



## Health and Safety Guidance for Farm Visits

This guidance has been produced by Farming and Countryside Education (FACE) and Growing Schools to help teachers plan and organise visits to farms.

### 1. Introduction

#### Definition of a 'farm'

Farms are as varied as the food we eat, providing opportunities for learning both in a formal context and as an opportunity for enhancing the social and emotional aspects of development. They may focus on livestock or arable production, or a combination, and be self-contained units or part of huge estates.

Most are working businesses producing food and materials we use every day, and some are run by voluntary organisations (including city farms) where farming is only part of what they do.

#### Learning opportunities

Every aspect of a visit to a farm gives opportunities for both direct and indirect learning, to be surrounded by the sights, sounds, and unique smells of a farm. A visit to a farm gives young people the opportunity to understand where the food we eat comes from, and an understanding of how food production affects the countryside.

Farms offer many unique learning opportunities, from the power of simple first-hand experiences, such as witnessing the birth of a lamb in spring or walking through a field of wheat which stretches to the horizon, to getting to grips with microbes in action in a dairy as milk turns into cheese, and getting a glimpse into the many varied careers involved in keeping the countryside flourishing.

### 2. Planning a Farm Visit

Farms, in common with other working environments, can be hazardous even for the people who work on them. Most farm visits will therefore be seen as a Category 3 activity (i.e. an activity requiring detailed risk management because it potentially involves a 'significant chance of harm') and need to be planned and approved accordingly. You should therefore follow your Local Authority/Employer's Guidelines for organising this type of Learning Outside the Classroom activity.

Before organising a visit to a farm, the Activity Leader should try to check that:

- The farm is providing quality and meaningful learning experiences;
- It is well-managed and has a good reputation for safety and animal welfare;
- It maintains good washing facilities, and has clean public areas.

## LOtC Quality Badge and CEVAS accreditation

This is most effectively done by choosing a farm that either has the LOtC Quality Badge or has gone through CEVAS accreditation or training. CEVAS is the Countryside Educational Visits Accreditation Scheme. If a farm is accredited in this way, the Activity Leader can be reassured that the farm is both managing risk effectively and providing a quality learning experience.

Details of farms that have the Quality Badge can be found at

[www.lotcqualitybadge.org.uk/badgesearch](http://www.lotcqualitybadge.org.uk/badgesearch)

All farms that have gone through CEVAS accreditation/training can be found in the Places to Visit section of the Growing Schools website at

[www.growingschools.org.uk/places](http://www.growingschools.org.uk/places)

However, there will be other farms that an Activity Leader may wish to use. Checking whether these farms provide quality learning experiences and are managing risk effectively is best done during a preliminary visit.

### Preliminary visit

During a preliminary visit the Activity Leader should discuss visit arrangements with the farmer/education officer and check the provision at the farm to ensure that:

- o Eating areas are separate from those where there is any contact with animals;
- o There are adequate clean and well-maintained washing facilities. The provision of running water (preferably warm) and soap is essential;
- o There is clear information for visitors on the risks and the precautions to take;
- o Slurry pools (where animal waste is collected) and sheep dips are fenced off and areas containing chemicals are secured;
- o Young people will not get close to working machinery and equipment;
- o Young people will not ride on vehicles which have not been modified to carry passengers. See HSE Carriage of passengers on farm trailers  
[www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/ais36.pdf](http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/ais36.pdf)
- o There are traffic-free areas for groups to meet and be briefed.

Remember to discuss and agree all supervision arrangements with the farm staff that will be supporting the visit.

## 3. Managing Risks

The following advice is based on two HSE documents:

HSE information sheet AIS23: *Avoiding ill health at open farms – advice to farmers*

HSE information sheet AIS23 Supplement: *Avoiding ill health at open farms – advice to teachers*

Both documents can be downloaded at [www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/ais23.pdf](http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/ais23.pdf)

## **Hazards associated with *E. coli* 0157 and other infections**

Some infections may be contracted on farms. All animals naturally carry a range of micro-organisms, some of which can be transmitted to humans, where they may cause ill health. There is a seasonal increase in the number of cases of *E.coli* 0157 and *E. coli* 026 infections, and there is a link between farm visits and infection in young people (although 98% of *E. coli* infections are not contracted at farms).

**While the hazard from infection resulting from a farm visit is real, the risks are readily controlled by everyday measures that visitors would be expected to follow on any visit.** The following simple and sensible steps will help make a farm visit even more safe, healthy and enjoyable.

**Before the visit** the Activity Leader should:

- Read the advice in the HSE AIS23 information sheets, and discuss visit arrangements with the farmer/education officer to be reassured that the facilities provided match the recommendations in AIS23;
- Complete a risk assessment which will help decide the appropriate level of adult supervision for the group. Staffing ratios for farm visits are difficult to prescribe as a range of factors need to be taken into account including the age, ability and characteristics of the group, the nature of the activities planned, and the experience of the leaders and other adults in off-site supervision;
- Discuss and agree with assistant leaders and volunteer helpers their role during the visit. They must understand the need to make sure that the young people are supervised in washing, or are helped to wash, their hands thoroughly after contacting animals, and follow the other guidance suggested below;
- Discuss with young people the reasons for and importance of hygiene during the visit, stressing that they must not eat or chew outside the areas in which they are permitted to do so (and not until after they have washed their hands);
- Discuss with young people other 'rules' for the visit. Involve them if possible in the drawing up of these rules;
- Make sure that all young people (and accompanying adults) wear appropriate clothing, including sturdy outdoor shoes (not sandals) or wellington boots if possible;
- Check that any cuts, grazes, etc. on hands are covered with a waterproof dressing.

**During the visit** make sure that the young people:

- Do not kiss or place their faces against animals;
- Do not eat or drink while going round the farm;
- Always wash their hands thoroughly before and after eating, and after any contact with animals. The young people must be supervised during hand washing to make sure that they all wash and dry their hands thoroughly. Farm staff may be able to help with this supervision;

- Eat only food that they have brought with them (or food for human consumption they have bought on the farm), in designated areas, and never eat food which has fallen to the ground;
- Do not taste any animal foods;
- Do not drink from farm taps (other than in designated public facilities);
- Do not bite their nails, suck their fingers or put their hands in their mouths;
- Do not put pens, pencils or crayons, etc. in mouths;
- Do not touch animal droppings — if they do, hands must be washed.

**At the end of the visit** allow plenty of time before leaving so that the young people do not have to rush. Make sure that they:

- Wash their hands thoroughly before leaving the farm;
- Clean or change their footwear before leaving, remembering to wash their hands after any contact with animal droppings on their footwear.

**If a member of the group shows signs of illness (e.g. sickness or diarrhoea) after a visit, advise them or their parent/carer to visit the doctor and explain that they have had recent contact with animals.**

### **Managing other hazards**

The vast majority of accidents to young people on farms involve the farming family **and not visiting groups**. Of these accidents, moving vehicles and open slurry pools have proved to be significant hazards.

Activity Leaders must ensure that the young people stay in their allocated groups during the visit, and that they:

- Do not use or pick up tools (e.g. spades and forks) unless permitted to do so by farm staff;
- Do not climb on to walls or animal pens, etc.;
- Listen carefully and follow the instructions and information given by the farm staff;
- Approach and handle animals quietly and gently;
- Do not chase, frighten or torment the animals.

Never let young people:

- Ride on vehicles which have not been modified to carry passengers;
- Play on tractors or other machinery;
- Play in the farm area, or in other areas which are out of bounds such as silos, slurry pits, etc.