

## Host Farm Guidelines for School Visits

### Rationale:

This document has been prepared by Agri Aware in order to provide insight and advice into hosting a group of school pupils to a farm. Agri Aware accepts no responsibility for negligence and is not involved or associated with any visits organised without the direct pre-agreed involvement.

Farmers facilitating group visits from schools of any level (pre-schools, primary & secondary) should adhere to strict guidelines to ensure high levels of hygiene and biosecurity are maintained and that visitors experience best practice and obtain both a better understanding of agriculture and an appropriate impression of the industry.

This document is a detailed set of guidelines for any farmer who wishes to facilitate visits to their farm as a reference to the minimum requirements expected of the host farm and farmer.

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## Basic Farm Requirements

### 1. Facilities

- a. Farmers must have appropriate safety and hazard signage in place on the farm, signage should highlight:
  - i. Immediate dangers
    1. Slurry tanks
    2. Livestock
    3. Moving Machinery
    4. Hazardous Material (chemicals)
    5. Areas with heights or falls
  - ii. Warning signs
    1. Livestock moving
    2. Machinery moving
    3. Areas of concern
    4. Live Electricity (Electric Fences)
    5. Bait Points
  - iii. Notice signs
    1. Location for First Aid kit
    2. Location for fire extinguishers
    3. Location for safe assembly
    4. Notice of entering a farm
    5. Notice of public liability
    6. Visible Eir Code in case of Emergency
- b. Farmers should have basic equipment that caters for all visits and unprecedented situations
  - i. Fully stocked and maintained First Aid Kit
  - ii. Fire extinguishers
  - iii. Disinfectant Foot Baths (preferably sponge type baths)
  - iv. Hand Washing/Sanitation facilities

## 2. Documentation

- a. Farmers must be adequately insured to have members of the public on the farm, this includes an up to date copy of Public Liability Cover from your insurance provider and must be easily accessible in the event that a copy is required by the school.
  - i. To comply with students entering a workplace, farms should have certification for any electrical work carried out on the farm  
(This certification is mandatory when taking in students for work placement)
- b. In accordance with the Department of Agriculture Food & Marine (DAFM) all farms must comply with any restrictions posed on them from a Biosecurity Perspective. Farms must be within their Annual TB test and have clearance from their local veterinary practitioner or DVO to proceed as normal.
  - i. It is advisable that any farm with a recent or recurring outbreak of zoonotic diseases should seek clearance from their local veterinary practitioner to proceed with any on farm visits, diseases for concern include:
    1. Bovine Tuberculosis (TB)
    2. Leptospirosis
    3. Brucellosis
    4. Orf
    5. Toxoplasmosis
    6. Rabies
    7. E-Coli
    8. Salmonella
    9. Streptococcus suis/zooepidemicus
    10. Ringworm
    11. Cryptosporidiosis
    12. Anthrax

## 3. Condition of Facilities

- a. To safely facilitate any visit, facilities on the farm must be in appropriate working order with no defects that could result in an injury or potential life threatening situation. The following must be in good condition and maintained correctly
  - i. Livestock handling facilities
  - ii. Gates and barriers separating visitors from livestock

- iii. Doors and entrances to yards and buildings
- iv. Structures of buildings (walls, steel-work)
- v. Lighting
- vi. Concrete surfaces
- vii. Fencing
- viii. Manholes, agitation/entrance points

#### **4. Host Farmer**

- a. Host farmers must take responsibility for the safety and welfare of visitors to their farm, and treat visits as a priority in the days prior to the event.
- b. Given the importance of public perception and the use of media to portray agriculture, farmers should make best effort to create a good impression on all visitors to the farm, steps to achieve this can include:
  - i. Dressing appropriately and allocating time for personal appearance (school teachers are likely to take photographs)
  - ii. Taking time to research the school curriculum and make efforts to link activities on the farm with what they need to learn
  - iii. Assess the farm and establish if there are areas or activities you think are of more interest to a school group, and also any areas or activities that might raise interesting questions
  - iv. Make efforts to engage with the school group and keep information relevant to the age group you're addressing
  - v. Be confident in taking questions and ensure that answers are appropriate and relevant to the question

### Reasons Visits Should NOT Proceed

Occasionally circumstances can change which can result in the farm no longer being appropriate to visit, the responsibility for this decision lies with the farmer, hence host farmers must assess the farm as a place of visitation and not a standard workplace that they are accustomed to.

