

# **Connecting to the CLASSROOM**



# Connecting to the Classroom

**T**here are many ways to open your farm to visitors. Hosting classroom students is a powerful way to reach young people and build a strong connection with the next generation. But don't feel like you have to do everything at once. Consider starting with just 10 school visits a year or work with two classes for multiple visits. The one-time visit is a perfectly good starting point, as well, but people learn best when they are given multiple experiences.

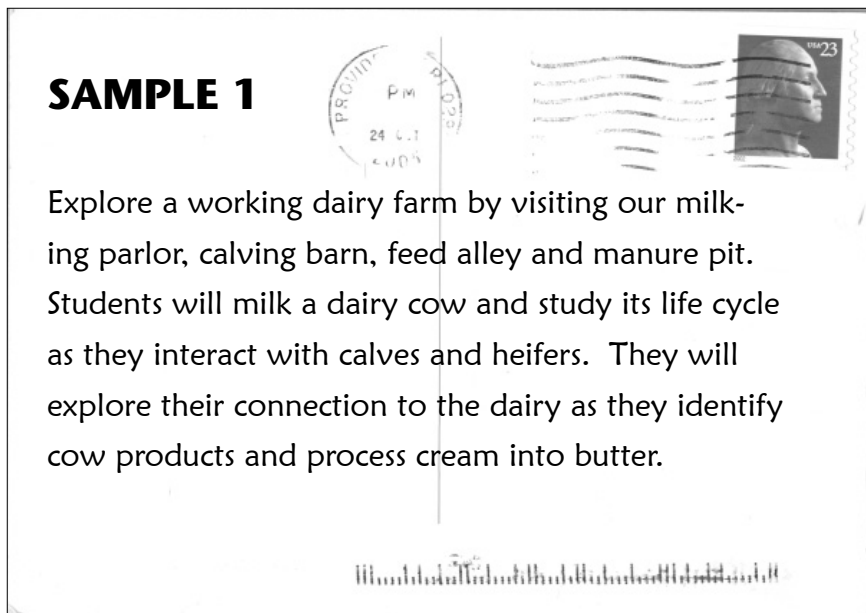
**N**ow that you've assessed your readiness to host a school group, how do you find one? Start with the phone book or the internet. Start with just one or two schools. (Farmers often start with their children's schools.) After you have identified schools in your community (including preschools), send out a letter, flyer, or postcard. Try to identify a lead contact at each school who can be a spokesperson for you as you start to make connections. You might even ask for five minutes to speak at a faculty meeting. The following are two samples of what a postcard could include:

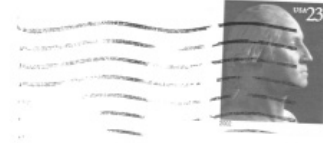
## Advertising and finding schools

### FINDING SCHOOLS ON THE WEB:

A list of Vermont K-12 school websites can be found at:  
<http://www.k12.vt.us/>

You can also search for private schools in your county at: [http://www.privateschoolreview.com/state\\_high\\_schools/stateid/VT](http://www.privateschoolreview.com/state_high_schools/stateid/VT)



**SAMPLE 2**

A visit to our farm offers school children an opportunity to discover the important role farms play in their lives. Children will be able to interact with cows, sheep, goats, chickens, and other farmyard animals and venture in to the garden of 'pickable' food to tend the plants and possibly taste the fresh fruits and vegetables.

## Preparing your farm for the visit

You may find it helpful to record the information outlined here using the "Field Trip Information" template and the "Farm Visit Chaperone Letter" template on pp. 29 & 30.

**L**ike you, teachers are busy people and are sometimes hard to get a hold of. Usually, the best time to reach them is at the beginning or end of the school day. If you leave a message, remember to leave your contact information and a time that's best to reach you. When organizing a visit with a teacher, discuss and record the following:

**INITIAL CONVERSATION:**

- Date and time of the visit
- Grade/age range of the students
- Number of students
- Number of adults/chaperones
- Group goals- what are their goals and what do you have to offer to meet those goals

**ONE WEEK BEFORE VISIT:**

- How will the group be transported?
- Are there any allergies or special needs to consider?
- Will the group bring a snack to eat during the visit? When will that work best?
- What is your rain plan? Will they visit rain or shine? Will you cancel and reschedule?
- What is your backup contact plan? Does the teacher have a cell/home number to be available at? Are you



willing to give out your home phone number or cell phone number to the teacher?

