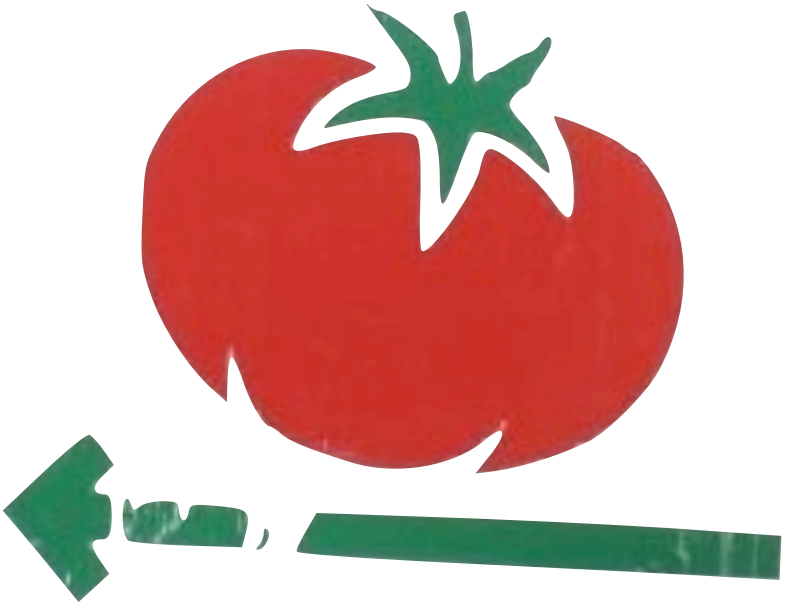
FARM TOUR



HANDBOOK

ACORN
Atlantic Canadian Organic Regional Network

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Farm Tour Handbook 5

Why host a farm tour? 5

Turning a Small Farm into a Big Business 5

The Benefits 6

Liability Insurance for Farm Tours 7

Things to Consider 7

Safety 8

Things to Provide 8

Budget / To charge or not to charge? 9

Costing Out Expenses 9

What to charge? 10

Ticket Sales 10

Research 10

Tour Activities 11

Tour Ideas 11

'Why Organic?' Tour 11

Edible tours 11

Tour historical sites on the farm 12

Tour natural land features and wild harvest areas 12

Demonstrations 12

Vegetable tour 13

Gardening Tip Tour 13

Seed & Seedling Demo (for Spring tours) 13

Weed tour 13

Beneficial insects demonstration 14

Demonstrate the full story–from seed to seed 14

A Taste of the Farming Lifestyle 14

U-Pick 14

Self-Guided Tours 15

Farm/Chef Tours 15

Farm-Chef considerations 15

Custom Tours 16

Planning & Promotion 17

Confirming the Details 17

Effective Outreach 19

Posters *19*

Flyers *19*

Radio *19*

CBC Contacts *20*

Facebook / Twitter / Email & Blog *20*

Press Releases *21*

Purchasing Advertising Space *21*

Word-of-Mouth / Invitations *21*

Take Home Materials *22*

Other activity ideas to consider offering on your farm 17

Kid-friendly Ideas 17

Take Home/Gift ideas 18

School Tours 24

Pre-Trip Planning 24

Tour Groups 25

Additional Insurance? 25

School Tour Notes 25

Conclusion 26

Appendix 28

Waterpenny Farm Tour 28

FARM TOUR HANDBOOK

This resource was created in response to the New Brunswick Organic Strategic Plan's (2010) suggestion that farmers meet the strategic priorities of consumer education by increasing "consumer understanding of the meaning of the term 'organic'" and "increase consumer awareness of the benefits of New Brunswick produced organic products." Farm tours present the perfect opportunity to achieve both of these goals.

The intent is that this guide will encourage more organic farmers in Atlantic Canada to consider hosting farm tours. It is particularly important for the organic community to reach out and offer an experience where consumers can learn about organic food and farming on site. Farm tours are an excellent way to educate consumers about organic principles and requirements–spreading the word about the benefits of certified organic food.

Why host a farm tour?

Turning a Small Farm into a Big Business

Farm tours are a great way to connect urban dwellers with their local food sources. They offer a connection to a more rural, natural environment, and also provide a rich education on the importance of supporting local food producers. These types of agri-tourism activi-

ties, which bring consumers face to face with their local farmers, will help encourage the long-lasting establishment of strong regional food economies as people become directly connected to their nearby food sources.

The Benefits

The benefits of hosting a farm tour may not be immediately obvious: it means a day away from production, and maybe even spending some time cleaning up the farm premises. But you'd be surprised by how taking one day out of your production schedule can affect your farm status and sales in the long run! The people who attend your farm tour become familiar with your farm practices, with your location and values, and most importantly, with you. Wouldn't you rather purchase from someone you know than from someone you don't? The personal connection is an important part of hosting farm tours, and a big part of the future impact on your farm's recognition and (hopefully) in the establishment of new customers.

Hosting farm tours also establishes familiarity and friendship while attracting new customers who become strong proponents of you and your farm products. Another consideration is that farm tours present you with one-on-one time with customers, allowing you the opportunity to better understand their desires and the specialty items they would prefer. Farm tours are a good means to test new products and to listen for product development suggestions from the participants. *Tip:* Don't hesitate to ask for their opinions and feedback.

One of the amazing benefits of showcasing your farm is educating children. Farm tours often involve exposing children to an entire lifestyle they may never encounter otherwise. Children can be very impressionable, and hosting a farm tour is your chance to reach out to younger generation and teach them about where their food comes from and about the importance of healthy, conscious eating. In fact, a farm tour has the capacity to change their lives–how many new farmers these days actually grew up on a farm, or even in a rural community? With approximately 80% of Canada's population residing in city centres, not many young people have been exposed to a rural lifestyle, let alone a farm. This may be their first experience on a farm (hopefully the first of many!), and so it's important to keep this in mind when planning a visit.

In short, hosting farm tours revitalizes the connection between consumers and the farmers who grow their food. Tours pro-

vide the public with a direct experiential education on the many aspects of food production, and a wonderful opportunity to discuss the intricacies and integrity of organic agriculture.

Liability Insurance for Farm Tours

General farm liability insurance will cover the basic needs for hosting farm tours; however, if you decide to include activities beyond a general tour, you'll need to check-in with your insurance company. These activities include horseback riding, wagon rides, petting animals, and in some cases, eating farm products (particularly dairy items).

It is very important to contact your insurance company before you host a farm tour. Take the opportunity to go over the details of the activities planned, the dates and times, and the number of people expected. This will help you be that much more organized!

