

School Tours

Decision Making Tool



Are You Ready to Host School Tours?

Do you like working with children? If so, school tours might work for you.

School tours are seasonal, usually occurring in June and September through November depending on location and weather. If you have tractors and wagons, washroom facilities, a seating area, trained staff, etc., for school tours, consider offering other types of tours to utilize those assets. Examples of other potential tour groups include:

- daycare
- summer camp
- cubs
- scouts
- brownies
- guides
- home-schooled children
- private schools
- seniors
- tourists

Tours diversify your farm income and give you cash flow during times of the year when you may have limited income sources.

School tours are the most effective way to target market to young families. School tours were developed as a marketing tool to attract young families to visit farms that market direct to consumers. The theory was that if the class learned something and had fun during the farm tour, the children would get their parents to take the whole family back to that farm on the weekend.

Initially, tours were offered at no cost to students because of the benefit the operators derived by advertising to their target market. As schools recognized the educational value of school tours, farmers began charging. The fees were small at first but have grown steadily over time. Now, depending on the population you have

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to draw from, school tours can be a significant income stream.

Except for operators near Calgary and Edmonton, Alberta does not have the population base to produce sufficient income to make school tours a stand-alone business. But school tours can be an important tool to attract consumers to your farm if offered with on-farm retail sales enterprises such as a corn maze, pick-your-own, or on-farm entertainment.

School tours need to include diverse educational events that appeal to a wide range of ages and interest groups. Check out the farm websites listed on page 12 to see how these farms have made tours a significant income source.

School budgets are shrinking and schools have to be very selective on the field trips they choose. Therefore, it is important that you design your farm educational program to correspond to the school's core curriculum. If teachers can show how touring your farm will improve the class's comprehension of the

curriculum, they are much more likely to come. Refer to the Agriculture in the Classroom and farm website web links at the end of this booklet for ideas on how to tailor your programs.

The Management Side of Farm Tours

Who is Your Target Audience?

- **Preschool through Grade 3:** Start here and do a great job on a basic half day (90 minute) tour before considering expanding your program to older children.
- **Grades 4 and 5:** This group is more of a challenge to keep focused and needs a more hands-on experience. More involved programs like soils, weather and natural wildlife habitats on the farm appeal.

Policies

Obtain a deposit from tour groups when they book and tell them that you will collect the final payment immediately upon arrival. Leaving payment until the end of the tour puts you in an awkward position if the tour group wants you to invoice the school or delay payment.

Can you handle special needs students? Is your tour over packed ground so a wheelchair can be used? If you give wagon rides can wheelchairs access the wagons? Usually the attendant of any special needs child receives free admission.

Establish a ratio of students to adults. Some farms allow one adult for every five students. Every adult that exceeds that ratio pays the full student price. This avoids the problem with preschoolers where parents and grandparents can outnumber the children and exceed the seating capacity of your wagon even though only a few are paying for the tour.

Establish a rule regarding admission. If the tour has giveaways like a drink or a pumpkin the adults will feel entitled to them as well. Some farms charge everyone who enters. For older groups, some farms allow only one teacher and one parent for the group and all others are required to pay. Others allow one free per 10 students. It is always better to start off with a fair policy rather than trying to change rules midstream. Changing after you have been open for a while results in classes coming back and saying, "you didn't charge for everyone last time, why the change?" It just sets you up for a confrontation. Confrontation is not the way to build a business.

Adults talking amongst themselves can be distracting. Mention your concern to the tour groups and have

a policy for handling it. For example, use a whistle, a cow bell, or a toy that makes an animal sound (moo) to focus everyone's attention if there is too much background noise.

Set minimum revenue from each tour by either setting the minimum number of students or the minimum revenue you need before doing a tour. Make sure your minimum revenue covers all your tour costs (e.g. staff members, tractor, wagon and driver, hand washing stations, increased insurance premiums, etc.).

Charging \$5 per student with a minimum number of paying participants of 15 says that you need a minimum of \$75 to host a tour. So, if a group of 10 home-schooled children ask for a tour you can accommodate them but your minimum charge will be \$75. For that they can have 15 people come. If more than 15 people come each will be charged \$5. A \$100 minimum is common with many established farms.

The more children you have in a group, the greater your potential income is. Encourage larger tour groups; 30 to 35 students is ideal. The group is small enough to maintain the students' attention, hear the tour guide and ask questions. Combine classes in the same grade to create your ideal tour size. Often the school itself will do this to reduce the cost of the bus.

Logistics

Wagons are commonly used to move tour participants around the farm. A 24' wagon has a capacity of around 50 and gives flexibility when daycares come with parents and grandparents. To build the wagon yourself expect to pay \$1,000 for the wagon chassis and \$2,000 for the lumber. Custom built cost is about \$5,000.