1. Disease Outbreak

- a. Should the farm experience a disease outbreak from the zoonotic disease list, it is imperative that nobody external to the farm should enter until given clearance by a local veterinary practitioner

2. Poor Weather

- a. In the interest of everybody's safety, no farm visit should occur if any weather warnings are issued or if,
  - i. There is excessive rain
  - ii. There is windy/blustery conditions
  - iii. There is excessive heat

3. Personal Health

- a. If you or a family member is experiencing poor health, it is within the interest of everyone that the farm visit should be postponed until everyone is in better health.

4. Defective Facilities/Equipment

- a. Should you find any facilities or pieces of equipment to be defective, it is vital that nobody unfamiliar with the premises should enter. The event should be postponed until the defects can be rectified adequately.

### Things To Remember About Younger Visitors

As we grow older we tend to forget what it was once like to be a child, teenager, young adult. Reminding ourselves of how a younger person might think may help significantly when preparing and facilitating a farm visit.

- Young children will want to climb gates to see better
  - Secure gates adequately
  - Allow an area for children to see what it is you are showing them
- Not everyone is from a farm or will understand where food comes from, make it relevant and easy to understand
- Get down at the same eye level as a child when assessing your farm for potential dangers, this will help you see things from a child's perspective
- Young people don't always learn from being told something, try and demonstrate what it is you are talking about
- Young people won't see the dangers that you might see, double check everything
- Create a story or consistent flow within the information you are giving them, this allows them to remember it easier
  - Eg. *"From Grass to Glass"* when talking about milk production
- Make it as fun and interactive as you can, this way they will enjoy it and you should equally enjoy it

## Getting The Level Of Information Right For Your Audience

Within the years of 4 to 17/18 there are many different levels of knowledge and understanding, for this reason we must adjust how we speak or relay information to young people so that they can understand what it is you're saying.

With any age group it is important to ask the following questions before you begin

1. Do we have any young farmers today?
2. Who has visited a farm before?
3. What do you already know about farms?

### Younger Children (4 - 7)

- With every statement you make, explain in very basic terms what it is you mean, eg. *"This is a dairy farm, so that means on this farm we milk cows so that we have the milk for our cornflakes and butter for our toast"*
- Keep words as simple as possible and speak nice and slow.
- Make sure that when you talk about something they might have never seen before to provide a physical example where possible eg. machinery, tools, technology

### Older Children (8 - 13)

- This age group may know some things about farming, some may come from a farm and more may not, ask them what they know and engage with them in discussion
- Continue to use physical examples where you can to demonstrate what it is you are saying
- Provide them with some interesting facts and funny or interesting anecdotal stories that will help them remember your talk with them

### Teenagers (14 - 18)

- This age group will respond well to being spoken to as young adults, engage with them and divulge some more technical information whilst also backing it up with physical examples
- Make it as relevant to their daily lives as possible and discuss the different roles that farmers have within the economy, community and environment

- If you can keep the conversation humorous and engaging, the group will interact with you more and therefore take more away from the visit.

