



# Planning A Farm Tour

Less than two percent of the nation's population are directly involved in agriculture. Yet people are becoming increasingly concerned with how their food is produced. Hosting school children and other consumer groups on your dairy farm can be a wonderful way to give the public first-hand experience with modern dairy farming.

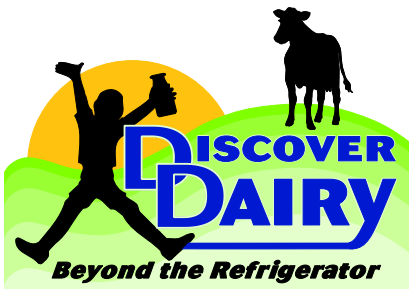
Before hosting any group, make sure you have made the proper preparations:

- **KNOW YOUR FARM:** Offering farm tours requires an ongoing commitment to prepare your farm to accommodate tour participants. Make sure every area of the tour meets visitors standards for appearance. Remember, how you conduct your tour and where you take them is at your discretion. Keep in mind, the things you see on your farm every day may not be viewed the same way by your tour participants. Look around to see if there are things you want to move, put away or clean before the tour group comes to your farm.
- **KNOW YOUR MESSAGES:** During a farm tour, you will want to educate the public on how dairy farm families:
  - Care for their animals, by providing nutritious diets, comfortable housing and regular care.
  - Protect the land and water through environmental practices and modern technology.
  - Produce safe, wholesome dairy products.
- **KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE:** Many farm tours are for elementary-aged children, but there are often teachers and parents who accompany the group. When you agree to host the tour, find out who is participating. If media will be there, you may want to assign a spokesperson to accompany them through the tour to answer their questions.

No matter what age group is there, most participants will not understand farm terms you use on an everyday basis. Keep the following tips in mind:

- Avoid using acronyms, abbreviations or jargon.
- Explain any terms they are not familiar with. (i.e. Total Mixed Ration)
- Avoid using lots of statistics and numbers. Instead use comparisons. (i.e. A cow drinks a bathtub full of water every day.)
- Stick with the basics. Focus on what consumers need to understand.
- Stay positive, even when challenged about animal care or production practices. Continue to remind participants that you care for your animals and the land.
- 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.
- **MAKE SAFETY YOUR FIRST PRIORITY:** Make sure your farm tour participants are safe.
  - Know your farm's liability insurance policy.
  - Determine which areas of the farm are off limits and communicate that clearly to the group leader. Have a system for limiting access to those areas.
  - Route your tour so participants are kept away from large equipment and machinery.
  - Make sure participants wash their hands immediately after having contact with animals.
    - Make sure all participants thoroughly wash their hands before eating any food.
    - Inform the group leader about your security measures prior to the tour.





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Plan each area of the tour carefully and decide on what you want the key message to be for that particular area. Remember, don't get too specific. Focus on what they need to know. Identify the messages that will support your commitment to animal care, quality milk production and environmental stewardship. Incorporate hands-on activities wherever appropriate.

## THE DAIRY COW

### Key Messages:

- Cows have an important job. They give us milk to drink.
- In order for a cow to give milk, she must be healthy and well cared for.
- Cows need regular medical care — just like people do. They receive vaccinations to prevent diseases and get regular check-ups from a veterinarian (or animal doctor).

### Hands-On Ideas:

- ◆ Have a cow tied outside so the participants can see her up close. Let them pet her head and front area. Avoid the back area, and make sure participants use hand sanitizer.

## DAIRY COW HOUSING

### Key Messages:

- Cows sleep in clean, spacious stalls
- The barn is well ventilated to keep the cows comfortable
- Stalls are well bedded to provide a comfortable place for the cows to lie down

### Hands-On Ideas:

- ◆ *Tie stall:* Have an empty, freshly bedded stall at the end of the barn so participants can stand in it to see how soft it is.
- ◆ *Free stall:* Have a bucket filled with the bedding material you use and have the participants feel how soft it is.

## DAIRY COW FEEDING AREA

### Key Messages:

- Cows are fed a well balanced diet and a constant supply of fresh, clean water
- Cows can eat up to 90 pounds of feed a day and a bathtub full of water
- Feeds are blended together so that every bite meets their specific nutritional needs

### Hands-On Ideas:

- ◆ Have samples of different commodity feeds — corn silage, haylage, cottonseed, corn grain, etc. — and have them touch the different feeds. Then show them the TMR mixer and explain that it is like a giant mixing bowl that blends all of the feeds together.

## MILKING AREA

### Key Messages:

- Cows must be milked two or three times a day, with each milking taking about 5 minutes.
- The average cow can give 120 glasses — or 60 pounds — of milk a day.
- The cows' udders are cleaned and sanitized both before and after milking to keep the milk clean and fresh.

### Hands-On Ideas:

- ◆ Have a pair of milker gloves, a milker claw and the teat dip on the table. Review each item and what it is for. Let them try a pair of milker gloves on and explain their purpose.

# Mapping Your Route

## MILKHOUSE

### Key Messages:

- Milk must be kept at below 40 degrees Fahrenheit to stay cold and fresh
- Milk is stored in the milk tank until a milk truck comes and takes it to the processing plant
- Milk is tested 17 different times from the farm to the marketplace to ensure it is safe

### Hands-On Ideas:

- ◆ Show the participants the milk flowing into the milkhouse pipes.
- ◆ Let them feel the difference between the warm milk that comes out of the cow and the cold milk from the milk tank.

## BABY CALVES

### Key Messages:

- A baby cow is called a calf. When a calf is first born, she gets a milk formula like babies drink baby formula. She is also fed grain and fresh water.
- Baby cows are housed in individual pens to keep them safe and free from contagious diseases.
- All calves are given an individual tag with their name and/or number when they are born, so they can be individually tracked and cared for through out their life.

### Hands-On Ideas:

- ◆ Let participants take turns feeding a baby calf a bottle. Make sure they sanitize their hands when finished.

## DAIRY HEIFER AREA

### Key Messages:

- A cow must have a baby to give milk
- Heifers are “teenaged” cows
- They need a well-balanced diet to grow and mature into a cow

### Hands-On Ideas:

- ◆ Show students the measuring tape or scale used to measure the weight of the heifers. Let the students put the tape around their waist or stand on the scale to see what they measure.

## CROPS/FIELDS

### Key Messages:

- A cow eat feeds that we cannot easily digest — like corn stalks and hay. She converts those feeds into milk, a nutritious product for us to drink.
- Farmers grow crops like corn and hay in their fields.
- Farmers must be good stewards of the land — using conservation practices and nutrient management planning to care for the soil.

### Hands-On Ideas:

- ◆ Take the group on a hay ride so they can see the fields. Point out the use of waterways, contour farming and other conservation practices.

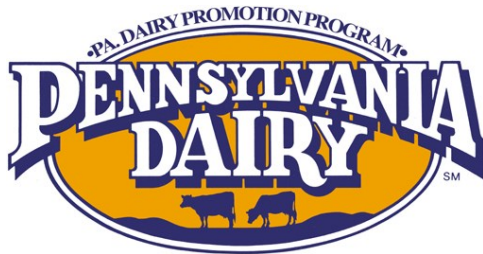


## Additional Resources

Brochures, promotional materials and other resources are available to dairy farm families hosting farm tours. For more information on resources available, contact:



**MID ATLANTIC DAIRY ASSOCIATION  
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