Hand washing stations are required. It is a good policy for the children to wash their hands before eating and after visiting animal pens, playing in soil, using the washroom, and before leaving the farm at the end of the tour.

Alcohol based gel hand sanitizers, available at any drug store, are an option if hands aren't soiled but the best way to clean hands is with soap and warm water. Two or three hand washing stations should allow 30 people to wash their hands in a reasonable time. It is more economical to buy portable hand washing stations than to rent them.

See page 15 under Suppliers.



Planning the Tour

The tour should be educational and fun. Hands-on activities for the children increases the element of fun. Start with a high energy activity, particularly if the students have ridden a long way to your farm.

Tie each activity back to the core curriculum for that age group. For example, if the curriculum deals with the environment, talk about the importance of sun, rain, and healthy soil. Show how plants use photosynthesis to take in gases that are building up in our air like carbon dioxide and produce both oxygen that we need to breathe and energy (sugar/starch) that is stored in the plant. The level of sophistication and the terms you use will depend on the age of the students.



Suggested Activities

Children look at or feel different items and describe the differences they see or feel:

- different soil types (clay, organic/muck soil, sand, gravel)
- different cereal heads, individual grain seeds, dry oatmeal porridge, loaf of bread, croutons, etc.
- different grains

- flour
- straw
- wool, hide, feathers, mane, etc.

Children feel things that they can't see by putting their hand through a hole in a wall and touching items in the categories listed above.

To feature a cereal crop, show what the crop looks like as it grows, how it is harvested, and what it is processed into. Are there different uses for the different parts of that plant (grain kernels, straw, stubble, roots)? Demonstrate how to grind the crop, (historical method, modern techniques) and show what the grain then looks like. Have a display of the many products made from that crop. Have the children handle (feel) the grain in its different stages as well as the different part of the plant. Have groups count the seeds in a head of grain and record the number each group counted to get an average. Explain how you planted one seed and each seed produced one head. These same activities can be done with any crop.

Set up large containers with different kinds of soils (sand, loam, clay, organic/muck soil, compost), and have students feel the differences among the different soils. Show them how water passes through different soils at different rates. Talk about how plants decompose to add health to the soil. Have children handle earthworms



Animal Education Area

An animal education area with two weaned animals of each species (calves, pigs, sheep, goats and 20 chicks) requires either suitable, clean housing in a child safe barn, or outside corrals for each pair of animals. You also need to budget for their feed, straw, hay, grain and commercial feed from May through November. Replace the animals with younger animals each year.

Budget items include:

- \$650 to purchase eight young animals (two calves, two pigs, two sheep, two goats) plus 20 chicks.
- \$1,000 for feed for the eight animals and chicks for six months.
- \$500 for a wooden shed inside the corral to give animals protection from rain and heat.
- \$300 for each 16' x 16' corral to house each pair of animals.

The corral includes:

- Eight cedar posts, 8' long, spaced 8' apart (\$80).
- 60' of 4' high fencing (12.5 gage corn crib wire) (\$80).
- Spruce 2 x 4s to run along the top of the cedar posts as well as at ground level. The fence will be fastened to these 2 x 4s (\$25).
- 4' x 4' metal gate (\$115).

A great resource for organizing fun farm related educational activities is the book *Project Seasons* published by Shelburne Farms in Vermont. It is available at http://store.shelburnefarms.org/category/education_resources

found in a container of composting organic matter.

After seeing cattle on a livestock farm tour, position one child at the front of the tour group and talk about the parts of an animal. Does the animal have horns? The class votes and, if yes, put horns on the child. Does the animal have a tail? If the vote is yes, then ask what the tail is used for. If the class says the tail is used to swat flies put a tail on the child that is a flyswatter. Continue until all the physical attributes of that animal have been attached to the child. This can be modified for any domesticated farm animal.

Another popular activity is bottle feeding young animals. One farm distributes milk bottles with nipples then opens a door for several small animals (goats, pigs, etc.) to come running in for the children to feed from their bottles. The animals must be ones that have been handled a lot so they are comfortable around people and not aggressive. They should also be kept very clean.

Hold a scavenger hunt. If you are sending children on a scavenger hunt or to play a game in a corn maze you will need a hand-held school bell or loudhailer to collect them up.

Tour Length

Tour lengths vary from 90 minutes to all-day programs. The length is usually determined by your customer base. As most school tours use school buses to transport students to the farm, the tour group can't leave for the farm until the bus runs are done in the morning and they must be back at school in time for the afternoon bus run. Factoring in how far the school is from your farm will give you the maximum length a tour can be for any given school. This is less of an issue with home-schooled children and

daycares because parents often do the driving.