- What are the teacher's goals and objectives of the visit? What are yours?
- How does the visit fit into their curriculum? Are they working on a farming unit? Is there anything they'd like to focus on during their visit?
- What related activities will students complete before or after their visit? What are your ideas?

After all the details have been ironed out over the phone or in emails, you may want to send a confirmation letter or email to the teacher (sample on p.31). If you discussed any activity ideas or would like to share a few for the students to complete at school or at home, send those too!

#### **DAY OF VISIT CHECKLIST:**

- Is the boot wash station ready?
- Are signs and map ready?
- Animals: Put dogs in the house; put bull in back pasture; lock up grumpy rooster
- Is the first aid kit out and ready?
- Do the bathrooms have toilet paper?
- Is parking area clear of equipment & well marked?
- Are emergency numbers posted by the phone?
- What is the weather for the day? Do you have cover ready if it rains?
- Put out extra trash bags
- Are all materials for your activity stations ready?
- Put hand sanitizer at hand washing stations
- Are the snack and/or take-home activities ready?
- Rope off areas where you do not want foot or car traffic (pond, equipment, infirmary, etc.)
- Take keys out of tractor
- Turn off the electric fence
- Are all fertilizers, pest-control products and medicines out of reach?
- Name tags or masking tape and pens



## Working with students of all ages

**H**ow do you know if the activities you've planned are appropriate for the students who are visiting on a particular day?

Will the activity that was a hit with the preschoolers yesterday be a hit with 5th graders tomorrow? It depends on the activity. Milking a cow or harvesting vegetables from the garden are activities for all ages. An activity about trait selection in animal breeding, on the other hand, would be most appropriate for high school-age students or older.



The following is a partial set of characteristics and tips for working with youth in four general age groups: 3-7 years, 7-11 years, 11-13 years, and 13-18 years. It should be noted that to communicate effectively with youth, the whole context of a child's background and special needs, as well as the particular circumstances of any given situation, must be taken into account. This includes various social, ethnic, and cultural traditions or communication styles or patterns not within the scope of this listing.

### AGES 3 - 7

CHARACTERISTICS	TEACHING TIPS
Thinking is in the here and now ("concrete" thinkers)	<i>Youth need real experiences to learn.</i>
Attention span is about 20-30 minutes; need hands-on experiences	<i>Vary the length of activities. Try rotating small groups through stations.</i>
Begin to develop friendships, usually with youth of the same sex	<i>Plan activities that youth can do in groups rather than individually.</i>
Want to be liked and to please adults	<i>Let youth know when they have done a good job.</i>
Learn best when physically active	<i>Allow youth to participate in activities where they can use physical energy.</i>
Have a special attachment to older youth	<i>Allow youth to choose an older youth to be their helper and role model.</i>
Are easily motivated	<i>Use encouragement to keep them motivated.</i>
Competitive activities are less appropriate	<i>Plan some cooperative activities.</i>
Differentiation between fantasy and reality can be difficult	<i>Build in transitions and discussions to help distinguish the imaginary from the real.</i>

<b>AGES 7 - 11</b>	
<b>CHARACTERISTICS</b>	<b>TEACHING TIPS</b>
<b>Learn best when physically active</b>	<i>Allow youth to participate in activities where they can use physical energy.</i>
<b>Have a special attachment to older youth</b>	<i>Allow youth to choose an older youth to be their helper and role model.</i>
<b>Are easily motivated</b>	<i>Use encouragement to keep them motivated.</i>
<b>Reading becomes an individual experience</b>	<i>Allow time for youth to read on their own and think of activities before working with others.</i>
<b>Attention span is about 45 minutes</b>	<i>Use varied activities to keep them interested.</i>
<b>Acceptance by peer group is important</b>	<i>Use the peer group to recognize good works, e.g., applaud completed activities and avoid put-downs.</i>
<b>Interests expand from home, to neighborhood, to community</b>	<i>Talk to youth about friends and neighbors, and what goes on in their community. Involve them in community service.</i>
<b>Enjoy both cooperation and competition</b>	<i>Plan activities so that sometimes youth work together, sometimes compete with each other.</i>
<b>Show independence by seeking individual attention and sometimes disrupting the group</b>	<i>Involve youth in selecting activities from a "short-list." Give individual attention, like assigning tasks to "special helpers."</i>
<b>Feelings of competence enhance self-concept</b>	<i>Provide activities that will let youth feel good about themselves and succeed. Recognize them for their accomplishments.</i>

