



**A GREENER WORLD**  
Our Food. Our Farms. Our Future. Let's Choose!

## ***A Greener World Information Sheet #1***

# **Guidance Notes for Farms That Host Open Days and Farm Visits**

Certified Animal Welfare Approved by A Greener World (AGW) has the most rigorous standards for farm animal welfare currently in use by any organization in North America. Its standards have been developed in collaboration with scientists, veterinarians, researchers and farmers across the globe to maximize practicable, high-welfare farm management.

Allowing people access to farms is an important part of working with your local community – and your potential customers. It provides visitors with a real insight into practical farming and gives you the opportunity to show off your farm, your livestock, and the high welfare food you produce.

Farm visits provide an important opportunity to educate members of the public about farming, many of whom may have no idea where their food comes from or how it is produced. But as well as being informative and enjoyable, every farm visit should also be a safe experience. To ensure everyone has a great day out – and to guarantee the wellbeing of your visitors and your livestock – it is important to be aware of a number of key health and safety issues.

### Biosecurity: Maintaining the Health of Your Animals

Many farmers assume that their visitors have had no contact with other farm animals before they come to their farm. However, there is always a possibility that they have backyard chickens or other pets, or that their visit to your farm is part of a regional event involving visits to many other farms in the area. This contact with other animals could result in the transmission of diseases to your farm.

Foot dipping baths or mats with disinfectant are a good option if people are wearing sturdy shoes or boots. Always provide a brush so people can wash and brush off any dirt or manure from their footwear first to ensure that the disinfectant is effective. Don't feel awkward about politely asking any visitors to clean up before they walk your farm, especially if they obviously have dirt from other farms on their feet. If you explain the potential risks to your livestock most people will be only too willing to oblige.

Another option is to provide plastic overboots that visitors can put on over their own footwear. These are relatively inexpensive and can be gathered up and recycled with your other farm plastics at the end of the visit.

Some farmers prefer to take people round the farm on trailers. Visitors can still see everything but they do not get to walk around in your livestock areas. If you are going to use a trailer make sure it's safe and

that people cannot fall off or easily gain access to any moving parts. Work out the route before the day of the visit – and set a pick up and drop off point near the entrance to the farm. Always ensure that any children are accompanied by an adult.

### Biosecurity: Ensuring the Health of Your Visitors

While visitors can present a potential disease risk to your livestock, it is equally important to consider the health risks that your animals may present to your visitors.

All animals naturally carry a range of microorganisms. Some of these organisms can be transmitted to humans where they may cause ill health. Certain microorganisms, such as *Escherichia coli* O157 (*E. coli* O157), can present a serious hazard and potentially cause severe disease – particularly in vulnerable groups such as young children.

Remember that young children may suck their thumbs or bite their nails after touching your animals without any thought for hygiene. As exposure to even very low numbers of *E. coli* O157 bacteria can cause serious infection, it is vitally important that you control the risks to visitors. The good news is that taking steps to control the risks from *E. coli* O157 will also minimize the risks from most other organisms carried by animals which are transmissible to humans by hand to mouth.

Other diseases that can be spread from animals to humans include orf (sore mouth), ringworm and *Salmonella*. A small number of diseases present a particular risk to pregnant women. For example, it is recommended that pregnant women do not have contact with sheep at lambing time as there is a risk of contact with bacteria, such as *Toxoplasma* and *Listeria*, which could cause abortion.

To ensure your visitors stay safe follow these basic guidelines:

- If your visitors come into contact with farm animals you MUST provide hand-washing facilities. This must include:
  - Running water (preferably warm, but see next bullet point below). Basins/troughs of still water are NOT adequate
  - Liquid soap
  - Paper towels
- Always try to provide warm water as this will encourage your visitors to wash their hands, especially in winter months. In the summer months cold water may be sufficient, but you should consider how you will encourage visitors to wash their hands thoroughly.
- Make sure there is plenty of signage to remind visitors to wash their hands, pointing them to the facilities, and encouraging them to do so thoroughly.
- Cleansing wipes or anti-bacterial gels are NOT an acceptable substitute for proper hand washing.

### Risk of injury

You want everyone who comes to your farm to enjoy their visit and to keep safe. However, farms are working places and can therefore present risks to the unaware. It is important to think about where you

plan to take visitors and how different visitors might cope with your route. For example, you may be happy to walk down a steep slope to see your animals but an elderly visitor or a family with young children might struggle to follow you.

While you cannot foresee and eliminate every risk, you don't have to unnecessarily create them. When planning visitor routes round the farm avoid any areas where there will be lots of moving vehicles or machinery. If you want to show visitors your cows with their newborn calves, do so from outside the pasture rather than risk an overly protective reaction from the cows if you take lots of strangers in with them.

Make sure any hazardous areas on the farm, such as chemical stores, grain pits or silos, are locked or blocked and clearly marked as "private", "danger – no entry" or "out of bounds".

You know that a hotwire is not the best thing to grab or brush up against, but unless you clearly mark it and give people a warning your visitors could be in for a nasty shock.

Finally, either designate the farm as a "no smoking" area for the duration of the visit or create a designated smoking area well away from hay or straw barns.

#### How clean should my farm be?

No one is expecting your farm to be perfectly clean – especially if the open day is a one-off event. However, no-one wants to get their clothes covered in manure either. Think about where your visitors will go and clean the areas they are likely to touch. For example, if you intend to allow visitors to watch milking over a gate or through rails, make sure the area is clean of any manure and wipe down the gate or rails with disinfectant.

Where possible, wash down any areas where visitors will stand or walk. If you have animals in housing make sure they are well-bedded on the day of the visit. Not only does this present your farm in the best light, but it will reduce the risk of your visitors becoming soiled with dirt and manure, and minimize the risk of slips or falls.

Walk the route you intend to take your visitors on with a critical eye. You may have walked past that heap of rusty tin sheeting for months, so use the open day as an opportunity to get broken machinery, scrap metal and other junk removed.

#### How much supervision is needed?

If you allow visitors access to your livestock where they can touch or feed the animals you must have someone there at all times to supervise. There should be signs or other reminders for visitors to wash their hands after touching or feeding animals.

If there are animals in fields and you have a farm trail round the farm for visitors to follow, ensure you put up signs to make it clear whether touching or feeding the animals is allowed or not.

Do not let visitors drive or operate any farm machinery. Some visitors – particularly children – will have a keen interest in tractors and other farm machinery. If you allow people access to these machines make sure they are safely parked up on level ground with the keys removed.

#### A place to meet and toilets

Clear an unused building or area where you can meet your visitors, which can ideally be left tidy for your next visit. This will save you the time of tidying up a frequently used area like a corn store or livestock building, and will avoid having hoards of visitors tramping through your house.

You will also need to provide visitors with toilet and hand wash facilities. Put up sign posts so visitors can easily find the nearest one. If you do not want visitors trudging through your house to use your bathroom, you should consider hiring a portable toilet.

Finally, think about where you want people to park their cars so they are out of the way, and make sure this area is clearly signposted.

#### Further information

The following websites provide useful guidance for farms that offer open days or school visits:

<https://farmsunday.org/uploads/homepage-slides/2020-LOFS-Information-Pack-UK-v3-12page.pdf>

<https://farmsunday.org/open-my-farm/health-and-safety>

*Guidance Notes for Farms That Host Open Days and Farm Visits* is one of A Greener World's Briefing Paper range, designed to provide analysis and comment on current issues. For more information visit [agreenerworld.org](http://agreenerworld.org).