

Hosting Farm Tours – Tips From the Experts:



Brenda Pepper, Pepper's Dairy, Roaring Branch:

- We put milking gloves on all children to prevent contamination of both the children and the calves.
- We set up (stations) for the children to visit which they stay at each station 20 minutes.
- We have a calf station to feed the calves water, parlor station to watch the milking and see where the milk goes, a cow station where we have the amount of feed and water that a cow eats in a day in a pile and buckets, and if weather permits a hayride. We have lots of help and make sure they have fun with the kids.

Ralph Moyer, Mor-Dale Farm, Myerstown:

- School sponsored tours should be covered by their insurance. But it probably wouldn't hurt to ask though.
- Ask if they have any special needs students or medical conditions that you should be aware of before they come. An example we had was a participant who had a wheel chair or walker. We had to make a ramp to accommodate a child to use our bathroom in the house because they could not access the porta-potty. Ask about allergies. We used peanut hulls for bedding in our calf area and had to limit access for those allergic to peanuts.
- Our policy is to always answer questions honestly, but age appropriate, and if we don't know say we don't know and try to tell them where they can find the answer if we can't provide it for them.

Carrissa Itle-Westrick, Valewood Farms, Loretto:

- Use the teachers as a resource!! Even though it's a fieldtrip, they're still being paid for the day! We used to have extra staff to help move the groups between "stations" but now we rely on the teachers and parents to help us especially with group movement.
- Simple messages are best. I follow the tiered messages from DMI. I present the summary of a topic, and provide more information only if asked. We have a regular script that we follow for our tours. (We offer several tour guides with rotating "stations" based upon group size).
- Develop a brochure so that you have something "official" to send local schools.
- We recommend having a separate "agritourism" insurance coverage for all on-farm events.

Trisha Adams, Kar-Dale Acres, Shinglehouse:

- Have Fun... The three things that work for us are:
 - Feeding baby calves with a bottle of either warm water, or milk. Let the kids take turns holding the bottles. (This is a good time for a photo opportunity.)
 - Hand out Freebies such as cow erasers, magnets, etc. (Check with Mid Atlantic Dairy Association for many options.)
 - Have snacks. Kids love to eat ice cream, cheese sticks, yogurt and drink chocolate milk.
- Be Prepared...You will be opening yourself and your farm up to others. Be presentable and show off your farm's uniqueness. Be ready for the good and the bad questions. Keep a good attitude and squash misconceptions.
- Get your message across.... Reassure that ALL milk is safe and nutritious, animals are well cared for and farmers are environmentally friendly. Show your support for other farms also. (Farmers need to stick together when educating the public.)

For more resources to help you plan and host farm tours, visit www.discoverdairy.com and click on the "For Farmers" tab.