Similarly, with school tours, you should contact your insurance company as you begin to organize an event. More often than not, the school's liability insurance will cover the students, but if anything were to happen on the farm, it is likely that both the school and farm insurance would be liable.

In all of these activities, it's important to anticipate all of the possible risks on your farm tour. By identifying them, you can begin to develop a means of mitigating risks. Many risks can be avoided through signage, or by providing an initial overview to guests, or even a waiver form. For example, if you are going to be serving cooked food, you can post a list of ingredients or a sign asking participants to identify any food allergies they may have. In many cases, your insurance company can help you identify the areas of concern, and may offer helpful suggestions about how to avoid risks.

Things to Consider

- How many people can you and your farm accommodate?
- How many people should be on hand (someone to welcome, someone to give guided tour # 1; someone to give the tour to next group, etc)?
- How long should the tour be?
- What will you feature?
- How can you be sure to communicate the information in an engaging manner?
- Are dogs allowed on the property?

- Do you have a well-stocked first aid kit?

Safety

Use common sense regarding animals and equipment. Remember many of your visitors will not know any of the hazards of a farm. Try to keep your tour out of unkept areas and away from direct contact with loose large animals (and electric fences!).

The first order of the day is to establish the rules of safety. It is best to keep the rules simple:no more than 5 general rules work best. For school tours, make a list and arrange to have the teacher share it with the class prior to arrival. [For more information about school tours, see section below.)]

If you are taking people directly into your fields, and if there is a chance of spreading disease (blight for example), you may consider requesting that tour participants wash their footwear before and after the tour. This would require setting a footbath station, and can provide an additional opportunity to discuss the risks associated with farming.

Things to Provide

- Proper directions to the farm, or a map if your farm is in an isolated location

- Marked parking
- Fresh drinking water. Provide cups, and encourage guests to bring reusable water bottles that can be brought into the field (especially on hot, sunny days)
- Access to washroom facilities. If there is no washroom, do your best to indicate this in advance, and recommend another location, such as a nearby gas station. If it is a large tour group you are expecting, consider charging enough to cover the rental of a porta-potty if there is nothing else available on site.

- Refrigeration for food items. If you give away or sell items that should be kept cool, make sure there is a cooler or refrigerator for people to use. This applies to produce picked fresh from the fields: you'll want them to taste the freshness and not have it wilt before they get home!

- Signage for proper communication. For example, "Please wait, next guided tour will be starting at 0:00". Have chairs and drinks available, or something for the visitors to see, do, or read in the meantime. (Such as ACORN brochures about local organic farming in the area!)

Budget / To charge or not to charge? [1]

Depending on the nature of your tour, you may want to consider charging for the event or for take-home items. Many farm tours partner with other organizations to cross promote and cut down costs. If you alone are in charge of promotions, organization and logistics, or if you are offering or serving food or providing a costly experience, you may want to consider charging for your tour, and even selling tickets in advance so you know how many people to expect.

Establishing a budget is key to gaining a clear sense of how much expense will be involved in hosting a farm tour. From time taken away from farm labour, to promotional materials, to supplies—providing a clear breakdown of costs involved will help you plan accordingly.

Costing Out Expenses

Based on the above considerations, if you do decide to charge for your farm tour, it is essential to cost out your expenses in order to set your price. There are many obvious items and some not-so-obvious to include in your budget:

- Development of promotional materials (posters promoting the event, flyers for participants) and farm signage
- Food and beverage costs
- Lost labour time ($/hour)
- Set-up costs (for extra infrastructure, toilets, hand-washing stations, activity items, etc)
- Miscellaneous items (first aid kits, on-farm signage and rules, etc)
- Revenue

---

[1] Information for this section was sourced in part from Farm Folk City Folk's *Farm Tours, Project Development and Feasibility Study*. December 2007.

If you are going to charge to recover your costs, do not base your ticket price on a sold out tour. Estimate a 50-75% turn out to start. Charge enough so that you are making a profit while considering all of your expenses.

To minimize costs, consider joining existing tours, such as "Open Farm Day" in the Maritimes, which will allow you to promote the event to a wider public audience. Or simply talk to your neighbouring farms and consider collaborating to increase the draw and to cross-promote and share costs. This way, particularly if visitors will be travelling far, people can come and see a series of farms in the area and learn about different farming methods and practices.

What to charge?

After your estimated expenses and revenue are complete, a cost per person will be evident. If the cost seems unreasonable and you want to keep the price affordable, you might decide at this point to obtain sponsorship from a business or businesses that would benefit from the promotion. If any of the businesses are a retail store, you may even consider them as a ticket outlet. This will reduce your own labour expenses. Businesses can also help with promotion. It is essential to create an agreement with them to clarify what is expected of them, what type of promotion they receive in return, promotional materials or information they will require, along with a timeline of when to provide them with the materials or information.

It is beneficial to provide your promotional sponsors with a one-page 'Project Brief' describing the project and its relationship to their company. They can pass this on to their employees so they can answer questions from customers and help promote the program.

Ticket Sales

When tickets are purchased, ensure your guests know the date (and rain date), pick up and drop off time, location, to wear shoes appropriate for a farm field, to bring a bottle of water and snacks if they wish, and that tickets are non-refundable.

Research

Consider what you would be looking for in a farm tour and conduct your own research on other popular tours. It's a great excuse for you to visit your neighbours by participating in their open farm days and farm tour events. As you gather information, pay particular attention to the details of what the tours offer, how often they occur, and typical costs and duration. This information can help you create an ideal model for your own tour. As farming picks up quite a bit in the spring, take the time to do these initial preparations in the "off" months to save time and further labour.

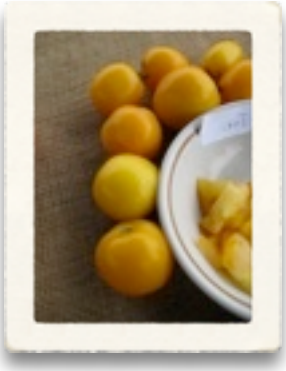
Tour Activities

Tour activities can range from mazes and scavenger hunts to laid-back, very "open" farm tours. Browse the lists of suggested tours and activities below to decide what works best for you and your farm. Some of these activities are directed towards children, while others could be fun for the whole family! It is important to consider who your audience will be, and to cater each tour appropriately. At the end of this document, you'll find further information about hosting school tours and ideas to help keep children engaged and interested on the farm.