### **Suggested Topics to cover with students**

- The History of the farm and how you became a farmer
- How the farm operates from day to day
- What it is you produce and where that produce goes to, what is the end product from your produce?
- The lifecycle of an animal on your farm
- How you provide an animal what it needs
- The kind of facilities you have on the farm and their purpose (sheds, handling facilities, roadways, underpasses etc)
- Machinery you have and why you have them
- How you maintain machinery
- The care you give to the soil
- How you incorporate environmental measures on your farm
- Where do you see the farm going in the future
- What safety measures you implement on the farm
- How jobs change from season to season



### Demonstration Examples

- Why we milk cows twice a day and why we don't leave the calf with a dairy cow
  - Put 25 - 28L of milk in one bucket, measure out the 6L a calf would drink and then ask the students to lift the remaining milk in the bucket and hold it up as long as they can, this helps to demonstrate that cows are relieved of a weight when milked
  - Similar idea to demonstrate how much water a cow drinks 60L+ a day
- Putting into context the amount of milk a cow produces
  - Recommended milk portion for a bowl of cereal (coco pops) is 125 - 150ml, cow giving 25L = 166 + bowls of cereal a day
- Explaining how a milking machine functions
  - Pulsator is the equivalent of a human heart, contracting and relaxing (pulsing) whilst the vacuum pump is just a Hoover that takes the milk from the claw piece to the bulk tank (mentioning both a vacuum pump and a milk pump can over-complicate things for a younger age group)

Feel free to get creative with different examples and spending the time to make or invest in different props can be a massive help in explaining things to younger visitors.

### Checks Prior To A Visit

1. One/two weeks prior to visit,
  - a. Farmyard
    - i. Ensure all signs are up and visible
    - ii. Check all safety equipment such as fire extinguishers and first aid kits
    - iii. Assess all gates, barriers, divisions to ensure they are properly hung and not requiring attention.
    - iv. Observe all livestock in the yard and ensure they are in good health and that they have all necessary Tags.
    - v. Assess supplies in the yard and look at the calendar to see if there will be any potential interferences on the day of a visit such as deliveries or milk collection (this is to reduce traffic on the farm during a visit and just ensure everyone's safety)
    - vi. Check that you have adequate foot bath disinfectant, hand soap/sanitiser and purchase more if required.
    - vii. Assess if the place is appropriately clean and allow time before the visit to address any issues or cleaning that is required.
    - viii. Ensure all lighting is working
    - ix. Ensure any chemical/tool storage have adequate locking systems
  - b. Farm in General
    - i. Look at the current status of fencing, address if required
    - ii. Ensure easy access for a school bus or multiple cars, allow space for turning and parking
    - iii. Ensure there are no fallen trees or other potential hazards around the farm
    - iv. Cordon off dangerous heights/falls/watercourses etc.
  - c. School
    - i. Invite the teachers out for an hour or so before/after school someday to show them what you hope to do and also show them the dangers around the farm and where children are permitted/not permitted to be.
    - ii. Establish how many teachers will be there and ensure children are adequately supervised

2. Day prior to a visit

a. Farmyard

- i. Ensure the yard is tidy
- ii. Double check all livestock and confirm they are content and well bedded with plenty of feed
- iii. Lock or store away any machinery that will not be required on the day of the visit
- iv. Complete a final check on all gates, barriers, divisions
- v. Lock any chemical/tool storage facilities
- vi. Place your disinfection footbaths in place and have them ready for filling the following day
- vii. Cordon off any bales or storage areas (pallets, fertiliser, machinery)

b. Farm in General

- i. Clear any access routes
- ii. Close any gates that might mislead a group of visitors if left open
- iii. Having the parking turning area clear and well marked

c. Personal Preparation

- i. Have an idea as to how you would like to show the visitors around the farm, even draw out a route on a piece of paper and have it to hand
- ii. Assess your own health and ensure you feel adequately prepared
- iii. Assess the weather
- iv. Contact the school and confirm that all is ok for the visit to go ahead and confirm time of arrival and if the teacher has any particular topics they would like to cover with the class
  1. Confirm any allergies or special requirements in the class (wheelchair access, other disabilities)
  2. Advise any necessary wellies, raincoats, hats etc that you think they should bring
  3. Ensure that the teacher is bringing sufficient help to supervise the students.
- v. Have a presentable clean set of farm clothes or clothes you don't mind wearing on the farm, ready for the visit

