

Linley Estate Pasture for Life Study Tour



How to Host a Farm Tour and Engage with your Local Community

A Pasture for Life Guide

So, you're thinking of hosting a farm tour and engaging with new audiences?

It's easy to think that farmers collectively only have a small voice, but every person that visits a farm and gets first-hand experience of something taking place can be informed and influenced. If more and more farmers can open their gates to new audiences, this will mean that genuine understanding and appreciation can be increased throughout our society.



Pasture for Life at FarmED

Why host a farm tour?

It is important to have a think about your reasons for hosting a farm tour as these will underpin the style of your event and your motivations for making it a success. These could include:

- To inspire, inform or engage a new audience or community
- To help sell something (such as produce from your farm) or raise awareness
- To generate income, perhaps via a scheme or an educational element of your business
- To share your farm and your experiences for the benefit of others or perhaps for your own fulfilment
- To share ideas, concepts and new ways of working

Sometimes you don't always know what will come of hosting a farm tour – such as a reciprocal invitation, new knowledge or a new opportunity, so it is important to keep an open mind.

What kinds of events or activities might you use to engage new audiences with your farm?

There are many different ways in which you could do this, and you can choose the right ones to suit you, your circumstances and available resources. Here are some ideas:

- Tours for the public, or local interest groups – e.g. local environmental groups, ecologists, or history groups
- Hosting interested farmer groups – e.g. Farm cluster meetings, or Pasture for Life meetings
- Welcoming volunteer groups onto the farm to get involved with a particular task or having students on work experience weeks
- Meeting customers at your farm shop or market stall
- Hosting camping, dark skies evenings, festivals, fundraisers, retreats or social prescribing
- Open days – e.g. Open Farm Sunday
- School visits – students or pupils could visit the farm or you could take the farm to them by holding a talk or workshop in the classroom.
- Online - social media, email newsletters, YouTube, webinars, etc.
- In the media – TV, Radio, podcasts or newspapers
- Interactions with other people in the community as part of daily life – e.g. at the pub, shop, church, parish council meetings, livestock market, or on footpaths passing through your farm

Every occasion you engage with an audience you are giving an impression of yourself, and the way you farm. Getting across your message can involve lots of different methods and take time.

Image of Duncan Miller by Clem Sandison



What kind of audiences might we encounter and what do we know about them?

- **Supporters** – interested customers, foodies, chefs, or families. Probably have a low knowledge of farming, but are curious, open minded and willing to learn. They might be short of time and may have checked you out online first.
- **Urban community** – a basic knowledge (perhaps via Countryfile or other forms of media), sometimes carrying misconceptions and leading very different lifestyles to farmers.
- **School children** – usually zero knowledge of farming (although rural schools may differ) but are curious and ask excellent questions. Ages can vary and you need to build momentum with them and relate stories to them. Younger ones like movement and hands-on activities. Important to also think about the teachers and helpers that are with the children and what their farming knowledge might be.
- **VIPs, decisions makers, Royalty, MPs or Defra officials** – usually with good intent and keen to hear about farming perspectives and realities
- **Young farmers, students and young people interested in a career in farming** – e.g. people on work experience who are curious and looking for inspiration – future farmers.
- **Ecologists / environmentalists** – usually friendly and well-intentioned with a high level of interest in the natural world, but with a low level of understanding of farming practicalities. Some may not be so friendly if they view farming as damaging habitat / the environment.
- **Other farmers** – Some might come across as nose-y, or stubborn because they don't seem receptive to new ideas and are quick to criticise. However, they might also be curious and ready to learn from you, perhaps as a result of facing their own realities on the future of their businesses. Sometimes they might bring along their children who can bring a different perspective. It's easy to feel like an imposter talking to other farmers, but the increasing culture of sharing is changing that. Keep an open mind.
- **Park Rangers and National Park staff** – usually with a good understanding of the countryside but have other areas of focus besides farming
- **Local hobbyists undertaking leisure activities such as walking, cycling or bird watching** – usually appreciative of green spaces but keen for good easy access.
- **Difficult people** – protestors or NIMBYs with an axe to grind, or they might have been angered by something they perceive to be your fault.
- **Journalists and other people from the media** – usually looking for a story and can have influence on their followers so a key group to engage with positively
- **Specific groups** – such as corporate groups having away days for team building, or groups with a special interest such as Pasture for Life, land workers or artists.
- **Local community and neighbours** – often curious with something to say (can be both negative and positive). Some may have memories and knowledge of the area too.
- **Local businesses** – e.g. agricultural merchants or suppliers of services who might be impacted by what you are doing on your farm
- **Own family and friends, and maybe landlord** – people in our lives or businesses that we need to bring along with us, and who might be cautious or resistant.