Tour Ideas

'Why Organic?' Tour

The 'Why Organic?' Tour provides the opportunity for you to showcase everything you do as a manager of a certified organic farm. One suggestion for administering this tour is to act as though the visitors are organic inspectors. Show them around the farm as if you were demonstrating your good organic practices and your efforts to follow the Canadian Organic Standards. For example, demonstrate your buffer zones and explain why they are important, show-off your water protection techniques, your humane animal conditions, your pest and weed control methods, your compost, your seed sources and possibly even demonstrating your audit system. Regardless of what type of tour you decide to offer, take the opportunity to showcase your organic practices and teach the public more about what it means to be certified organic.



Edible Tours

This idea is growing in popularity! Edible tours can take different formats, such as having tasting tables set up in different areas of the fields where participants see the plant, pick the produce, wash it and taste it! For example, if you grow several varieties of tomatoes, you could have a table set up to slice them and provide samples of each tomato (maybe with some salt and pepper available too). It's a good idea to have a way to wash the produce before serving it to visitors, so you may want to have samples prepared in advance and allow the visitors to keep the tomatoes they pick to take home with them.

If you want to raise the stakes, consider partnering with a local chef for a gourmet farm tour! For more information about hosting a gourmet edible tour, see section Farmer/Chef tours below.

Guest: "Wow–look at that beautiful barn!"

Farmer: "What, that old thing–it's probably over 300 years old by now... darn thing"

Guest: "300 years old?! That's amazing!"

Farmer: "... I suppose it is isn't it?"

More often than not, farmers do not fully appreciate the beauty, heritage and traditions on their farm. Having farm guests can help the farmer appreciate their property in a new light. The above is a true interchange between a farmer and a farm guest in Nova Scotia!

Tour historical sites on the farm

Many farms in the Maritimes are historical wonderlands, and many things you may take for granted can be fascinating for a newcomer. Tell the story of the farm when it was first getting established by demonstrating antique farm equipment and tools, and showing off the 200-year old apple trees, barns and homes. Show guests what it must have been like for the first settlers–how they cleared the land, built their homes, raised animals and stored their food without a refrigerator. The antique tour provides an engaging context with which to compare your present-day organic farm practices with those of times past.

Tour natural land features and wild harvest areas

Showcase your environmental stewardship practices and any naturally beautiful and significant areas on the farm. For example, do you have a woodlot you've been sustainably harvesting? Or perhaps you collect maple syrup, mushrooms, fiddleheads or other wild edibles from a certain area of the forest? Some farms have worked hard to protect wildlife habitat areas, such as beaver dams or places for woodland turtles. These are all things that set your farm apart, as organic farming has a mandate to protect wildlife areas and biodiversity.

Demonstrations

Another experience you could offer visitors is how you process, package and/or harvest the food you grow. If you make jams and preserves, package your food or grow a crop that needs processing , help foster an appreciation for the work by demonstrating the entire process.

For preserves or other value-added goods, take visitors into the

kitchen, show them your tools, cooking process and the ingredients you use. Imagine the experience of a cooking demonstration, tasting, and then the option to purchase ready made bottles to take home at the end of the tour–the makings of a very memorable day!

Vegetable tour

If you are a market gardener, a more simple and perhaps straightforward tour is to take visitors on a "veggie" tour highlighting the many different varieties you are growing, and how they are related. For example, teach your farm guests about the plant families, such as how broccoli and mustard are related! Show visitors all of the odd plants (even some beneficial weeds) and give them tips for their own gardens.

You can take the vegetable tour to the next level by allowing guests to harvest their own take-home basket. Demonstrate how to harvest the foods they want, and tell them each to fill a bag or basket. Once picked, show them how to handle each crop–how to wash and bag the lettuce, carrots and herbs, as well as tips for storage. This gives each farm visitor a hands-on experience of how you handle the food they eat while providing them with fresh veggies. Hint: consider charging a small fee for this option to cover the cost of the basket of vegetables. It is probably simplest to charge per basket rather than per item.

Gardening Tip Tour

If you are an organic market gardener or vegetable farmer, it's likely that you've gathered a few tricks of the trade over the years. Why not target those backyard gardeners and offer some of your knowledge?

Seed & Seedling Demo (for Spring tours)

Consider hosting a seed and seedling demonstration to help with your springtime workload! Offer some seedlings to your guest helpers as a reward and take-home gift. One local farm has an annual potato seed party, where guests cut potatoes and share in a potluck meal.

Weed tour

Farmers grow weeds too! Invite your guests to help out with weeding while sharing the special properties of the weeds on your farm. For example, talk about how delicious lambs

quarters are, how dandelion root has amazing diuretic properties, or how milkweed attracts monarch butterflies. The weeds can tell a natural story on your farm, and help showcase how you deal with weed and pest problems as an organic farmer. You can also take this opportunity to show your visitors various weeding tools and methods.

Beneficial insects demonstration

Show people your beehives, butterflies, ladybugs and spiders, and how they interact positively with your plant systems as an organic farmer.

Demonstrate the full story–from seed to seed

Educate farm tour participants about each part of the plant cycle. Start with the dried seed before it is sprouted, moving on through the seedling , transplanting and planting processes, the harvesting phase, and finally to seed collection. This way, you can tour the various parts of the farm, showing different plants in the different cycles. Garlic would be an easy crop to start with for this type of tour.

A Taste of the Farming Lifestyle

Another great way to get people engaged in farming is to invite them to your farm to help out with the work. By engaging them in hands-on experience, they get a true taste of the farming lifestyle, and you don't lose as much labour time. Consider offering your 'worker bees' a reward for their hard work too–show them your rest spots, favourite garden snacks and maybe even your swimming spot!

U-Pick

U-picks are a tried, tested and true method of bringing people out for a farming experience. Many people treat u-picks as a family or full-day adventure. If you are going to offer a u-pick of any of your fruits or vegetables, try to come up with ways to differentiate the experience your farm has to offer from others offering a similar experience–perhaps by incorporating some of these tour ideas to expose visitors to other parts of your farm.

Self-Guided Tours[2]

Tours can take up a lot of your time, and if you plan on hosting regular farm tours, or if you are a participating in an greater Farm Tour event, such as "Open Farm Day", and/or are at risk of being short-staffed, but still want to extend your farm and practices to the public, you might consider creating a self-guided tour. A self-guided tour allows visitors to come to the farm and tour the premises on their own time. When farm visitors arrive, they are provided with a map and a reading guide about each "stop" along the tour with an invitation to ask questions when they return to you at the farm gate or farm stand. This tour option requires excellent signage, and a direct and clear pathway. It will also require some initial time invested in writing up the farm tour specifics–and there are some great examples in the *Growing For Market* articles. Included in this handbook as an appendix is a sample self-guided farm tour.

