipment, special things.
  - Steps in the product cycle (production, processing, marketing and distribution).
  - Where these animals or plants originated, and why they grow well in this area.
  - How products are kept fresh and safe for the consumer.