PfL Scotland study tour
by Clem Sandison



For a farm tour or event, how can you find out about the audience beforehand?

Make sure you are clear on the answers to the following questions:

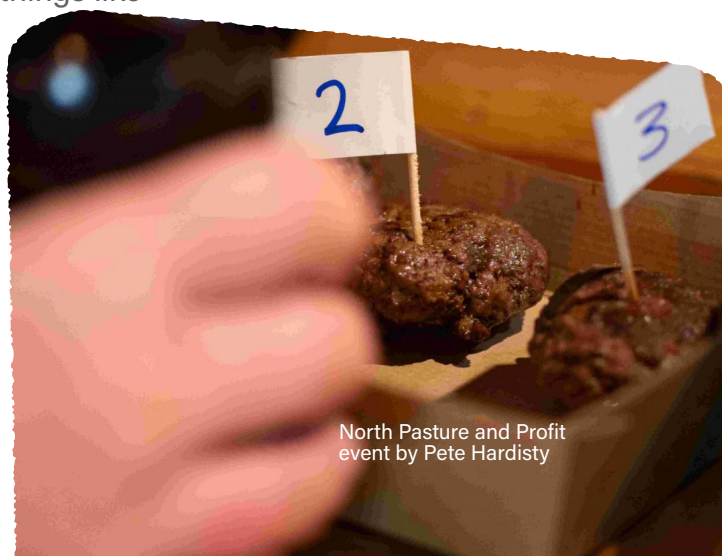
1. Who are they?
2. Why do they want to come? What is the purpose of their visit?
3. What is their existing knowledge and what would they like to learn about?
4. How big is their group? How will they travel to the farm?
5. How much time do they want to spend at the farm?
6. Will they require refreshments? Or will they bring their own?
7. Do they have any special needs? Dietary, allergies, access or mobility issues, etc.?
8. Will someone help manage or facilitate the group?

These answers will immediately give you a better guide as to how you will arrange an appropriate tour and what you will say during the tour and even whether you might decline the request (which is okay in some circumstances).

Finding out about the size of the group will help inform things like parking arrangements, demand for toilet facilities, safety considerations and how you might best present to the group. You may also want to limit the group size or think about getting some extra help to host them.

Some groups, especially school groups, may like to arrange a pre-visit to check access, facilities and suitability. They may also want to meet you in accordance with their safeguarding protocols.

You could also ask if they are willing to pay or make a donation (to recognise your time commitment, any refreshment costs, etc.).



What makes a 5* farm tour for any audience?

Here is a checklist of 25 top tips for a successful farm tour:

- 1 Before people arrive, or before the day itself, **take the time to plan** and have a good think about how you will run the event, how much time it will take, what you want to cover (based on the information you found out about the audience in advance), and potentially have a rehearsal to run through everything.
- 2 Provide good **instructions in advance** to ensure everyone arrives calmly and can enjoy the tour – i.e. directions (if postcodes aren't precise consider using What3words, a Google pin or providing extra description), appropriate footwear, weather appropriate clothing (you can say something like "Dress for the weather" so they can make up their own minds about what to wear but are at least prompted to think) and a phone number for emergency contact.
- 3 Provide good clear and obvious **signage** to help guide people into the farm, and towards any designated parking and meeting points. Remember farmyards could be daunting places for some visitors. If there is someone able to direct people on arrival that is helpful, and even better if they can wear a high-vis jacket as this is immediately reassuring.
- 4 Always provide a **foot dip or mat** for use on arrival and before they leave – so that disease is not spread. School groups don't generally like to dip (due to worry of interacting with disinfectant) – and rather kids arrive with clean boots and take them away in carrier bags to be re-cleaned at home. Disinfectant soaked mats are more suitable (and fun) for kids.
- 5 **Allow time** for socialising and getting acquainted (or burning off excess energy in the case of school children!) – getting this out of the way can enable better focus during the tour. This can happen alongside tea and coffee on arrival or checking people in.
- 6 Consider **delegating some tasks** to the facilitator or others in the group – people usually like to feel useful. You could appoint a 'sweeper' to bring up the rear, help keep the group together and take responsibility for closing gates. Someone else could help with time keeping and sorting refreshments.
- 7 **Welcome** people with a smile and consider breaking the ice to kick things off – group intros, quick polls or a fun question to understand what they'd like to find out about during the tour. Doing this well can really set the tone for the event. Make sure that everyone can hear and see you – someone might be hard of hearing. If it's a large group a megaphone / microphone and amplifier might be useful. You might also want to give permission for people to take photos and share the occasion on social media.
- 8 Highlight any **safety considerations** for the group (e.g. beware of muddy or uneven ground) and let people know where the **toilet** and **first aid kit** are located. (You must do a risk assessment in advance (see link below for an example) and have tidied, locked away or fenced off any potential hazards, and checked you have suitable insurance cover).
- 9 Provide an **overview** of the tour and what to expect. How much walking will there be? Will they be riding on tractors and trailers (trailers can be useful for containing visitors in a safe place, especially children, though this must be risk assessed and clarified with your insurance provider)? Will there be breaks? When can they ask questions? You could point to a map to help visualise the planned tour and give an idea of timings.
- 10 Provide some **background** to your farm and explain your **context**. Remember that your farming situation is unique and it is important to lay this out to help your audience understand why you are doing things in a particular way. This can also help to head off any criticism later on.