Farm/Chef Tours

Farm cuisine à la mode!

Collaborating with a chef can be another great way to educate people on food production. Organize a farm dinner or barbeque with a chef who will use ingredients from the farm to create and serve a dish, preferably in an outdoor setting. Chefs, like farmers, are passionate about food, and collaborations allows the enthusiasm to spread to the public!

Farm-Chef Considerations

Chefs are accustomed to the utmost sanitization, so have hand-washing stations and sanitizers available. If the food is going to be picked fresh from the field, make sure that the pickers' hands are washed prior to picking, and that the food is washed before it is consumed. This washing lowers the risk of any contamination caused by animals or birds.

Where will they cook the food? One easy solution is to make it a

[2] *Host a Farm Tour Without the Work.* Growing for Market. Vol. 20 # 7. August 2011. Rachel Bynum.

barbeque event and get the chef to cook up a gourmet meal that everyone can try at home on their own BBQ. BBQs don't always require meat either–there are a lot of amazing vegetable dishes that can be created! Alternatively, the chef can prepare the food in advance at their restaurant, with ingredients sourced from your farm. They can be on site to talk about the cooking process, offer recipe ideas, and voice the special benefits of farm-fresh foods. Consider charging an adequate fee for the meal to cover costs.

Remember, if you are going to be serving food, you will need:

- Hand washing stations
- Utensils
- Napkins
- Plates/bowls as necessary
- Beverages
- Compost, recycling and garbage disposal

Custom Tours[3]

Because you can often charge more for a custom tour, you might consider offering them even though they take more effort to organize. Custom tours should be directed towards groups such as chef and restaurant associations, private schools, and food and wine clubs. You can also inquire about partnering with local hotels to offer packages to their guests, especially if the hotel features a restaurant that promotes local wines and local ingredients in their establishments. One suggestion would be to offer a custom tour meant for food service and retailers, one that showcases your organic practices, audit and food safety measures.

[3] Information sourced from Farm Folk City Folk's *Farm Tours, Project Development and Feasibility Study*. December 2007.

Other activity ideas to consider offering on your farm

‣Offer a "blind" taste contest comparing your farm-fresh vegetables with a non-local/organic source–carrots and tomatoes work really well for this

‣Have taste-testing stations set up around the farm and fields. For example, near your lettuce production, have a sample salad made with your fresh-picked greens for participants to enjoy. Upon viewing your herb gardens, offer participants an herbal iced tea. If you create preserves from some of your vegetables and fruits, set up a table where guests can taste the pickles in the field–next to the cucumbers the pickles are made from. This also provides the opportunity to share your recipes and ideas, encouraging customers to buy food from you to do the same.

‣Planting/transplanting "parties"

‣Host a potato-bug picking competition

‣Animal feeding

‣Collecting eggs

‣Milking the cows or goats (but remember guests cannot likely taste the milk for insurance reasons)

‣Canning and preserving demos

‣Consider collaborating with nearby farms. Why not plan a bike tour route with 3 farms in one day, or a bus tour from the city?

Kid-friendly Ideas

‣Straw bale maze

‣Ecopots (newspapers made into little pots for planting seeds)

‣Scavenger hunt

‣Potato prints (tried and true)

‣Miniature golfing tour

‣Compost demonstration (have kids bring food scraps too)

- Art farm (build hay sculptures, food sculptures, plant funky plots in shapes/designs, etc)
- If you're open to frequent visits, you could consider hiding a GeoCache on your farm

Take Home/Gift ideas

People love to have farm treats to take home with them. Ones that act as memories or can be eaten tend to be favourites! Just remember that not everyone will have brought coolers with them, and they may have a long drive home–you don't want to give them something that will wilt or spoil! Some great suggestions include:

Food:

- Berries and fruit
- Jams, pickles and preserves
- Salad mix (that they picked and washed!)
- Potatoes, or other root crops that they dug themselves
- Squash/pumpkin
- Other storage/root veggies

Other:

- Bumper stickers, magnets, etc
- Recipes (have a selection of different recipe cards available to take home)
- Set up a farmer photo booth, a place for great family photos, or have guests/children explore a farmer "dress-up box" featuring farmer attire (layers of flannel, overalls, straw hats) and have a photo shoot

Planning & Promotion

Getting the word out about your farm tour can be a daunting task–and one that can seem overwhelming at first. This section of the Farm Tour Handbook is intended to guide you through some tried-and-true means of promotion. Though not exhaustive, we hope these tips will help you successfully plan and engage a good turn out for your event!

Confirming the Details

In order to properly begin promoting an event, you first need to confirm all of the details. Below is a basic and typical list of points to remember to work out in advance of promoting your farm tour.

- *Pick a date*—week-ends are often much better for consumers, although early evenings (before the bugs come out) can be a good time too. Saturdays tend to be difficult, as many farmers (and consumers) attend farmers' markets—making it a bit of a hectic day. Consider hosting the tour (particularly if it is a public tour) on a Sunday. Make sure you confirm the date and availability of your partner(s) and staff, as you will likely need all of the help you can get to pull this event off successfully!

    - *Rain date?* Decide in advance if the tour can take place if the weather is not favourable. If you do plan a rain date for the event, make sure it's well communicated to those who registered or expressed interest in attending, and especially to any ticket vendors. Furthermore, make sure you communicate the rain date in all of your outreach—on posters, radio announcements, press releases, etc—to avoid having to communicate the rain date at the last minute.

- *Pick a Time:* Think carefully about what time you will expect visitors to begin arriving and what time you hope to have everything wrapped up at the end of the tour. Remember to allow time for lingering conversations, for shopping at the farm gate and for unexpected occurrences. If you want people to be off the farm for 5 PM, it's recommended to end the tour on-paper by at least 4:30 (if not 4:00) in order to have people actually gone by 5:00 PM. Likewise, keep in mind that some farm guests will inevitably be late arrivals. Plan a buffer time to accommodate the late-comers, for example, if your tour is scheduled for two hours, have your communicated start time about fifteen minutes to half an hour before the actual tour will begin. This time can be used for introductions and mingling amongst farm guests.

- *Plan your activities:* Based on your anticipated start and end time, it's helpful to establish a program of activities. This handbook includes a sample itinerary to give you an idea of what a basic farm tour could look like. As you can see, completing an itinerary in advance can help you plan and prioritize activities.

- *Product Planning:* If you are providing items for sale or give-aways, specify in advance what products will be available for farm visitors. Listing these in your promotional outreach can be a great advertising tool. In addition, knowing in advance what you will need to have on hand can be crucial to help you plan your crop planting and sales!