It is common for farms to offer different packages with different components so each tour may run a different length of time. Tours can include:

- orientation – including any safety rules and policies you have (15 min.)
- walking tour of certain aspects of the farm (20 - 40 min.)
- wagon ride around the farm, to see crops/pick a pumpkin (20 - 30 min.)
- demonstration – milking a cow/ goat, spinning wool (15 min.)
- dressing a child up like an animal (20 min.)
- activity such as planting a seed or transplant, gathering eggs, or feeding an animal (15 - 20 min.)
- explanations of different crops or soils (15 min.)
- small maze (20 min.)
- play time (if you have a play area for children) (20 min.)
- washing hands and getting ready to leave (20 min.)

Indoor Options to Extend the Tour Season

Access to a building extends the tour season. A building or canopy can be used to conduct the orientation, demonstrations, activities, etc. It is nice to be outside, but having indoor facilities where you can do a large portion of the tour means fewer cancellations if the weather is poor.

What do you do if it rains or snows and your regular tour schedule is thrown in disarray?

- Crafts such as paint a pumpkin or ice pumpkin cookies. Some farms have students carve a pumpkin using special childproof knives.
- Count the number of seeds from different plants.
- Compare different kinds/sizes/ colours/shapes of seeds.
- Discuss what parts of the plant we eat (root – carrot, tuber – potato, stem – celery, flower – broccoli, fruit – tomato, leaves – lettuce, seeds – sweet corn).
- Dress-up activities such as dress students as a cow.





- Use a rabbit or young lamb as a prop to talk about farm animals.
- Mystery tools – lay out old and modern farm tools and have the children guess what they are used for.
- Sequencing games (fertilize, seed, soil, sun, rain), (egg, wash, candle, size, package).
- Popcorn activities (look at popcorn.org under Other Educational Resources in the list of websites on page 14).
- Erect a corn pool – a pool filled with kernels of corn, canola, or a large-seeded bean – for children to play in.
- Build a 4' x 8' play table with 2" x 4" edging that is 2" off the ground. Fill to about 2" deep with a smaller sized smooth product such as corn meal, washed sand, or canola seed. Put toy farm implements in it. Show the children how they work on the farm, then let them play with the toys.

Pricing

Tours are a GST taxable service, so include the cost of GST in your price.

Many farms price their tour to a round number that includes GST. The price will vary with the length of the tour, the activities the children do and any products or food that are given to the children or the school to take home as part of the program. Add-ons could include:

- a drink
- a colouring page that relates to the farm tour
- a pumpkin or gourd
- something that relates to the crop or animal your tour featured

Some farms offer schools the option to stay for lunch. Farms can offer separate seating areas for the different school groups and allow them to bring their own lunch, or if they have an approved (inspected by the local health unit) kitchen they can offer simple lunches.

Typical prices for a partial day tour range from \$4 (for the 90 minute tour) to \$6 (for a three hour tour).

Full day packages range from \$6 to \$12. Pricing depends on whether lunch is provided, the activities included and the supplies needed.

Day-long packages might include:

- Nature walks pointing out things found in the wild. The items pointed out would vary with the age of the children and the curriculum.
- Story time for younger children.
- Making popcorn over an open fire. For safety, the fire should be fenced and either be properly sheltered or cancelled on windy days. Be careful burning poplar wood as it can spark.
- Making a scarecrow.
- Painting a pumpkin.
- Playing a game in a corn maze.

One possible corn maze game is survivor tag, where children are

divided into “critters” and “plants.” In this game, herbivores eat plants, carnivores eat meat and omnivores eat plants and meat. Explain each category and describe what animals fit into each group and therefore who can tag who.

Another possible event for a day-long package might be a scavenger hunt. This could be related to the environment where children collect cards that represent components to life and death like water, soil, seeds, sunshine vs. diseases, insects, and weeds.



As well, some farms offer day long workshops for older children that tie into their core curriculum. Examples include workshops on soils, habitats, and weather.

Takeaways

It's important that visitors leave knowing the name of the farm. They should leave with something that tells them where they have been, what they have learned and helps the teacher meet the school's curriculum requirement, such as:

- Worksheets describing what students saw.

- Colouring sheets relating to the content of the tour.
- True and false questions on what was seen on the tour (supply teacher with the answers).
- A product from the farm (pie, pumpkin, cob of popcorn, a pot with some seeds the children planted).
- A brochure or bag with the farm name, contact information and driving directions on it.
- A coupon giving one free admission to an upcoming event, or a coupon for a product the child can buy at the farm or at a special event. The child won't come alone, but rather with admission-paying family members.

