

Open Farms: Bridging the gap between town and country

What is an open farm?

It's a farm that for a selected day, or number of days each year, opens its doors to visitors. Open farm days can be organised by an individual farmer, or group of farmers, who decide to invite people from the local area to visit their homes. In order to increase their overall impact they are often organised as part of local, regional or national initiatives through which hundreds of farmers decide to open their doors on a specific day or weekend. At an open farm, guests take a tour around the site where they discover a working farm and learn more about the daily lives of farmers.

An open farm day can include the chance to taste locally grown food and/or to explore a variety of educational or fun activities for children and young people as part of school visits or as a one-off class trip.

Why open up a farm?

Most people today live in towns or cities where they can become disconnected with those who produce their food.

They may be completely unaware of the range of tasks a farmer carries out, or how much cutting edge technology is used to produce their food. They may not even realise that, as well as producing high quality and nutritious food, farmers play an important role in helping the environment and ensuring that rural communities thrive.

An open farm gives people the opportunity to visit local producers and gain a better understanding of agriculture and the role of farmers.

This can raise awareness of the work that goes into growing the food we eat, while creating stronger links between consumers, farmers and rural communities.

Open up your farm!

OPEN YOUR FARM TO VISITORS AS PART OF AN EXISTING OPEN FARM DAY IN YOUR COUNTRY OR ORGANISE YOUR OWN EVENT

Several open farm initiatives already exist at local, regional, national or European level, which are organised by regional/national administrations and agricultural organisations at national or European level.

Being part of a larger event or network will generate more publicity and thereby increase the number of visitors to an open farm day, in this way helping to show more people living in towns and cities the role that farming plays in producing safe, healthy and quality food in a sustainable manner, protecting the environment and contributing to growth, jobs and investment. Many open farm initiatives can provide you with support, guidance and resources to organise your event. Cooperating with existing initiatives, in particular

those on a large scale, will help to create synergies and to exchange best-practice experiences.

HERE ARE SOME PRACTICAL TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL OPEN FARM DAY...

- Make sure that the initiative is coordinated by a regional/national/European organization and involves many farms in your region/country.
- Think about the points of interest for visitors which you could organise activities around. These could include farm walks, horse/pony riding and tractor trailer rides, demonstrations involving animal care, machinery or produce, art and craft activities, 'meeting' the farm animals and tasting produce.
- If you are involved in producing a food or drink which is a specialty in your region/area think about how to best incorporate this into your day.
- Consider who would be interested in visiting the farm and how to best publicise the event among this target group, for example, putting up posters, handing out flyers, contacting local schools, adverts in regional or national newspapers, etc.
- If you're organising a farm tour, plan your route taking into account the interests and needs of visitors, the time available, the distance and the likely weather forecast.
- Think about younger visitors and plan activities that could interest them like a treasure hunt or quiz.
- Make sure that you have enough helpers onsite to assist visitors – these could be employees, family members, friends or volunteers – and that they have information on their role, the overall event and what to do in case of an emergency.
- Put up signs so that visitors can find their way around the site (for car parking, toilets etc.).
- Make certain that your insurers have been notified of your event and that you observe any necessary health and safety procedures.
- Plan a visitors' book, comments box or simple questionnaire so that you can get feedback from visitors to help you organise an even better event next time.
- Once all preparations have been made, consider also using social media to promote your open farm event. Ask your friends, professional contacts and co-organisers to also promote your event on social media and to share photos and comments about your open farm day after the event.

EU support for open farm activities includes:

THE EUROPEAN AGRICULTURAL FUND FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT (EAFRD)

The EAFRD is designed to support the sustainable development of rural areas. As part of this, funding is available for farm and business development. This consists of support for both setting up non-agricultural activities as well as for investing in the creation and development of non-agricultural activities in rural areas. This funding could include open farm days and is available for farmers and for micro- and small- enterprises.

COMMUNITY-LED LOCAL DEVELOPMENT (CLLD) BASED FUNDING

Under CLLD, local people can come together to form a partnership and then design and put into practice a development strategy for their community. These local partnerships receive long-term EU funding. In rural areas the LEADER initiative supports rural development projects initiated at local level which aim to revitalise rural communities and create jobs. These could include open farm activities.