▸ *Contacting and confirming partners:* If you plan on selling tickets through a store or alternate location, make sure you contact them well in advance of advertising the event. Likely they will have suggestions for you and if they are sponsoring your effort, make sure you discuss with them how they would like to be recognized in the promotional materials and outreach. As a means of recognizing their contribution, request that they send you their logo to use on the posters and other materials.

▸ *Volunteer effort:* If you anticipate the need for volunteers, it is generally good practice to put the call out for volunteer help before you start promotion. Although it would be ideal to have all of your volunteers confirmed before promoting the event, once you've put out the initial call and confirm some help, you can also use the promotional outreach to solicit additional volunteers for the tour. Consider compensating volunteers by not charging for the tour and offering them a selection of free farm products.

Sample Itinerary for Basic Farm Tour

2:00 PM *Expected arrival time and registration; basket or harvesting bag hand-out*

2:20 PM *Introduction & Overview*

2:30 PM *Tour of Greenhouse production with tomato taste-testing station*

3:00 PM *Tour of field crops with harvesting lesson for 3 crops: zucchini, pumpkin, and eggplant*
(note that they are 3 crops that do not require immediate refrigeration)

3:45 PM *Animal visit and demonstration (collect the eggs as a demo, milk cow or goat, sheep shearing demo *(Unless you are well set-up to accommodate many people, it is recommended that animal activities be a mostly hands-off demonstration)*

4:30 PM *Tour wrap up and invitation to purchase items offered *(make sure produce and items in need of chilling are well-packaged for travel)*

5:00 PM *Finished!*

---

*Note: *Although this tour is scheduled to be 3 hours, it could easily be cut down to 1 hour by dropping the harvesting and tomato tasting activities)*

Effective Outreach

With the date, time, activities, partners and volunteers confirmed, you can begin to promote your event. See below for outreach suggestions–and remember, ACORN is glad to help

members with any promotional materials and outreach–don't hesitate to contact us for more details about how we can help you!

Posters

Posters are a common and effective means of spreading the word about an event. If you are unable to make a poster yourself, this is a great opportunity for a volunteer. In addition, volunteers can help distribute the posters to key locations in the towns and cities near your farm. It's important to think about what kind of an audience you are targetting, and decide what locations would reach out your desired audience. For example, if you are trying to reach families with children, consider postering at YMCA/YWCA locations, whole food and grocery stores, daycare facilities, after-school program centres, and schools. If you are trying to target a post-secondary audience, try postering cafés, University and College campuses, and even bars and popular restaurants–especially any food service establishments or other locations that you sell your products to. If you attend the Farmers' Market, make sure to bring plenty of posters to put up there as well. Farmers' Markets tend to be a popular spot for information gathering. Don't hesitate to invite your fellow farmers as well, and ask them to put up a poster on their farm stall on your behalf!

Flyers

Creating a flyer in addition to a poster is another excellent way of reaching-out to potential participants. The advantage of flyers is that you use less paper than a poster–making it a convenient hand-out. Consider dropping off a number of flyers at various health food stores, and bring them to your Farmers' Market stall to distribute to customers. If you or a fellow farmer have a CSA, consider distributing them through in the food boxes too!

Radio

The radio, especially CBC or your local radio station, is a great way of getting the word out about your farm tour. Not only does the radio play community announcements frequently leading up to your event, as a result of your public service announcement (PSA), occasionally reporters will contact you to conduct an interview–providing even more air space for you to promote your event! Listed below are the regional contacts for CBC's PSAs. As you often have to leave your announcement on an answering machine, be prepared by writing your message out completely beforehand so that you don't forget any details as you read it off on the recording. CBC encourages creativity on the radio–so consider using a cow bell or a "cockle-doodle-doo" to capture the attention of listeners–don't be shy!

CBC Contacts

New Brunswick: CBC Radio will accept requests for public service announcements not-for-profits Please send announcement at least two weeks in advance to:

- Fredericton: You can call in a PSA on Information Morning's talkback line at 1-800-561-4222 or (506) 451-4100 (local).

- Saint John: You can all in a PSA on Information Morning's talkback line at 1-800-632-7743 or (506) 632-7747 (local).

- Moncton: You can write in a PSA via e-mail (infomorning@moncton.cbc.ca) or fax your request to (506) 853-6400,or try calling (and leaving a message) (506) 853-6666

Prince Edward Island: Print or type the details of your event including date, time, location, and a contact, and fax to (902) 629-6518 approximately two weeks before the event date.

If you miss the deadline, you can call the talkback line at (800) 680-1898 and record your own 30-second community event notice. A selection of these recordings are aired on Island Morning and Mainstreet.

Nova Scotia: Public service announcements can be sent to Olga Milosevich via email, by fax (902) 420-4211, or by mail to CBC Radio, Box 3000, Halifax, NS, B3J 3E9. You can also call in a PSA to Information Morning's talkback line at 1-800-582-5526.

Facebook / Twitter / Email & Blog

- Don't hesitate to email your regular customers, contacts, friends and family to spread the word about your event and be sure to suggest that they forward the message on to their friends and interested groups and contacts. Often, an email can turn into an email "tree" when people forward on your message; this way, a simple email can reach a surprising amount of people.

- Facebook is really a great tool for event organizing–and helps link you to a greater audience. As an organic farmer and ACORN member, ACORN would be more than happy to help you create a Facebook event, especially if you do not have or do not want a Facebook account. If you make a Facebook event, be sure to notify ACORN so we can help spread the word through our extensive Facebook network!

- Twitter is another means (much like Facebook) of getting the word out. If you have a Twitter account, you should definitely "tweet" about the upcoming event and your plans. If you don't, ACORN can help with this too–and we can tweet your information and updates on our Twitter accounts.

- If you have a blog or website, make sure you post the information asap. Writing an entire blog-post about the event can really help visitors understand what to expect from the tour in advance. It also provides a way for you to direct people to your blog / website. On posters, for example, you can write, "For more information, please check out our blog"–which will give your blog/website more traffic, introducing people to you and your farm and practices.

Press Releases

The purpose of a press release is to attract media attention by providing reporters with information about the upcoming farm tour. The press release should include the basic details about the event, and if well-written, is often used verbatim in a newspaper. Press releases are also often seen as an invite for reporters to contact you for more information in case they would like to develop a larger story about the event. It's for this reason that you want to make sure you include your full contact information at the end of a press release. Typically, press releases are emailed directly to the newspapers you are targetting, and you can include photos in the email as well that they may use in the article. If you do choose to include photographs, make sure you include a caption (e.g. "Farmers' Joe and Jill picking wild mushrooms in their woodlot") and the photo credit. Press releases should be issues 1 week in advance of the event. If you require help writing your press release, ACORN would be happy to send you samples and help you create and distribute your press release.