3. Day of the visit

a. Personal preparation

- i. Depending on the time of the visit, start a little bit earlier to get any necessary jobs done and allow time for something to eat and a change of clothes before the visit
- ii. Have your planned route and any other pieces of paperwork you need, ready and to hand

b. Farmyard

- i. Final checks on facilities
- ii. Final checks on livestock ensuring they are well fed and bedded
- iii. Final locks on dangerous areas
- iv. Fill foot baths with disinfectant and ensure there is sanitiser and/or water with soap ready to go

c. Farm in general

- i. Ensure any required access gates are open

## Fulfilling A Visit

1. Greeting school group
  - a. Meet the school group where you have designated a place for parking and go through the following,
    - i. Ground Rules
      1. No horseplay
      2. No wandering off without consent
      3. Stay together, stay safe
      4. No taunting animals
      5. No climbing, running etc
    - ii. Introduction to yourself and the farm, briefly give a bit of history of the farm and briefly explain what you have on the farm
    - iii. Establish if there are any other farmers in the class and engage with them, you might know their families and this helps open a line of communication and encourages them to ask questions
    - iv. Encourage students to ask questions and explain that everyday is a school day for everyone, and that you're bringing them onto the farm to learn
    - v. Allow time for students to put wellies and jackets on
  - b. Bring everyone through the footbath and explain its purpose, also highlight that there are hand washing/sanitation facilities available
2. During the visit
  - a. Allow plenty of time at each of the stops
  - b. Encourage them to ask questions
  - c. Explain as best you can the whole process your farm completes in the food chain, this can include,
    - i. Where the livestock are sourced, how they're reared
    - ii. The life of any one animal on the farm
    - iii. The process of producing feed for the animals (silage, grains, etc)
    - iv. The recycling of nutrients on the farm (slurry, dung, etc)
    - v. The process of maintaining fields/growing crops
    - vi. Any efficiencies you have invested in on the farm

- vii. Any environmental measures being carried out on the farm
  - viii. What your day to day jobs look like
  - ix. What machinery you have on the farm
  - x. Where you see the farm going in the future and any big steps that need to be taken to achieve that
  - xi. Safety measures taken on the farm and how important farm safety is for everyone in the countryside
  - xii. The importance of soil health
- d. Be confident and enjoy any questions or interesting discussions that might be had with the class group.
3. Finishing a visit
- a. Advise everyone to wash/sanitise their hands
  - b. Bring everyone back through the footbath and encourage them to wash wellies in long grass or with a tap
  - c. Thank everyone for their time and attention
  - d. Encourage the teacher to send on any new questions that might arise after the visit and wish them well in their studies.

### **Additional Notes For Busy Times Of The Year**

At certain times of the year within the school calendar it will also be very busy on the farm, during these times of the year it's very easy to forget little things that might not affect us in our day to day lives on the farm but it's very important we address them for any school visits.

#### 1. Spring time

##### a. Birthing Animals

- i. Ensure lambing/calving pens are clean and presentable with no effluent leaking from them or any foul odours
- ii. Ensure no afterbirths or mortalities are around the farm, as good practice these should be handled quickly and appropriately

##### b. Young Animals

- i. Ensure they are well bedded, fed and presentable
- ii. It is best to keep away from any sickly young animals from a health and stress perspective for the animal
- iii. Remove any stale milk, forage or bedding from around young animal housing
- iv. Ensure all young animals are tagged

##### c. Field Work

- i. Any muck/clay being dragged into the farmyard by tankers, spreaders etc, should be tidied up.
- ii. If slurry is a priority on the week of the visit, pause all spreading for the duration of the visit and ensure all slats are closed and agitation points shut properly with locks on them where possible (alternative is to park a wheel over the agitation point if possible). It is also best to avoid any agitation of slurry for the 2 days prior to the visit if possible.