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Take control of the group and set boundaries from the off – **set a precedent** for everyone to listen and pay attention and ask questions if they wish – as they come up, or at certain times.

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Read the audience as you go and ask them further questions to help **tune your message accordingly**. E.g. would anyone like to see how this machine works?

13

Pace your tour – practice to improve timing and make sure it flows but stay flexible in case something unexpected happens – e.g. a cow calving mid tour or a rainstorm! To keep track of time you might find wearing a watch easier and less awkward or distracting than reaching for your phone. Have in mind where you need to be at different times so that you finish on time and do not miss something important. Have a few optional parts to your route or additional points of interest in case time runs out or there is spare time. And allow extra time for the group to move – not everyone moves around the farm as fast as you!

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Have your main/core points in mind. Write down **notes or bullet points** if it helps you to be concise and not get tempted to ramble but be careful that these don't become monotonous scripts or that you hide behind them. Ideally, they can help guide you and keep you on track, but don't let them replace your natural flare and passion. Get to know your own style.

15

You could provide **maps or handouts** to help provide an overview at the beginning, especially for people who take in information in other ways. However, be careful these don't become a distraction and simply waste paper that ends up getting dropped around the farm. Pointing to a map on the wall might be a better solution.

16

Consider using **props** to help explain something the audience might not otherwise see first-hand or understand from your description E.g. bring along a GPS collar, a batt latch, or a clod of your soil, or a handful of grasses and flowering herbs? Provide some disposable gloves if you want to get people looking for dung beetles, and for children perhaps a checklist for species they might see or encounter. It's also great if you can [safely] show livestock being moved from one paddock to the next.

17

When arriving at a point of interest, wait for the whole group to assemble and say that's what you are doing so that this reinforces the need for everyone to stick together and pay attention (members of the group also then take ownership for keeping everyone together). Defer questions until the whole group are present if possible – so that you don't have to repeat yourself (e.g. "That's a great question, please ask it when the whole group are here"). **It's okay to be assertive** – attendees will respect it.

18

Include **relatable stories** to help explain and make your point – e.g. Disney's Lion King and the circle of life! If you can make a connection or find common ground with something personal to your audience it can help them understand the point you are making.

19

It is fine, and often helpful, to **reinforce your points** by saying them in different ways – this helps get the message across to your audience (who will all have minds that work in slightly different ways).

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Have confidence in yourself. You are not an imposter – **you are the expert on your farm** and your context is unique.

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Be the educator – you have a great opportunity to positively affect some people's lives and **inspire them** to eat better and take more care of the countryside. Make it fun too!

25

Welcome **feedback** from the group and also have a think to yourself whether there is anything you think you could have improved on – this will help you learn and get better at delivering your message and running tours in the future.