Scheduling

Most farms take school tour registration by phone/fax; a few such as Howell Family Pumpkin Farm and Springridge Farm do on-line registration (see online Registration Sources on page 15). It is important that just one person schedules school tours to ensure there is no double booking and reduce errors if bookings change. Monday is usually a slow day, as it is the first day of the school week; teachers like to remind children

what to bring and what to wear for the tour the day before the tour takes place.

Promotion

It is very important to mail promotional material to schools at the right time:

- send your mailing around mid March for June school tours
- for September/October tours send your mailing in mid August – most teachers get into their schools about two weeks before classes start and that is the time to reach out to them

Include a message on the envelope to make the teacher curious enough to open the letter, such as “Outdoor education inside” or “Kids and core curriculum learning come together on our farm.”

Get a list of schools within your target market and the names of their principals from the school board's central office. Ask if you can e-mail your promotional materials to the school principals. Don't forget other



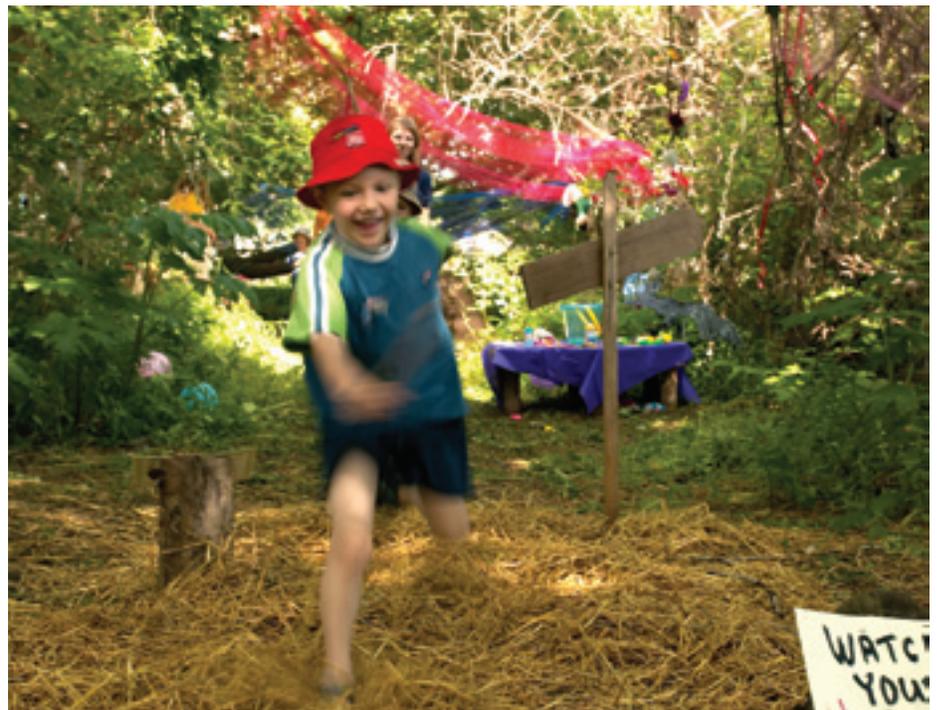
schools like Montessori, private, language or religious schools.

Contact the schools and make an appointment with the principal to share your tour materials and obtain a list of teachers covering the grades that you plan to set up tours for. Ask the principal to distribute your materials to the K to 5 teachers. Don't depend on a mailing/email to the principal as your sole vehicle for

Promotional Vehicles to Consider

A professionally produced brochure is one option:

- full colour
- 8.5" x 11" folded into three panels.
- costs about \$600 to print 1,000 brochures



contacting teachers as the principal may be too busy to respond.

Talk to interested teachers. Show them what your farm has to offer. Emphasize how you plan to tie it to their grade's core curriculum and that your farm is a safe clean environment. Ask if they can suggest things which would better tie the tour content to the curriculum.

A month before your school tours begin send your tour promotion packages to the Parent Advisory Committee (PAC). PACs can influence teachers to include curriculum-driven school tours in their lesson plans.

Colourful brochures are costly. You may want to wait until you get your programs worked out and tested and you have some pictures of groups at your own farm before opting for full colour printing.

A self produced black and white brochure can be a simple first step. Use a line drawing of a child interacting with whatever product you will be featuring on your farm tours and provide the tour highlights, costs, your location, phone and website address. This can be done using clip art from the internet and then photocopied on coloured paper. Use a different line drawing and different coloured paper for each tour package you offer. The copying can be done at any photocopy store:

- \$0.05 each under 1,000 + \$0.01 for coloured paper
- \$0.04 each over 1,000 + \$0.01 for coloured paper

You can fax schools a black and white version of your brochure. Fax only full size, black and white pages to ensure readability.