Purchasing Advertising Space

Unless you feel that it is great value for your money, ACORN does not recommend purchasing advertising space–it's a costly endeavour as you need to develop a nice advertisement to fit certain specifications–which takes time and skills you may have to hire to accomplish. Another consideration is that fact that these days, an affordable ad is typically quite small and doesn't run for a long time. There are other means of advertising that are more effective and much less costly!

Word-of-Mouth / Invitations

Another significant means of spreading the word about your event is to specifically and personally invite your family, friends, customers, and new contacts to participate in the tour. Your personal invitation can make people feel so much more comfortable and welcome to attend. Take advantage of any opportunities to invite people–mention it to all of your customers at the Farmers' Market, at your CSA drop-off locations, and during your restaurant and store deliveries–this can make all the difference. Handing out flyers and posters and asking people specifically to come is likely the most effective way to garner an engaged turnout!

Take Home Materials

A final, but very important part of the farm tour, is to make sure that visitors have something to take home as a reminder of your farm and the tour, with an invitation to contact you in the future. In addition to any food products they purchase or receive, make sure you have some printed materials about the farm for them to take home, such as business cards, brochures, flyers–or anything they can put on their fridge.

School Tours[4]

What you need to know about hosting a large group of children:

If you're interested in making a big impact on youth, catering to the school crowd can be a rewarding experience. To book a tour, contact your local school district community coordinator or a school directly to find out if there are any teachers who might be interested in taking their class on a farm tour.

Pre-Trip Planning

Contact the teacher and give the following information:

1. Farm description and special points of interest
2. Directions for finding the farm
3. Best times for a visit
4. Suggest one adult supervisor for each 5 students
5. Communicate your safety rules and provide a list to pass on to students (see safety above)

Questions to Ask

- Charge per student? (for your time and any food you might serve)
- How many students will be coming?

---

[4] The bulk of this information has been sourced from the Government of Alberta, *Agriculture and Rural Development,* Farm Tours website: http://www1.agric.gov.ab.ca/$department/deptdocs.nsf/all/agic5614

- What grade are they in?
- How old are the children?
- Have they been studying agriculture? cooking? or other related topics?
- Will the tour require picnic space? special facilities?
- Will there be any students with special needs?
- Will a bus be used (must consider parking options)?
- Does the school have a liability release form or policy?

Be sure to contact your insurance company with the above information. In addition to the school's liability insurance, a farm should have liability insurance. Your regular insurance for your farm should be sufficient coverage for farm tours, but the operation of tours should be stated in your policy.

Tour Groups

Plan to divide the class up into groups of between 5-10, depending on the number of chaperones. From here, you can develop "learning stations" with time limits for each of the groups. These stations could showcase various ways of interacting with the farm, providing a different experience of farm life at each station. Experiences may include harvesting food, feeding the animals, cleaning and washing, preparing for market, etc. Perhaps a final, communal station could be a chance to taste some food at the end of the tour.

Additional Insurance?

In most cases, field trips that are during school hours fall under the school's insurance; however, parents and chaperons are not necessarily covered by the school's policy. You should make sure you have proper insurance, and double-check that the teacher/school has alerted their insurance company that they will be participating in a farm tour.

School Tour Notes

- Kids need bathroom breaks, usually upon arrival and before leaving. Be sure to suggest where the bus can stop on the way for a bathroom break if there is not a proper facility on site.
- Kids need rules: Write and post farm rules and make sure you go over them at the beginning of the tour.
- First aid–have a simple kit on hand (see safety above).
- Allergies–ask about allergies before making close friends of animals and plants.

- Snacks and refreshments–hungry children will lose their concentration quickly. Plan for frequent snack times. With extra activities, appetites soar. Suggest that children bring plenty of food and that disposal of garbage is taken care of.
- Make sure to provide clear instructions on what the students should bring and wear. These could include a good sun hat, sturdy boots, water bottle, wind parka or rain gear (if rain is forecast), t-shirt, long-pants, notebooks, eating utensils and plates, a bag lunch, and name tags.
- Also, be sure to provide excellent driving instructions for the bus driver and make sure there is a place for the bus driver to turn around easily.

Hosting a school tour, or any group of children, can be extremely rewarding. You are allowing kids to receive an experiential taste of education–allowing them to pet, feed, harvest and work on the farm. It's important to make sure that children leave the farm with stories to tell and memories to cherish, as it's a unique opportunity for kids to be introduced to the food chain and their role in creating a healthy planet. Don't be shy to make those connections with the children! Tip: Provide the teacher with enough farm brochures that can be given to children at the end of the day, so parents can see where children have been and support the farm, if possible.

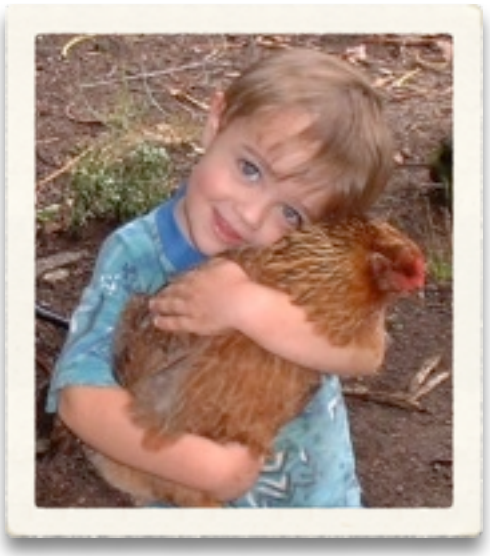
Conclusion

Despite many consumer campaigns and new government regulations, people are still confused about what organic really means. Organic farmers are distinguished by the fact that, unlike "natural" and other food claims, there is actually a set of standards and a certification process... but how much of the general public really *know* the facts about organic?

Farm tours provide the perfect opportunity to showcase what organic really means, and in particular, what *you* are doing as an organic farmer who cares. Take the opportunity during the farm tour to let visitors know why you don't spray your crops with chemicals, or inject synthetic fertilizers into the soil, and be sure to connect your practices to the principles of organics. Tell them about the seeds you use and express your concerns about genetically modified seed and crops. If you have animals, describe the humane organic standard requirements (it's more than just "free range"), and take this chance to help your visitors understand that organic certification is substantial and significant.