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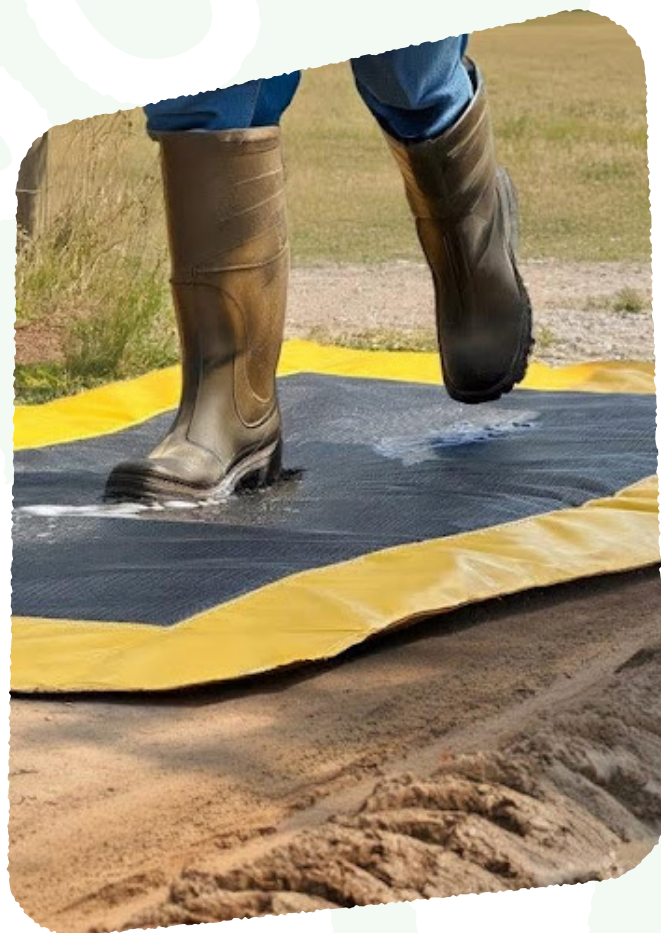
Show **reality**, warts and all – be honest and genuine, and share your mistakes and lessons learnt – it will gain you respect. If the tour comes across as too good no one will believe it. It is good for more farmers to acknowledge and verbalise the difficulties of farming.

23

You can't please everybody – choose your battles. If someone is being antagonistic or disruptive don't be tempted to give them too much attention – think of the rest of the group.

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It is good to draw a line at the end of the tour so that it doesn't carry on forever – people will start drifting away if some of the group keep asking questions. Consider wrapping up with a **summary** of key points and a '**call to action**' – e.g. buy local, visit more of your local farmers and wishing everybody a safe journey home. Anyone with more questions can always stick around for a bit longer if you have time.



An extra note on communicating complex farming subjects

How to turn a complicated message into one which is easily understood for any audience?

E.g. mob grazing, the need for animal handling / medication / tagging / castration, how certain machinery works, etc.

1. Before launching into a monologue of explanation, take the time to understand the audience's starting point – ask them questions to clarify what they do or don't know already.
2. Lean into their questions and understand where they are coming from so you can tailor your response. Make them feel at ease for not knowing.
3. Relate to their views and use the language they are using (mirroring) – and avoid acronyms. Pretend you are talking to children i.e. keep it super simple.
4. Break it down into bitesize chunks and build the information up – depending on how much they can cope with at a time – read their reaction and ask if what you have said makes sense.
5. Be prepared to try explaining in different ways or relate your explanation to something they might know about already, or demonstrate with the help of props, activities or resources.
6. Remember to explain WHY you are doing something, not just what you are doing.



Some other topics to consider

Booking Management

Consider using a booking system like Eventbrite for easing the admin burden of organising an event. However, please note that you will need to comply with GDPR if you are collecting personal data (e.g. name and email address) through an event booking site.

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/>

Considerations for Public Liability Insurance and Risk Assessing the Farm

<https://www.ruralinsurance.co.uk/news/benefits-of-public-liability-insurance>

<https://www.ruralinsurance.co.uk/news/open-farm-sunday-are-you-covered>

You must discuss insurance and risk assessments with the organisers of any groups in advance of them visiting the farm. Some groups may have their own insurance and be able to help you with risk assessments. By doing so you can make sure all parties are well prepared for all potential liabilities.

LEAF Risk Assessment Example (for their "Open Sunday" scheme)

(very thorough risk assessment template examples)

<https://farmsunday.org/uploads/news-images/LOFS-Risk-Assessment.pdf>

Public Liability (using Springtime Related Risks as an example)

<https://www.farmcover.co.uk/blog/safeguarding-your-farm-in-spring-understanding-public-liability-insurance>

Further training, in particular for educational visits from schools:

<https://leaf.eco/education/for-farmers/training>

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Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs



High Weald
National
Landscape



Kent Downs
National
Landscape



Surrey Hills
National
Landscape



Nidderdale
National
Landscape



**North
Pennines**
National
Landscape



Lake District
National Park



YORKSHIRE DALES
National Park Authority



**Forest of
Bowland**
National
Landscape



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