



Action sheet

Organic farm visits

This action sheet introduces the organic farms network and explains how local groups can arrange a visit to a network farm or other farms.

What is the organic farms network?

Organic farmers all over the country want to show people what is happening on their farms. The Soil Association is working with them to create a network of organic farms across the UK, from idyllic countryside in Devon to a city farm in Yorkshire.

Each network farm will have something special to show you: from lambing to bee-keeping, from harvest to hedge laying; in fields, vineyards, orchards or nature reserves. Whatever their focus, organic farmers have a common purpose - a pledge to the health of future generations and of the land itself, and an enthusiasm to share this vision with others.

Different farms will cater for different audiences. This will depend largely on the farmers' objectives, enterprise mix and facilities available. School children, the public, farmers and other interest groups will be encouraged to visit their local network farm to discover more about organic production.

There are currently over 70 farms in the organic farms network. The farms will provide a body of informed opinion to support sustainable land use policies, and a platform for education and training. The emphasis is on demonstrating the many benefits delivered by organic farming.

How can local groups get involved?

The farms provide an excellent resource for local groups to visit for farm walks and open

days. Most farms will provide guided tours for pre-arranged group visits, often for only a small charge to cover their time. Some farms have established visitor centres, organic shops and cafes to further enhance the visit and demonstrate the importance of local food initiatives. Why not link up with other local groups in the region and organise a joint visit? A list of farms on the network is available in the Resources section of this pack, or at www.soilassociation.org/farmvisits.

A visit to a farm is an opportunity to:

- Walk a farm trail and enjoy the countryside and its wildlife
- Organise an inspiring educational/school visit
- Stock up with the freshest food at the farm shop
- Taste the farm produce at farm cafés
- Enjoy special open days or even stay on a farm.

Farm open days and events

Many farms run special open days and farm walks throughout the year. Whatever its focus, the day will provide an excellent opportunity to talk to the farmer and see at first hand what is special about the farm. Many of the farms will put on special tractor and trailer tours, displays, and even stalls of local crafts and produce.

Arranging your visit

Check for opening times as not all farms are open all the time. Most farms will usually have a trail which you can walk to find out more, or you may be able to join a special open day. Some farmers may charge a small fee for guided tours to account for their time spent away from their work to show you around.

Countryside Code

Ensure you take appropriate footwear and waterproofs to avoid a soaking in wet weather. Remember to follow the Countryside Code, the farm is both home and livelihood for the farmer so please treat it with respect.

- Take your litter home with you
- Leave gates as you find them
- Do not disturb livestock or wildlife
- Keep to marked paths.

Dogs may not be allowed on some farms to avoid disturbance to wildlife or farm animals. Take note of the health and safety guidelines contained here.

Farm shops and cafés

Some farms will have a farm shop, so do make a shopping list before leaving home. Many farms have picnic areas so you may consider taking lunch with you, or alternatively enjoy a meal at a farm café where available.

Staying on organic farms

The best way to enjoy feeling part of an organic farm is to actually stay on one. Some organic farms offer bed and breakfast, self-catering cottages or camping, where you can relax and enjoy the local countryside and its wildlife. Details of organic farms offering accommodation are available from the Soil Association (look on www.whyorganic.org).

Health and safety guidance

While the hazard from infection resulting from a farm visit is real, the risks are readily controlled by everyday measures. The following sensible steps will help make your visit even more safe, healthy and enjoyable.

Before your visit

- Discuss visit arrangements with the farmer;
- Read and understand the advice in the HSE's AIS23 information sheet (available free from HSE Books - see below);
- Ensure supervisors understand the need to follow the rules;
- If you're taking a school trip, discuss with pupils the rules for the visit;

- Make sure all members of your group wear appropriate clothing and footwear, and that cuts or grazes are covered with a waterproof dressing.

Remember:

Any children with you are your responsibility and should be supervised during the visit, especially during hand washing.

If a member of your group shows signs of illness after a visit, advise their parent/guardian to take them to a doctor and explain that they have had recent contact with animals.

During and after the visit

Make sure that children:

- do not kiss animals, suck fingers or put pencils in mouths
- wash hands thoroughly before and after eating, after any contact with animals and again before leaving the farm
- never eat food which has fallen to the ground, or taste animal foods
- clean boots thoroughly before leaving
- stay in their allocated groups during the visit
- do not use or pick up tools, 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.

Further information

See the Resource sheet in this pack: *Organic farm network* for the list of farms.

www.soilassociation.org/farmvisits has more information to help you arrange a farm visit, and lists forthcoming events on farms in your area.

The little book of organic farming – Available from the Soil Association (£5 +p&p). Suitable for all ages (aimed at younger people).

Health and Safety information sheets and supplements (AIS23) are available free from HSE Books, PO Box 1999, Sudbury, Suffolk CO10 2WA. T: 01787 881165. F: 01787 313995, www.hsebooks.com