#### 2. Summer time

##### a. Field Work

- i. Any muck/clay being dragged into the farmyard by tankers, spreaders etc, should be tidied up.
- ii. If slurry is a priority on the week of the visit, pause all spreading for the duration of the visit and ensure all slats are closed and agitation points shut

properly with locks on them where possible (alternative is to park a wheel over the agitation point if possible). It is also best to avoid any agitation of slurry for the 2 days prior to the visit if possible.

b. Sheds/Storage

- i. Any empty sheds should be closed up to prevent temptation

c. Livestock

- i. Areas of high traffic with livestock such as laneways and cow passes should be cleaned where appropriate or fenced off if possible
- ii. If required, milking times should be done earlier/delayed to prevent visitors interfering with cows entering and exiting the farmyard

#### **Extra Tips for Visits**

- Try and have the school teachers out on the farm before the visit to establish the safe and not-safe areas.
- Remind teachers that they are there to supervise as well as learn, their attention must be focused on the whereabouts of students at all times.
- Have an employee or family member carrying out work in the background or acting as supervision for the group so that you have someone you trust as an extra set of eyes around the farm for any unprecedented circumstances.
- If ever in doubt about something there are plenty of resources available and plenty of people to ask, farmers with any specific questions can contact their local,
  - Veterinary Practice
  - DVO
  - Visiting School
  - IFA Branch

Alternatively farmers can contact Agri Aware if unsure as to where their query might be directed to.

- Online resources are also very useful and can provide clarity or guidance on best practice such as this document on preventing and controlling infections within open farms: [Open Farms and Pet Farms- Guidance Document.pdf \(hpsc.ie\)](https://www.hpsc.ie/healthandcare/yourhealth/foodandnutrition/foodandnutrition/foodandnutrition/foodandnutrition/Open_Farms_and_Pet_Farms- Guidance_Document.pdf)



### Self Assessment/Review

After the visit has ended and you have time to reflect on the visit, ask these questions of yourself so that you can further improve the experience for both yourself and any visitors which ultimately will benefit the visitors but also the agricultural industry in its efforts to bridge the gap between farms and consumers.

1. Did the group seem to enjoy themselves?
  - a. What did they enjoy/not enjoy?
2. Did you enjoy facilitating the visit?
  - a. What did you enjoy/not enjoy?
3. What were the highlights of the visit?
  - a. Can these be included more or made more interactive with visitors?
4. Was there anything asked that was too difficult?
  - a. Why might this question have been asked?
5. Was there anything visitors noticed that you didn't notice previously?
  - a. Should these unnoticed things have been noticed and be remembered for future visits?
6. Did you learn anything from the visitors?
  - a. If so, what?
7. From your assessment, did the visitors learn anything from you?
  - a. If so, what?
  - b. Can this be increased without boring them?
8. Anything that worked really well?
9. Anything that didn't work so well?



CHECKLIST	Week in advance of visit			Day before visit			Morning of Visit		
	Checked	Need to come back to	Needs attention	Checked	Need to come back to	Needs attention	Checked	Need to come back to	Needs attention
Safety Signs									
Locks on gates and storage sheds									
Disinfection Footbaths									
Handwashing facilities									
First Aid Kit									
Fire Extinguishers									
Gates and Barriers									
Fencing									
Lighting									
Manholes/Agitation points									
Structures (Walls etc)									
Concrete surfaces									
Health Status of Livestock (VET, DVO)									
Ensure Livestock have tags									
Print copy of Insurance/public liability									
Contact school/teacher									
Research/Enquire about curriculum									
Clean yard appropriately									
Cordon off dangerous areas									
Lock machinery and chemical stores									
Place for car/bus parking									
Ensure Entrances are clear									
Check calendar for any clashes (Deliveries/collections)									
Bed livestock sufficiently									