continued

**AGES 11 - 13**

<b>CHARACTERISTICS</b>	<b>TEACHING TIPS</b>
Can take responsibility in planning and evaluating own work	<i>Give youth responsibility for group activities, including planning, implementing, &amp; evaluating.</i>
Can discuss current events, international affairs, and contemporary issues with some help	<i>Use discussion activities and games that encourage awareness of current events and issues.</i>
Want to make decisions but still depend on adult guidelines	<i>Establish guidelines that give parameters for youth to follow.</i>
Peer pressure mounts, first from same sex, then from opposite sex	<i>Use peer pressure to influence positive behavior. Have group give encouragement to individuals. Provide opportunities to work in groups.</i>
Can be quite self-conscious	<i>Avoid asking youth to share their work individually until they feel more comfortable with the group.</i>
Strong emotional attachment to older youth and adults	<i>Encourage youth to participate in activities with older youth and adults.</i>
Choices are often unrealistic	<i>Assist youth in making realistic choices. Review their plans, discuss alternatives and help them weigh options before making decisions.</i>

**AGES 13-18**

<b>CHARACTERISTICS</b>	<b>TEACHING TIPS</b>
Personal philosophy begins to emerge	<i>Use activities where youth search for experiences that will allow them to identify their own philosophies.</i>
Enjoy discussing global situations as well as personal activities	<i>Encourage discussion of events and feelings.</i>
Abstract thinking and problem-solving reach a higher level	<i>Put youth into real-life, problem-solving situations.</i>
Strong desire for status in peer group	<i>Develop a climate in which youth are encouraged and supported by peers.</i>
High interest in social activity	<i>Encourage youth to plan and carry out own activities.</i>
Need freedom from adult control to make decisions	<i>Help youth realize their decisions have consequences.</i>
Widespread feelings of inferiority and inadequacy	<i>Encourage and help youth see their positive worth.</i>

Adapted from 4-H Cooperative Curriculum Systems 1997 – Theater Arts Adventures. Used with permission.



# Teaching Tips

- 1. Set the tone at the beginning of the trip.** Establish guidelines and rules with the students—what can they do to help themselves have a safe and fun day? See what they come up with and then add other things that they may have left out.
- 2. Use a positive tone.** Use phrases like “Please walk” and “Keep your hands to yourself” instead of “Don’t run” or “Don’t touch.”
- 3. Give the group a brief overview of the day.** “We’ll be spending the whole day outside. We’ll have time to see the animals, do some chores, and we may even be tasting something today!”
- 4. Refer to the students by name as often as you can.** Name tags are very helpful, so ask the teacher to use them. Small pieces of masking tape and a pen will do if nametags are forgotten.
- 5. Eye contact is important.** Make sure to situate yourself so that the group can look at you and not have to look into the sun.
- 6. Instead of giving all of the information, ask students to come up with it themselves.** Asking questions will encourage your students to think and discover on their own and will help you understand their level of knowledge. Let them think for a few seconds, then give a hint or two if there is no response. Leading them to discover the answer themselves builds their confidence.
- 7. When possible, let the group make decisions about their trip.** “Would you like to spend a few more minutes harvesting carrots, or are you ready to head over to the compost pile?”
- 8. Remember the “teachable moment.”** If the students’ attention is diverted to the manure spreader in the field, go ahead and stop what you’re doing and talk about





natural fertilizers and the benefits of manure! Take advantage of their interests.

**9. Be aware that students have multiple learning styles.** It will be helpful to use a range of methods to convey the ideas you would like the students to learn about. Try to be creative, allow the students to smell, hear, see, and touch while learning.

**10. Stay one step ahead of your group.** Try to foresee safety issues before they happen and identify students who may need special attention. For example, if one student has an especially high energy level, delegate a special task for them or give them an extra responsibility, such as carrying an item or opening gates.

**11. Keep the group actively participating** instead of mostly watching and listening. You can vary the pace by letting them run in some areas and tip toe in other areas.