An attractive yet inexpensive handout could be a postcard with a picture on

the front and an outline of the tour options and contact information on the back. This could also be given out to groups or at information kiosks as well as to the children at the end of the tour to take home to mom and dad. A postcard costs approximately \$250 for 2,500.

A DVD/video of your farm showing it is a safe, clean operation that is worth visiting is an excellent promotional tool. Be sure the video shows that the farm is clean and well trimmed, and that all hazards are well out of the reach of children.

Include fliers or brochures of other retail activities you have that attract consumers. These can show your

on-farm retail market or pick-your-own, or farm members vending at farmers' markets or attending public functions like a fall fair or community event.

Each farm website listed on page 12 and 13 has a button for school tours. Your target audience commonly surfs the web. A website promoting your farm is a good investment.

- Include the web address on all school tour information.
- Through the pictures on your website (photo releases required), a potential tour organizer can see both your farm and a class of children touring it.



- If you are just starting, consider inviting a Sunday school group out at no charge, explaining that you would like them to be your guest at the farm and you will be taking pictures to be used on your new website.
- To reduce the cost of website development start by hiring a high school student who can build a basic website with pictures for you. A good website can save you the cost of an expensive full-colour brochure.

Paid newspaper ads are a difficult and expensive way to hit your target market. A more cost effective way to utilize the media is to put out a press release to local newspapers, radio and TV stations. Hopefully you can get a reporter to do an article on your new venture.

Staffing

School tours require work. Assess your family's existing workload and see if anyone can take on the new venture. If not, you need to hire staff. It is important that the people performing the different tasks are trained. Not just anyone can take a group of school children and keep their interest for 90 minutes or more. You aren't just looking for bodies to plug into jobs – you need the right people.

Possible Staffing Requirements

You'll need someone to schedule tours. Teachers work from 9:00 a.m. until 3:30 p.m., and may only be able to answer the phone during a spare or recess. If you miss their call, ask

the caller to leave a message saying when the best time is for you to follow-up.

One instructor is required for every 30 students. If it is an older group, you might want to cut that back to 1 for 35. If you are having the students do an activity, you may need some extra help during that activity. Good sources of instructors are:

- Homemakers. Not all moms/dads are good at this job. Consider advertising for parents who have had volunteer experience at school as they probably enjoy working with children. Ask for references. Call the references to find out how the prospect interacts with children.
- Retired school teachers. Not all teachers are good with children. Be sure to gauge their attitude during your interview.

If you offer tractor tours of the farm, you will need well trained, careful tractor drivers. The tour instructor goes on the tractor tour to give any commentary that is part of the tour. The driver needs to have their full attention on the safe transportation of the children.

Farm grounds must be maintained at a higher level for school tours. This means keeping the grass trimmed, pulling weeds, building curb appeal and making sure the tour area is safe and childproof.

Live animal exhibits add variety to your farm tour but require someone to look after them. Animals create manure that hosts flies and bacteria. Clean manure up daily and move it to a more remote area of the farm to reduce flies and odour. This isn't a part of farming that teachers and parents want the children to experience.

If you are having activities or planting demonstrations, someone needs to get those ready.

With the public coming onto your farm you need public washrooms. They can be portable toilets but they need to be kept clean and odours controlled.

The tour programs and workshops have to be written. Usually, the farm family retains control of this job. The first time you design a program it might take two or three days to decide what you can cover that ties to the school curriculum. With experience, a tour program for Kindergarten through Grade 2 might take five hours, and an all day workshop 20 hours, to prepare and train the staff.

Staff Training

Training staff is very important. Staff members need to know the farm story and the tour content to give a good tour. They also need to know about all your tour packages so they can talk about them to tour participants and potential tour guests. The best place to start is to create a manual. The manual should cover:

- Safety concerns (where children can go, what they can do, and the importance of washing their hands).
- Emergency procedures (if a child is hurt, lost, or becomes ill).
- Rules of conduct for your tour guide staff, teachers, parents and students. Remind everyone that yours is a working farm with inherent dangers. Children can not wander off. They must always be with an adult.
- Background information on the farm plus information on the farm's crops and livestock.
- Complete tour script for each tour package with samples of any handouts (colouring sheets,



brochure, quiz, etc.) that are part of each tour package.

- Timing for each component of each tour so staff know how long they can spend at any activity. This becomes important as you become busier; you don't want the 9:30 a.m. tour leader who was scheduled to meet the 11 a.m. tour still doing the first tour because she didn't follow the timing schedule.