Organics has traditionally been a grassroots movement, with people working together to promote a more sustainable and environmentally sound form of agriculture. The movement

is built on connections between people and the land, and farm tours allow this connection to be extended beyond the farm borders–rejuvenating the connection between farms and the food we eat.



ACORN

P.O. Box 6343
Sackville, NB E4L 1G6

1-866-32-ACORN (22676)
admin@acornorganic.org
www.acornorganic.org
Blog: http://acornorganic.wordpress.com/
Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/acornorganic

Appendix

Waterpenny Farm Tour

Growing For Market
publication date: Sep 1, 2011

This is the information sheet visitors to Waterpenny Farm can use to show themselves around the farm.

We have been cultivating 10 acres of ecologically grown vegetables here in Sperryville since 2000. Our farming methods are all ecologically based and sustainable, and we use only organic inputs (no synthetic pesticides or fertilizers). In addition to growing vegetables and flowers, we have a flock of 175 laying hens on the farm.

The farm is our family's sole source of income. We sell at Farmer's Markets in Charlottesville and Warrenton on Saturdays; and in Takoma Park, MD, on Sundays. We also offer 100 CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) shares, which are delivered to Arlington and at the Capital Area Food Bank in Lorton on Wednesdays and picked up on the farm on Thursdays. CSA members sign up in March for a weekly box of seasonal vegetables from the farm, from June to the beginning of October. Finally, we have a self-serve stand on the farm; self serve customers can either pay when they shop or purchase pre-paid credit on the farm.

Each year we hire 5-6 people to work as farm interns. They earn a stipend and live on the farm, and participate in all aspects of the farm. Interns have the opportunity to learn the ins and outs of our farm's systems. Interns are vital to our farm's success.

We have a 40-year lease on 30 acres of Mt. Vernon Farm. To find out more about our long-term lease arrangement, see the article on our website. Mount Vernon is an 800-acre farm that offers grass-fed beef, pork, & lamb (to get to their store, turn left at onto the highway at the end of our driveway, then take the first right onto Mt. Vernon Lane).

Thank you for coming to see our farm. We hope to see you while we're here, but we've also set up a self-guided tour you can do on your own. It will take you all around the farm, a distance of about a mile. Bring your water bottle and wear a sun hat if it's hot out. Just look for the numbered signs and read the descriptions below.

Before you start, look at the farm map. You will notice that our farm is divided up into 35 blocks that are each 300 feet long and 30 feet wide. Having our farm divided into equal-sized fields makes it easier for us to plan a crop rotation, avoiding putting the same family of crops in the same fields two years in a row. Our rotation also includes a fallow year in most

fields every 5 years or so. This is good for the soil, varying the types of nutrients the crops use and need. It also gives us an advantage over pests, many of which are dormant underground in host fields in the winter time.

1. Deer fence. After years of having more and more deer damage to a wide variety of crops, we finally had this deer fence installed in the spring of 2007. It's 8 feet high, 4400 feet long, and keeps all the deer out (as long as we close the gates). We noticed a big increase in production immediately after this fence was completed.

2. Asparagus. We planted this asparagus patch in 2003 and started harvesting in 2006. The varieties we chose to grow are resistant to bacterial rust. Asparagus beetles are its main pest, and our main challenge with asparagus is keeping it weeded all year. We harvest the first shoots to come up in the spring, and continue cutting it daily for 6-8 weeks (usually Mid-April to early June). The tall, fern-like fronds you see now develop from the tender shoots when they're left to grow. They are now feeding the roots of this perennial crop.

3. Flowers. We grow about ¼ acre of flowers every year. We sell cut flowers at the farmer's markets & on the farm

(Thursday afternoons and Fridays), but flowers also do a lot to attract birds, butterflies, and other beneficial insects and pollinators to our farm. We try to have something blooming most of the year, either wildflowers in the spring, or flowers and vegetables we grow in summer & fall. Zinnias and sunflowers are our mainstays, with Cinnamon Basil, Ageratum, Gomphrena, Celosia, snapdragons, statice, and strawflowers in prominent roles. We also cut many native and naturalized perennial flowers and herbs we've planted around the farm for our cut flower bunches. Customers can breathe easy knowing that they're not bringing in pesticides with their beautiful bunches of flowers.

4. Blueberries. We planted 130 blueberry bushes in the spring of 2005 and had our first significant harvest in 2008. Each row is a different variety, and they ripen at different times, extending our harvest to about 6 weeks, from mid-June through July. The wooden posts and clotheslines are used to support netting we put over the field to keep the birds out when the berries are ripe. Blueberries have relatively few pest & disease problems and can be produced organically without as many problems as other small fruits.

Facing sign #4, turn right to walk between the blueberries and our pumpkin field below. Pass our young apple and Asian pear trees, then turn down hill to find #5.

5. Beneficial insect habitat. We've set aside several parts of our farm that rarely or never get mowed in order to provide additional habitat for beneficial insects. The Echinacea, Bee Balm, and Rudbeckia in this field were planted in 2001, while the goldenrod & many other

plants are volunteers. We aim to keep our farm's insect communities in balance by having natural levels of both vegetable pests and their predators, and providing "refuge" areas for them to live, overwinter, meet, reproduce and/or eat each other helps us do that.

6. Tomatoes. This is our second of four tomato plantings. We grow about 5,000 tomato plants every year. We stake the more fragile heirloom and cherry tomatoes to help them be more productive, but we let a lot of the hybrid tomatoes flop on the ground. This 2nd planting is basically finished, but we'll continue to harvest from our 3rd and 4th plantings for another month or so. At peak production we pick about 3000 pounds of tomatoes each week

7. Kale. We transplanted this kale September 1st (about 3 weeks later than usual due to the weather) for harvest early October through the fall. We grow kale, lettuce, cabbage, and broccoli on white plastic mulch. The white plastic keeps the weeds down and holds in moisture the same as black plastic mulch, but while black plastic warms the soil for warm-season vegetables, white plastic helps keep the soil cooler for spring & fall crops.

Row cover. Right after planting, the kale field was covered with row cover. This gigantic white sheet is a breathable polyester fabric that keeps insects and animals away from our young transplants, while allowing light and rain to pass through. We cover many of our plants when they're young to help them get established. When fruiting crops such as squash start to bloom, we remove the row cover so that bees can get in to pollinate. Leafy crops such as the fall kale in this field can stay covered until we're ready to start harvesting. After getting uncovered, the plants are usually big & strong enough to withstand some pest pressure and still be productive.

To get to #8, face #7 and turn right. Walk along the edge of the fields towards the gate by the river, then on through to #8 at the tree line.

