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Farm Tour 101

Here is all the information you need to plan a successful and rewarding farm tour, as an engagement and education piece for your local food program. A well-rounded tour includes visiting a produce farm, farm-raised meats, a dairy or cheese facility, and providing a meal which showcases local items from the area. Another valuable component is providing opportunities for your participants to buy the products they see and taste on the tour.

You should allow at least 4-6 weeks to plan your tour, depending on where you are planning to visit, seasonality, harvest times, popularity of the destinations, and scheduling of your participants. A good cap is 25 participants, so that everyone can see and hear well, and you can use a smaller bus, which costs less.

The tour should be a full day, keeping in mind that travel time between destinations can be long and you don't want to be rushed at any one destination. Lets get started.

Step One- Pick your destinations.

Gather a list of places you would like to visit. A logical place to start would be any operation currently supplying your business or providing products similar to those you use in your operation. You should also try to identify farms and producers who are passionate and enjoy speaking about what they do. Good places to find information about local farms are local economic development associations, farmers market lists, culinary tourism sites, and local food organizations in your area.

Step Two- Make phone calls and send e-mails

Describe who you are and your project, and let them know that you have an eager group who are interested in learning more about what it is they are doing. Give them 2-3 dates for your tour, and give them time to book it into their schedule. Sometimes farmers or producers have never done a tour before, or they have done many would like to cater the tour to your needs. Some farms charge a small fee for a tour, but most do not. A small token of appreciation is a nice way to say thank you, or consider inviting them to join you for the lunch.

Step Three- Pick a date.

Send out a meeting request to all farmers, producers, and participants letting them know the date of the tour, and that further details will be sent out closer to the date. This allows you to get all the details into an itinerary which you can share later. Make a list of



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participants and set an RSVP date well in advance, so that you can fill extra spots if needed. Make sure you ask all participants about any dietary requirements they may have.

Step 4- Reserve a restaurant/meal

Some producers, farmers, and restaurants are so closely linked in their communities that they have worked together before to put on events. Sometimes there is a cooking school in the area who does local lunches for the public. Get creative and make the meal an integral part of the experience. The chef will often be passionate about local and want to speak about the menu and where they sourced their ingredients. Let them know what you are doing, how many people will be attending, your budget, and what kind of food you would like to see (local!). Pass on any dietary requirements and get a quote. Reserve the date and time now.

Step 5- Create your itinerary.

Map it out on Google and figure out where you want to start and plan your route logically. Set a time for everyone to meet (earlier than you actually want to leave, because people WILL be late). Decide how much time you want to spend at each stop (1 ½-2 hours each, plus another 1 ½-2 hours for lunch is a good guideline). I cannot stress enough the importance of people showing up ON TIME. One 15 minute delay can throw off your whole day, so stick to schedule. With students, I would suggest telling them the bus will leave without them if they are not there, then do it.

Step 6- Book the Bus

I have used [Coach Canada](http://CoachCanada.com) and have been very happy with their service. They assign a person to your day to work out all the details with you. You can also research charters in your area. They will want your detailed itinerary with addresses, so do your homework and have it ready for them. Please note: They do NOT accept tips, but as a nice gesture you should include the driver in your lunch plans.

Step 7- Send out the Info

Once all your bookings are confirmed, you can now send out your detailed itinerary to all your participants and the people you will be visiting so they know your schedule for the day. Make sure to put the name and contact number of the person in charge of the tour. Make sure you include weather info, how to dress, what to bring (water bottle, hat, sunscreen, etc)





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Step 8- Create an info sheet for the day and prepare for the tour.

It nice to have a handout to give each participant, with a map of where you are going, and a paragraph or two about each place you are visiting as a background. Have these ready, as well as a list of all participants to check against when leaving each destination. Make sure your cellphone is charged, and load it with the contact info for everyone involved in your tour including the bus company, in case of any issues.

Step 9- Feedback and Thank you's

You may want to create a way for participants to follow up about their experience. An online survey or a place on the facebook page to post comments are two ideas. Make sure you send a follow-up thank you e-mail to your hosts.

Good luck!

Kelly Hughes, Education and Outreach, Greenbelt Fund