The tour script needs to include facts about your farm and tie into the school's core curriculum. Ask a retired teacher to help you with the script. You know the agricultural content but the teacher knows how that content should be presented to the students and tailored to meet the needs of the school.

Tour programs must be practiced before being used. Have instructors present the information to test audiences such as your family and other instructors. That way, everyone gets a feel for how the material should be delivered, and can ensure that the content is correct and the tour fun.

Making a tour fun is your leader's responsibility. You want the children

to enjoy themselves so they tell their parents what a great time they had, and recommend the whole family go back to that fun farm on the weekend. Once you have been in the school tour business for a couple of years establish a mentoring program where new staff shadow experienced staff for a day so they understand the content and can handle questions students and teachers might ask.

Websites for some groups that can help you with content and handouts are listed on page 13 and 14.

Safety

Guest safety is your paramount concern. Children are not familiar with farms and the hazards that are instinctively understood by the farm family.

There should be no gopher/prairie dog holes, thistles, nettles, poison ivy, etc. where the children tour.

Implements or sharp objects must not be left around where children can get at them.

All pesticides need to be locked up and equipment used to apply

pesticides needs to be stored out of the reach of children.

Some children are allergic to bees and other farm items. In the information package given to teachers prior to the tour, remind them that if they have children with allergies there are potential hazards, such as bees (bee stings), pollen, livestock hair, dogs, cats, etc. on the farm. Make sure you have taken all precautions to reduce the risk for all of these potential hazards. Print off and read the factsheet (link on page 15) called *Managing Risk on Farms Open to the Public*.

It is a good policy to have children walk in straight lines from one activity to the next so it is easy to see anyone wandering off. Having each activity area enclosed by fencing can help to avoid potential problems.

One critical policy you need is a procedure for a lost child. Who on the farm should be contacted to start the search? The person leading a tour of 30 children is not likely the right person to start searching. Often the child was distracted by something on the farm and fell behind the tour group. To reduce the risk of losing a child, begin the tour with a headcount. The tour guide or teacher should do periodic child counts throughout the tour, so you can ascertain if someone is missing and start the search early.

Another important issue is hand washing. Germs are everywhere on every farm where animals are housed and touched, so it is very important that children be taught how to, and reminded to, wash their hands thoroughly. Children often put their hands in their mouth which can transfer germs like E. coli to their digestive system. Many children do not have sufficient immunity to fight off germs. Frequent and thorough hand



washing is crucial for their safety and for your peace of mind. Some farms require children to wash their hands after feeding animals, before lunch and as the last activity before leaving the farm.

Signs showing proper hand washing are available from Alberta Health Services or online (go to <http://www.health.alberta.ca/health-info/influenza.html>). Scroll down the page and under Influenza Poster choose Hand Washing Sign – Do Bugs Need



Drugs.) Post this sign in several locations on the farm including by every wash station. Discuss the importance of proper hand washing on the tour as you pass by wash stations. Ensure children wash their hands if you have activities that may expose them to potential health hazards.

Liability Insurance

Your general farm policy does provide liability coverage but it may not be sufficient for when you offer school tours. Insurance companies assume that your farm traffic is primarily farm supply companies and may become uncomfortable taking on the liability exposure when you start school tours.

Occasionally, farms are asked to find insurance coverage with another company but most insurance companies often just add to your policy and adjust your insurance premium to reflect their increased exposure.

It is important that you discuss what you are doing in detail with your insurance company. Better yet, bring your agent to the farm to see what you are doing. Take pictures and send them to your agent whether he comes out or not.

What you don't want to happen is for the insurance company to say, "I didn't know you were doing that! Your policy doesn't cover this kind of on-farm activity." This is not to suggest you will not be covered if you have a claim because you most likely will be, as long as you can show that the insurance broker knew what you were doing. As your business grows, smaller insurance companies may choose to drop farms that expose them to higher liability risk.

There are many factors that can affect the size of the premium:

- Do you have wagon rides?
- Is the wagon pulled by a tractor or horses? (Horses may get spooked when people are on the wagon)
- Do you have animals on the farm?
- Can children touch the animals? (E-coli risk)
- Are you providing food to the children? (Food-borne illness risk)
- What is your projected gross income from school tours?
- What activities do you offer?

For budget purposes, use one per cent of gross income from school tours as your insurance premium. Some insurance companies may not charge you a premium at all if school tours are a small part of the farm business. But it is important to talk to your insurance agent so they know what you are doing.



Classroom Setup

Setup can be as simple as straw bales in a semicircle on grass or in a barn, or as posts buried in the ground with 2' x 10' planks bolted to them. Create themed props to use at the front of the class.