8. Irrigation 1. Walk straight ahead to see the irrigation pump. Take the path to the right to get a better look at the river, the home of our namesake water pennies, pollution-sensitive beetle larvae which live in the water. If you pick up a rock in the river and find a flat, oval-shaped, dark coppery-colored bug the size of your little fingernail, that's a Waterpenny—treat it with care! Be sure to see the real live ones in our aquarium at the barn.

Irrigation is vital to producing high-quality vegetables. We use drip irrigation, a water-saving system that slowly puts water at the base of the plants and nowhere else. The gas-powered pump takes water out of the river, sends it through the large black sand filters to take out the sediment, then sends the water to the fields. We can irrigate about 2 acres at a time, or ten of our fields, and this small river provides all the water we need to get through dry spells. Sprinklers would be our other main alternative for irrigating, but they waste a lot of water,

enhance the spread of bacterial and fungal diseases, and end up watering the weeds too. With drip irrigation we use a lot less water and only water the plants we want to grow.

9. Irrigation 2. Here you can see the system of hoses and valves that deliver water to the plants—there are yellow flags at the valves. The 2" blue hoses (called "layflat") bring the water from the river to the field. The 1 ½ " black hoses (called "header") go along the edge of each field, and then the red valves connect to the drip tape running under each row of plastic. By opening & closing the valves we water different parts of the farm.

The black plastic mulch works in concert with the drip tape. It keeps the irrigation water from evaporating, suppresses weeds close to the plants, and warms the soil to speed the harvest. We have had good results on several crops using "biomulch," a plant cellulose-based, biodegradable plastic that looks the same as the petroleum-based kind, but degrades in place rather than needing to be pulled up each year. We also use a white plastic mulch on cool-season crops like kale and lettuce. The drip tape, plastic, and row cover can all be recycled into plastic "lumber."

10. Winter squash. We began harvesting this field of butternut squash in mid-September. We seeded it in mid-June, covered it with row cover until it flowered, uncovered it, weeded it some, and let it grow for 2 more months until the squash matured. When the vines died back and the tendril closest to the squash is dry and the color of the skin is tan all over, (a withered tendril indicates that no more sugars are being transported from the squash leaves to the squash itself) we clip the squash, let it cure in the field for a day or two, and then bring it to the barn for storage. We've already brought in 4 large bins of squash from this field, and still have more to go—this dry weather, combined with the ability to irrigate just the roots was great for it this season.

If you look toward the river, in the field perpendicular to this one, you'll walk by a field recently planted in a summer cover crop of buckwheat. We use warm season cover crops where we can, and plant winter cover crops on all fields in the fall. They build the soil, providing a "green manure" for our crops. They also can have an "allelopathic" or weed-suppressing effect, especially the summer buckwheat and the winter rye. In addition, they hold the soil in place, keeping it out of the river, and keeping our rich soil community intact.

11. Roadways. The permanent grassy "roadways," between our 300' x 30' fields also help to maintain our soil health. We never till these areas, leaving bacteria, fungus, and other microorganisms in the soil community intact. When we till our fields, the undisturbed microbial life in the roadways can easily colonize the tilled land (this is according to soil scientists we've heard speak— we haven't seen these little guys ourselves). Having a well-balanced and

vibrant soil microbial community is vital to plant health. The roadways also help minimize soil erosion in times of heavy rains, and provide more habitat for beneficial insects and pollinators, including native ground-nesting bees.

12. Summer squash. This is the third of our three plantings of summer squash. We pick a squash field 6 days/week for about 6 weeks, averaging about 100 lbs of squash every day. This field is almost finished, but we hope for a few more weeks of harvest before the frost.

Mulch. We mulched this field soon after we planted it in August. We roll out five or six 400-lb round hay bales in about 30 fields this size every year (about 150 bales or 60,000 lbs of hay total). In addition to helping keep weeds down (which it does for only some weeds), the mulch reduces rain & wind erosion, minimizes the spread of disease, keeps the vegetables clean, adds organic matter to the soil, provides habitat for soil microbes, & reduces soil compaction.

Some hayfields in our area, particularly those managed conventionally for "high quality" (meaning exclusively grass) hay for horses, are treated with the persistent broadleaf herbicide Picloram, which is devastating to broadleaf plants, including all the vegetables we grow. We learned this the hard way in 2007, when we mulched about 2 acres of our fields with hay we were sold that came from a field that had been sprayed the previous year with Grazon, a Picloram-containing herbicide. It's illegal to sell hay for mulch that has been treated with this federally controlled substance, but you definitely should specifically ask if your mulch hay has been sprayed before you use it. We learned this from hard experience. (Composted manure from horses who have eaten hay treated with picloram will also kill your vegetable plants, so now, in Virginia, all manure isn't good for your garden.)

13. Chickens. We have 175 egg-layers this year. They have portable coops and a portable electric netting fence (don't touch it!) that we move about every two weeks. This gives them access to new sources of bugs & plants, which means they lay very tasty, nutritious eggs with orange-yellow yolks. We have moved them through several fields that are not in crops this year. They naturally fertilize the field and eat many pests in the process. We feed them twice daily with certified organic, soy-free feed, and we also bring them our vegetable compost. They especially like melons and leafy greens.

You can see some of the cellulose-based plastic "biomulch" exposed and starting to break down by the chickens scratching in this area. By next spring, it won't be visible.

14. Equipment. (Please don't climb on any equipment or tractors!) This pole barn was built in spring 2009, and is wonderful for storing tractors, equipment, and field materials out of the weather and close to the fields. On our scale we rely on a set of specialized vegetable equipment to help us prepare fields and plant about 50,000 transplants every year. We use

tractors to get the fields ready, to lay the plastic mulch & drip irrigation, and to make little water-filled holes for us to put plants into. We rely on being able to get hundreds or thousands of plants in the ground in a short period of time, and our equipment helps make that possible. Of interest are the blue "spader" for tillage, the low red "plastic layer" for laying plastic and drip tape, the red and yellow "transplanter," and the green and yellow sprayer, which we use to apply a foliar fish and kelp-based fertilizer as well as a baking soda solution to deter fungal growth on plants.

15. Barn. This barn was built as an apple packing shed in about 1940. We bought it and the other buildings on the farm in 2004 when we signed our long-term lease. We use it to store and wash vegetables, and as a place to make CSA boxes and load market trucks. We also have a self-serve stand open Tuesday through Saturday (and today) where people can buy anything we grow. Walk past the sign & into the barn, then go up the step to the left to see the signs describing where to find and how to purchase vegetables and eggs from our farm to take home and enjoy.