

FARM TOUR GUIDE

You may be asked by a school, service organization or other group to give a tour of your dairy farm. And, as more and more people are removed from production agriculture, this can be a great way to give the public first-hand experience with modern dairy farming.

Farm tours are not for everyone. Offering farm tours requires an ongoing commitment by you and your staff to prepare and maintain your operation to accommodate tour participants. Every area on the tour has to meet visitor standards for appearance. Should you decide to offer farm tours, remember that how often you conduct them and what parts of your operation you include in the tour are up to your discretion.

During a farm tour, educate the public about how dairy farmers:

- **Care for their animals** by providing nutritious diets, comfortable living conditions and regular medical care
- **Protect the land and water** through environmental practices and modern technology
- **Produce safe, wholesome, delicious dairy products**

Know Your Audience

Many farm tours are for elementary-age children, but there may be a wide range of ages within the group — and that's not counting the teachers, parents and others that may accompany the tour. When you agree to host the tour, find out who is participating. Make sure to ask if there will be any media on the tour. If so, assign your dairy's spokesperson to accompany media throughout the tour and answer their questions.

No matter what the age or occupation, most tour participants won't be familiar with the farm terms you use on an everyday basis. Keep the following tips in mind when preparing for and giving a farm tour.

- Explain agriculture terms they won't be familiar with and avoid using jargon.
- Don't use acronyms or abbreviated terminology.
- Instead of using lots of numbers and statistics, use comparisons they can relate to (e.g., cows drink about a bathtub full of water every day; our cows produce XX gallons of milk per day).
- Stick with the basics. You don't have to explain every aspect of dairy farming, just the highlights that consumers need to understand.
- Stay positive, even if you are challenged about animal care or production practices. Continually remind tour participants of the ways you care for your animals and the land, and give them specific examples from your farm.
- Repeat your key messages about animal care, environmental stewardship and wholesome dairy products. People must hear a message up to seven times before they remember it.

Also, keep in mind that the things you see on your farm every day might not be viewed in the same way by your tour participants. Look around to see if there are things you want to move, put away or tidy before the tour group comes to your farm.

Safety and Security

The safety and security of farm tour participants should be your first priority.

- Know your farm's liability insurance policy.
- Determine which areas of your farm will be off-limits, and communicate that clearly to the group leader. Have a system in place for limiting access to those areas.
- Route your tour so participants are kept away from large equipment and machinery.
- Make all tour participants wash their hands immediately after contact with animals.
- If you serve pasteurized milk or dairy products, wait until after the tour is over and make all participants thoroughly wash their hands.
- Inform the group leader about your security measures prior to the tour.

Farm Tour Checklist

- Confirm details with group leader:
 - Number in group (if children, will adults accompany and what is their role?)
 - Age range
 - Length of tour
 - Group's interests/special requests to cover during the tour
 - Are members of the media participating in the tour
- Provide directions to your dairy farm
- Determine which areas of the farm will be included in the tour
- Draft an outline for the tour and identify YOUR goals for the tour (e.g., educate children about milk production, strengthen relationships with community leaders)
- If other family members or staff will be assisting with the tour, meet with them to review the outline and share your key messages to communicate during the tour
- Do a farm tour walk-through
- Make sure signs are posted and access is restricted to sections of the farm that will not be on the tour
- Notify appropriate family members and staff of when tour participants will be arriving
- Follow up with the group leader a day or two before the tour to confirm details and answer last-minute questions