



# Run a Farm Tour

Organizing and hosting a farm tour is an excellent way to reach an audience that is not familiar with farming. It provides an opportunity for non-farmers (or farmers from another commodity) to see and learn first-hand how and why things are done. It also provides a solid base of goodwill and increased public confidence in farming practices. Whether you bring the public to your farm or the farm to the public (i.e. farm displays), a successful event requires careful planning.



*If a picture is worth a thousand words, a farm tour is worth a million.*

# Things to Consider When Planning a Farm Tour

## Set Your Limits

Generally, tours on the farm should be aimed at carefully targeted, well-screened audiences. Your farm operation may be appropriate for certain sized groups or certain age levels but not others. You may only have time for tours at certain times of the year, or may want to limit the number of tours you give in any one year.

## Choose Your Audience

Schools (kindergarten through university) and youth groups (church, 4-H, or scouting organizations) usually find farm tours wonderful field trips. Often the teacher or leader can tie the farm visit to what they are teaching in their classroom or meetings.

Senior citizens or service clubs (which often include local business and community leaders) may appreciate an opportunity to see the workings of a present day farm business. And remember, if farming interests are

seen as crucial to community interests, local citizens will support them.

Farm tours also offer colorful photo and feature story opportunities for journalists and help to better prepare them for future agricultural and food related news stories. If you invite journalists, plan the story you want the media to tell and do your homework.

It is advisable to have a photo policy for farm visitors. While we encourage photos, a picture speaks volumes – keep in mind those words can be positive or negative. Tour your farm yourself and be aware of possible photo opportunities that could be construed in a negative manner.

Elected officials and government bureaucrats can benefit from the insight gained from a farm tour when making decisions that affect the farming community. Consider timing your tour to coincide with a larger agriculture awareness event or organize a multi-farm tour and invite elected officials to talk with local constituents and the media.

*... if farming interests are seen as crucial to community interests, local citizens will support them.*





## Promote a Positive Image

Be proud of your role as a farmer. Be positive, not defensive. After all, you help feed the world and you do it with care.

Clean working conditions and a sense of pride in one's farm are a psychological benefit to any farmer. A neat attractive farm also creates a positive image with visitors and neighbours.

- Welcome people when they arrive, an honest handshake goes a long way to making a good first impression.
- Keep physical facilities in good repair.
- Keep weeds and grass mowed.
- Provide good drainage.
- Practice good fly, rodent and waste control programs.
- Do a little extra for tours: make sure facilities are bright, clean, tidy and free of hazards.
- Plan your farm chores around tours and avoid unsightly chores like spreading manure the same day of a tour.
- Take an imaginary tour of your operation through an outsider's eyes or invite a non-farming friend to do it for you.

Proper care of farm animals is essential if farmers are to maintain the respect of the public. It takes people to manage animals properly, not just good equipment.

- Follow your Recommended Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Farm Animals.
- Stay up to date on changing standards for housing and handling requirements.
- Take advantage of livestock specialists, crop specialists, veterinarians and nutritionists to ensure your animals receive the latest and best that research and experience can offer.
- Follow good animal husbandry practices in handling, transporting and holding livestock.

Be an agricultural ambassador. The most effective public relations activities are those that reinforce widely held beliefs:

- Farmers are hardworking, honest, friendly people.
- Farmers provide abundant, wholesome and affordable food.

*Farm tours also offer colorful photo and feature story opportunities for journalists...*

## Consider Your Costs

Costs will depend on the extensiveness of the tour. However, just preparing for and conducting a tour requires time and labour that take you away from other things. Advertising and promotion (if necessary), special equipment (like barriers to block off restricted areas, portable toilets, signage), additional liability insurance, hand out materials, and product samples will all add to your costs. Check with your local Agriculture Awareness or Agriculture in the Classroom (AITC) committees, Farm & Food Care, provincial commodity groups or local agri-businesses to see if funds or materials are available. Consider charging a nominal fee per person to help offset your expenses.

## Farm Safety Comes First

Take a critical look at your operation and identify all potential safety hazards. Equipment and storage areas, access to animals, ponds and lagoons are all potential safety hazards to those unfamiliar with farm surroundings. Identify all off-limit areas and use signage, locks and barriers to restrict access. Check with your insurance agent regarding liability insurance. Ensure that tour groups (especially children) are adequately chaperoned. Never allow people to wander on their own. Begin all tours by explaining the ground rules.

Contact the **Saskatchewan Safety Council** ([www.sasksafety.org](http://www.sasksafety.org)) or the **Canadian Agriculture Safety Association** ([casa-acsa.ca](http://casa-acsa.ca)) for tips and advice. If providing food samples, be sure you meet local public health regulations.