Parking

Buses are heavy and need a solid base on which to park. Make sure that the parking area is high and dry and there is room for buses to enter, turn around and exit easily. Ensure laneways and parking areas have a solid base and/or are well graveled or paved.

Continuing Education

The North American Farmers Direct Marketing Conference is a good source of information for on-farm entertainment and school tours. Check out their website at <http://www.nafdma.com/>

This manual concentrates on the basics of organizing school tours. But other approaches will also work. Pick one that you are comfortable with, or create your own. You are only limited by your imagination!

Helpful Websites

Farm and wild animals, insects, water, forests, gardening, pumpkins – **Green Acres Outdoor Education Centre**, Markham, ON: <http://www.outdooreducation.ca/>

Farm Tours

There are many farms that offer school and other kinds of tours. Usually, farms design a tour around their feature product(s). Below are a few farm websites that feature a crop or animal focused farm tour. Do search the web for other examples. You will find many different ideas and approaches for hosting tours.

Apples, pumpkins, bees, plants – **Carrigan Farms**, Mooresville, NC: <http://www.carriganfarms.com/school.htm>

Strawberries, cooking, seasonal themes, bees – **Springridge Farm**, Milton, ON: <http://www.springridgefarm.com>

Dairy cattle – **Cagles Dairy**, Canton, GA: <http://www.caglesfamilyfarm.com/>

Farm animals, forest, strawberries, pumpkins – **Forsythe Family Farms**, Markham, ON: <http://www.forsythefamilyfarms.ca/>

Horses, pumpkins, soil leadership – **Rounds Ranch**, Elmvale, ON www.roundsranch.com/

Hamburger theme, pumpkins – **Bishop's Pumpkin Farm**, Wheatland, CA: http://www.webpumpkins.com/bishops_pumpkins_hamburger_farm.htm

Summer camps, school tours – **Cherry-Crest Farm**, PA: <http://www.cherrycrestfarm.com/fieldtrips.asp>

Cattle theme – **Fort Worth Cowboy Hall of Fame**, TX: <http://www.texascowboyhalloffame.com/kids.asp>

Write-up comparing “core curriculum” and their tour – **James C. Richardson Farms**, Dunnville, ON: <http://www.richardsonsfarm.com/> Click on “School Tours,” and then click on link “How does our program meet curriculum expectations?”

Adams Family Farm, VT: <http://www.adamsfamilyfarm.com/index.html>

Young's Jersey Dairy, Yellow Springs, OH. Very diverse operation that includes school tours: <http://www.youngsdairy.com/tours/index.html>

A nice basic school tour webpage – **Strom's**, Guelph, ON: <http://www.strom.ca/todo/tours/index.htm>

White Meadows Farm is a maple syrup operation. That's not likely of much interest to you, but their school tours webpage does a nice concise job of outlining how they tie curriculum into their tours: <http://www.whitemeadowsfarms.com/>

One example of online registration – **Springridge Farm**, Milton, ON: www.springridgefarm.com

Farms for Schools in the United Kingdom has a great overview of how to organize school visits to agricultural events. This site includes lots of detail (forms, risk assessment): <http://www.farmsforschools.org.uk/>

University of California, (Davis campus) has a pretty thorough overview of organizing school tours on the farm: <http://www.sarep.ucdavis.edu/Grants/Reports/Kraus/97-36FarmersGuide.htm>

Ontario's **Markham Fair** has a very complete write-up on how they link their agricultural fair to the provincial core curriculum. Although the curriculum content may vary slightly between provinces, this is a great



General Resources

There are so many resources available and a hundred ways to do it right! Before you develop your tour programs be sure to check out the resources listed below. You may find that much of the work of designing the informational content of a tour has already been done.

resource. Check with your local schools to access their curriculum for different age groups, and then look at the Markham Fair site to see what you can extract. On the Markham fair site, pay special attention to the Curriculum Connections for the different age groups, Educational Scavenger Hunt and the Education Guide. The Education Guide covers most of the critical aspects you need to consider for a well organized school tour, including:

- what students will learn from their visit
- what teachers might cover in class before their visit
- what students should bring on the school tour (proper clothing etc.)
- activities the class can do during the bus ride to the farm
- what students will see (each activity and its relevance to education)
- follow-up activities teachers can use back in the class room
- sample questions based on what the kids will see as well as the answers (many of the questions are designed for older children, but it will stimulate ideas for questions for younger children)

Your focus may be different than that of the Markham Fair, but this website gives you an excellent outline that you can tailor to your farm: <http://www.markhamfair.ca/>