**12. Gear the duration of your activity to the energy and interests of the group.** Sometimes an activity will last for 10 minutes, some groups can do it for 20.

**13. You are not responsible for behavior management and discipline.** If you are having a problem with a child or group of children, ask a teacher or chaperone to deal with the situation separate from your activity.

**14. Be flexible and HAVE FUN!** If the group senses that you're enjoying yourself, they will too!



# Templates



# Field Trip Information

Date of Visit: \_\_\_\_\_ Topic: \_\_\_\_\_

# Students: \_\_\_\_\_ Grade(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Transportation: Bus Cars Length of visit: \_\_\_\_\_

Students with special needs or allergies: \_\_\_\_\_

## TEACHER CONTACT INFORMATION:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Best way to contact: \_\_\_phone \_\_\_email E-mail Address: \_\_\_\_\_

School Tel: \_\_\_\_\_ Teacher Tel: \_\_\_\_\_ When to Call: \_\_\_\_\_

## GOALS OF VISIT & ACTIVITIES PLANNED: \_\_\_\_\_

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## CONFIRMATION PHONE CALL:

Date \_\_\_\_\_ Time Confirmation \_\_\_\_\_ # Students \_\_\_\_\_

Snack: Yes No \_\_\_\_\_

Pre/Post Activities \_\_\_\_\_

**CONFIRMATION LETTER:** Date Mailed \_\_\_\_\_

## PAYMENT:

# Students: \_\_\_\_\_ Amount Paid: \_\_\_\_\_ Chk # \_\_\_\_\_ School Billed: \_\_\_\_\_

## NOTES AND THINGS TO REMEMBER:

# Farm Visit Chaperone Letter

Dear Chaperones,

Thank you for volunteering to assist with the field trip to \_\_\_\_\_ Farm.

We encourage chaperone participation throughout the field trip. Your main responsibilities include:

- Keeping a total count of the students in your group
- Keeping an eye on groups of students during exploration
- Allowing students to make discoveries on their own
- Help facilitate proper behavior of students
- Being alert to potential hazards on the farm
- Having fun!

Some areas to be aware of for potential safety concerns on the farm are:

However, we have taken necessary precautions to ensure safety as a priority during student group visits.

Please notify me if any first aid issues should arise, your support is much appreciated! Also, please keep your conversations with other chaperones to a minimum as they may be distracting to the students as well as the teachers.

We are grateful that you have made special arrangements to be with us on the day of the field trip. Thank you for helping to make this a memorable experience for the students.

Sincerely,

# Confirmation Letter to School

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

Thank you for your interest in visiting my farm. This letter is to confirm the plans for your upcoming visit and to help integrate the field trip into your classroom studies. Please review the following information and contact me as soon as possible with any changes. Please check the reverse side of this page for directions and parking information.

**Date of trip:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Time & length of trip:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**# of Students:** \_\_\_\_\_

**What to Wear:** You can expect to be outdoors for at least two hours. Vermont weather is anything but predictable, so please have students and chaperones come ready for anything — waterproof boots, long pants, warm jacket, and dress in layers!

**Group Sizes:** For the majority of the field trip we will be in small groups of 8-12 students. Prior to arriving, please divide your students into \_\_\_\_ groups. At least one chaperone is recommended per small group. Please have all the children wear visible name tags on their outdoor clothes.

**Chaperone Role:** We greatly value chaperone participation in order to make this a memorable experience for the students. Enclosed is a letter to chaperones outlining their responsibilities during the field trip. Please make sure they receive this letter prior to arrival.

**Cost:** The field trip price is \$\_\_\_\_\_ per student. Please pay *by check* on the day of the field trip. There is no charge for teachers and adult chaperones.

**Program Cancellation:** In case of inclement weather, your field trip may have to be cancelled, although we often hold the field trip rain or shine! I will call you at school at 8:00 AM if the weather is questionable. If you must cancel your field trip, please notify me as soon as possible so we can schedule another group.

**Enclosed Activities:** To make the most of your field trip, classroom work before and after your visit is highly recommended. Enclosed you will find activities suited to the classroom and related to this field trip theme. Please feel free to call me for further information or if you have any questions.

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**What to Wear:**

**Group Sizes:**

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**Cost:**

**Program Cancellation:**

**Enclosed Activities:**

Sincerely,