- Farmers do so responsibly and professionally.
- The family farm remains the backbone of Canadian agriculture.

To the public a farmer is a farmer, so remember that in their eyes you are representing all farmers. Do not be a source of misinformation:

- Speak on what you know and limit your comments to your farm operation.
- Refer questions you are not sure about.
- Do not build yourself (or your sector) up by deflecting criticism somewhere else.
- Don't start a Food Fight! All agricultural practices have their place and deserve the same respect.

## Make it Relevant and Make it Understandable

Speak the layman's language – many urban people aren't used to agricultural jargon.

- Talk in terms that your visitors will understand: cartons of milk rather than kilograms of milk, birthing pens rather than farrowing units, neutering rather than castration.
- Make comparisons that are relevant to your audiences' experiences. By comparing disease outbreaks in livestock to chicken pox in people, for example, you can illustrate that even with the best precautions some diseases cannot be prevented or controlled.

Don't assume that the facts speak for themselves and don't expect people to see the obvious.

- Develop an agenda and verbal presentation for every tour.

Tailor your presentation to your audience: children for example want to know about the animals • and their life cycles, businessmen want to know about the business side of farming, etc.

- Pick a theme or key messages such as sustainable agriculture, food quality or animal care.
- Explain how and why things are done on your farm and point out the obvious.
- Point out the shade, water and feed available to animals.
- Highlight animal housing that protects them from predators, provides climate control and easy access to fresh feed and water.
- Explain restraining devices or point out the lack of them.
- Point out practices that make birth less stressful and protect the young (i.e. birthing pens).
- Discuss medical care given to livestock – vaccines to protect against disease and medication to cure illness.
- Describe animal handling practices necessary to the health and welfare of the animal – tail docking, needle teeth trimming, dehorning, neutering, ear marking, tattooing and ear tagging.
- Discuss feeding procedures and basics of animal nutrition.
- Always allow plenty of time for questions and to address common misconceptions in your prepared presentation.

## Make it Memorable

For many visitors this may be the first (and only) opportunity to see and experience a farm. Think about how to involve the public and how to make factual learning fun with hands-on activities or visual aids or hand-outs. Milking or shearing demonstrations, egg grading or butter making. Have samples of grain they can touch and play with, compare seeds to grown plants or end products or set up a ride on the hay wagon. All add to a memorable and positive farm tour experience.

**If you would like more information on holding farm tours, please contact us.**



FarmFoodCare.org | FarmFoodCareON.org | FarmFoodCareSK.org | realdirtblog.org



# Tips for Hosting Crop Tours



## Timeline

The seed-to-bin story is a great way to showcase agriculture from start to finish. Farmers can walk the audience through the production process, including seeding, pesticide application, swathing, combining, storage and shipping. This way, farmer tour hosts can answer questions in an organized matter, cover all equipment uses, and make it clear how production connects to the food that consumers eat.

*Elected officials and government bureaucrats can benefit from the insight gained from a farm tour when making decisions that affect the farming community.*

## Comparisons and Visuals

Visuals are great learning tools to help people unfamiliar with our industry to understand farm sizes, grain volumes and crop inputs. Examples include:

- 60 lbs of wheat in a pail to show how much is in a bushel (but make sure to define bushel as well, below)
- A pail of the amount seed needed to seed one acre and comparing it to the amount of harvested seed that is produced from one acre
- The tank of water and a small clear container with the actual amount of chemical that is used on one acre used to explain the use of pesticides on a per acre basis
- Cost comparisons – compare the value of a new piece of equipment to a house, or vehicle or something else consumers would be familiar with. (i.e.: One combine that costs approximately \$400,000 is the equivalent of buying an average sized house in Saskatoon.)



## Tips for Hosting Livestock Tours

### Timeline

The animal production cycle is interesting to non-farmers as they are familiar with the beginning and the end of it. However, there is a key opportunity to showcase how much you care for your animals when telling the story of that animal's life. Ranchers put a great deal of time, effort and money into making sure their animals are comfortable and well fed in order to increase productivity and returns on that investment.

Start by visiting the calving barn or any new calves on the farm and walk the tour participants through a day in your life at each stage of the animal's life. Beginning with calving, to vaccination and branding, to putting them out to pasture and bringing them back and finally the transportation to the auction market or feedlot. Going into the details of your daily routine will show the audience how much time and work you put into each animal's care.