National Western Stock Show, Denver, CO – Their teacher's handbook (great resource on all types of domesticated animals) has ideas on how to develop theme activities and education around animals: <http://www.nationalwestern.com/>

Shelburne Farms is a nonprofit state owned education center and historic site near Shelburne in Vermont. Their mission is to teach young people about conservation. They are considered by many farms to be an excellent resource for school tour program ideas. Some farms will take staff to one of Shelburne Farms' workshop programs to learn content and how to present it to children: <http://www.shelburnefarms.org/educationprograms/index.shtm>

Saskatoon Prairieland Corporation, Saskatoon, SK – This site has program outlines for cattle, grains, gardens, pork and dairy: <http://www.saskatoonex.com/ppevents.php?event=782>

Alberta Resources

The **Ag Awareness Program** fosters awareness and understanding of the agriculture industry in Alberta. The program provides activities and resources, including lesson plans, for teachers. This is a good way to see what is taught in the different grades so you can more easily tie your school tour into their curriculum. You can ask teachers if they are using any of the lesson plans provided by Ag Awareness. If they are, then you can use this site to help you focus the school tour: www.agric.gov.ab.ca/agawareness

Ag Awareness also has a **EAT** (Educational Ag. Tourism) website: www.agriculture.alberta.ca/eat

Crop and Livestock Facts

Animal education resources: <http://afac.ab.ca/education.htm#AFACResources>

Dairy: <http://www.albertamilk.com/nutritioneducation/teacherresources.aspx?g=&k=>

Chicken: <http://www.chicken.ab.ca/>

Eggs: <http://eggs.ab.ca/>

Pigs: <http://www.albertapork.com/community.aspx?NavigationID=1314>

Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development Resources

Educational resource listing: [http://www1.agric.gov.ab.ca/\\$department/deptdocs.nsf/all/agic612](http://www1.agric.gov.ab.ca/$department/deptdocs.nsf/all/agic612)

Colouring sheets: [http://www1.agric.gov.ab.ca/\\$department/deptdocs.nsf/all/cdc7787](http://www1.agric.gov.ab.ca/$department/deptdocs.nsf/all/cdc7787)

Other Educational Resources

This website links you to every province's **Agriculture in the Classroom** educational resources: <http://www.aitc.ca/>

Example – click on Saskatchewan → Teacher's Resources, then → Search by Grade or → Search by Topic and make a selection.

Ontario Agri-Food Education: <http://www.oafe.org/>

Photosynthesis story: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Photosynthesis>

Popcorn activities and facts: <http://www.popcorn.org/>

Helpful Organizations

Joining an organization will expose you to new ideas that may be very helpful to your business.

School tours are an important aspect of on-farm marketing. You may want to consider joining the **North American Farmers Direct Marketing Association**. Their annual conference



almost always has a session on school tours: <http://www.nafdma.com/>

The United Kingdom has the **National Farm Attractions Network** which may have some useful information for you: <http://www.farmattractions.net/regions.htm>

On Line Registration Sources

Providers of programs that offer on-line registration include:

- **AgPro Marketing** in Madera, CA, sell on-line reservation software for field trips and special events: www.agprobookit.com They also offer ag-tourism consulting: <http://www.agpromarketing.com/>
- **Maize Quest** of New Park, PA, has a on-line reservation program called BookMy Groups: www.bookmygroups.com as well as corn maze games, designs, attractions and audio safety products: <http://www.mazefunpark.com/>

Safety Resources

Managing Risk on Farms Open to the Public factsheet: <http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/busdev/facts/06-087.htm>

Hand washing poster: go to <http://www.health.alberta.ca/health-info/influenza.html>. Scroll down the page and under Influenza Poster choose Hand Washing Sign – Do Bugs Need Drugs.

Suppliers

Megaphone/Loudhailers: <http://talkietooter.ca/html/tktr2007.htm>

Toilets-Portable (to rent) is the wording you use to find them in your local phonebook, or use this link to YellowPages.ca: www.yellowpages.ca/search/pv/1/toilets-portable/ab

Hand washing stations are for sale from:

- **Rama Plastics**, Orillia, ON: <http://www.ramaplastics.ca/>
- **All Safety Products**, Lakewood, CA: <http://www.allsafetyproducts.com/site/323655/page/875173>
- **Quadal Industries**, Oregon, USA: <http://www.quadel.net>

For managing your mail list, you'll need to print labels, and perhaps e-mail potential customers. Some of the farms that have turned school tours into a major business for themselves manage their mailing list using some kind of software. There are lots to choose from. **Benchmark** is just one. Their rates start at \$108/year: <http://www.benchmarkemail.com/>

Now that you have the background information, proceed to the Questionnaire and fill it in to create your own budget for hosting school tours.