### Comparisons and Visuals

As livestock production can be a more emotional topic than crop production, because it involves living animals, it is important to be prepared for strong emotional responses and tough questions. Consumers who eat meat still want to be assured that the animal was raised and slaughtered in a humane manner but may not understand the differences or tolerances that large animals have compared to their house pets. Find a comparison that works for you to show that a brand doesn't affect the cow's tough hide the same way it would affect their own skin. Or that the unheated barn, when full of animals at  $-20^{\circ}\text{C}$  warms up to around  $0^{\circ}\text{C}$ . Emphasize that your feed mixtures are such high quality and the cows stomachs are so efficient that one feeding per day is perfectly sufficient for their needs.



# Tips for Both Crop & Livestock Tours

## Identify and Explain Industry Terms

Agriculture has a lot of terminology that we use on a daily basis that, from a consumer perspective, makes no sense without an explanation of the term and its uses. There are words used in crop production that don't apply to raising livestock and vice versa so it is key to identify what those words are so we are aware that they need to be explained. Examples include:

- *"I have 60 head of cattle"* – explain head as a term to reference 1 animal and that when your animals are standing in a pen/yard you count their heads to make sure they're all there.
- *Types of Animals* – This applies to all livestock operations, as we know to the general population cattle are mostly all cows but this isn't the case. Define any animal terms you will be using during your tour so as to avoid confusion later on. (i.e. heifers, steers, bulls, cow, sow, ewe, gilt, mare, stallion, etc.)
- *Bushel/Acre* – a weight measurement for grains and used to help price what we sell, a bushel of wheat is 60 pounds and the price is \$6.00 per bushel then we got \$6.00 for 60 pounds of wheat. We also use bushels to measure yield which is the amount of product we grow. So if my wheat yielded 50 bushels per acre and an acre is the size of a football field, I grew 1,100 pounds or \$300 worth of wheat on that one football field sized piece of land. A typical field size is 160 acres or 160 football fields.
- *No-Till* – Something we are very proud of in the industry is our relatively recent shift to no-till farming. Explain the previous methods of cultivation and seeding as well as the side effects, (nutrient and top soil loss, dust storms etc.) and describe the new machinery, chemicals, and methods that reduce our carbon emissions and soil erosion.

Simplify words without dumbing them down, provide a brief description instead of the word you'd normally use. Example: "I spray Roundup on my crops before harvest to desiccate them." Instead, use "I spray Roundup on my crops at harvest to help them mature so I can combine sooner."

Be aware of acronyms and abbreviations and spell them out or use the full term at least the first time you

mention them. Example: The CGC, FOB farm, the R.M, AI, etc.

Don't use terms a 10 year old wouldn't understand. Example: crop protection products, front line producer, live weight, premises identification

When in doubt, leave it out. If there is a term or process you don't think you can accurately explain or you're unsure your audience will understand the reference to technical or specialized terminology, its best not to include it.

## Don't take Chores for Granted

One man's chore is another's entertainment so don't discount the menial tasks you do on a daily basis as boring. For someone who's never seen a horse rubbed down, a truck unloaded, a sprayer tank filled from a dugout or an ear tag inserted in a calf, they are interesting integral parts of the farming process and should be explained.

## Know Your Audience

A key part of preparing for a tour is to know and understand your audience so you can focus on the areas they are interested in, relate to them on a personal level, and tailor your message to their interests. If you will be hosting 15 chefs, nutritionists or dietitians, they will be interested in the seed to bin story and where the food is coming from. They may also have questions about feed rations, pesticide use, GMOs, hormones or steroids that you will need to be prepared to answer. If your audience is a group of investment bankers or financial analysts they may be more interested in your cost of machinery, land purchase and rent prices, spot contracting vs. futures contracts, commodity price comparisons, and cost of inputs. Think about these questions ahead of time and come up with your responses so you can give a confident convincing answer.

# Help is Available

You don't have to be an expert in all areas and all management practices. If you don't know the answer to a question that's okay!

- Talk to others who have held farm tours or farm displays for their advice and suggestions.
- Work with your local Agriculture Awareness, CropLife Canada, Farm & Food Care or Agriculture in the Classroom organizations.
- Contact your provincial commodity group for resources, contacts, materials and training or advice.
- Work with local agribusinesses and/or area farmers.

Notes

If you would like more information on holding farm tours, please contact us.



(306) 477-FOOD (3663) | office@farmfoodcaresk.org  
Bay 6A - 3602 Taylor Street East, Saskatoon SK S7H 5K9  
FarmFoodCareSK.org



(519) 837-1326 | info@farmfoodcare.org  
100 Stone Road West, Suite 202, Guelph ON N1G 5L3  
FarmFoodCareON.org | realdirtblog.org