

Host Summer Camp on Your Farm

AGRITOURISM BEST PRACTICES SERIES

Carding wool, collecting eggs, planting seeds, and harvesting vegetables are just a few activities that kids can help with when they attend a farm-based summer camp. As campers learn about food, forest, and fiber production, farms are strengthening ties with their communities and adding value to their farm business. This chapter will walk you through many of the steps for planning a farm summer camp, including business planning, sourcing activities, marketing, and risk management.

Business Planning

Create a business plan for your camp. Consider elements such as clientele, duration (day or residential), environment, risk management, financing, staffing, summer or year-round programming.

For community-oriented farms such as CSAs, camps are a good way to strengthen connections with families. When kids have fun at your farm, it builds customer loyalty and the return on investment is long-term. Some farmers find that spending time with kids is a nice change of pace, and they may be comfortable taking a loss or merely breaking even because it improves quality of life. Others want their camp to be profitable, like any sound business. Regardless of your financial goals, all farmers need to employ careful planning and budgeting to develop a camp. Remember, always track your spending.



Full Moon Farm, Hinesburg, VT.

“ It is critical to treat camp like a business or it will absolutely fail, and to know in your head and heart that if you treat camp only as a business it will also fail absolutely; so always make your choices about the business of camp with the greatest care.”

— Rodger Popkin, Blue Star Camps and former American Camp Association national president

Sample Summer Camp Budget

When building a camp budget, there are two types of expenses: operating and capital. Funds used to provide services during the current year are *operating* expenses. Expenditures on projects that last more than one year are *capital* expenses. Personnel expenses will likely be the most expensive part of camp.

| Income | Number of campers | Tuition | Revenue | Net Revenue after Providing Any Financial Assistance |
|-----------------------------|-------------------|---------|-------------------------|--|
| Farm Camp — July (one week) | 12 | \$250 | \$3,000 (12 x \$250) | \$2,750 (one scholarship) |
| Farm Camp — August | 11 | \$250 | \$2,750 | \$2,750 (no scholarships awarded) |
| | | | TOTAL Income | \$5,500 |

| Expenses | May | June | July | August | TOTAL |
|---|---|------------------------------|---|---|----------------|
| Operating Expenses | | | | | |
| Personnel: Lead Teacher (\$18/hour) | \$540 (30 hours planning, outreach, registering) | \$180 (10 hours planning) | \$900 (15 hours planning, 35 hours teaching) | \$900 (15 hours planning, 35 hours teaching) | \$2,520 |
| Personnel: Assistant Teacher (\$14/hour) | \$70 (5 hours planning) | \$140 (10 hours planning) | \$560 (5 hours planning, 35 hours eaching) | \$560 (5 hours planning, 35 hours teaching) | \$1,330 |
| Office Supplies | \$50 | \$15 | \$15 | \$0 | \$80 |
| Camp Insurance (varies greatly depending on existing policies and your comfort with risk) | \$200 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$200 |
| Cooking/Food Supplies | \$0 | \$50 | \$50 | \$0 | \$100 |
| Capital Expenses | | | | | |
| Activity Supplies (journals, art supplies) (\$250 spread out over 2 years) | \$125 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$125 |
| First-aid Kit Supplies (\$100 spread out over 2 years) | \$50 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$50 |
| Signage Supplies | \$100 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$100 |
| Depreciation of Buildings, Driveway | | \$50 | \$50 | | \$100 |
| | | | | TOTAL Expenses | \$4,605 |

Camp Pricing around Vermont

| Farm | Camp Price | Hours |
|--|--|------------------------|
| Cedar Circle Farm East Thetford, VT | \$299/child per week | 7-hour day 1 week |
| Drift Farmstead Roxbury, VT | \$500/child (= \$250/week) | 7-hour day, 2 weeks |
| Farm & Wilderness Plymouth, VT | \$935/child (= \$467/week) | 6-hour day, 2 weeks |
| Full Moon Farm Hinesburg, VT | \$295/child per week <i>financial assistance available</i> | 6-hour day 1 week |
| Shelburne Farms Shelburne, VT | \$300/child per week <i>financial assistance available</i> | 6-hour day 1 week |

LICENSING AND ACCREDITATION

Many states require camps to be licensed. Contact your Department of Health or Department of Children and Families to find out about permit and license requirements.

Being accredited by the American Camp Association is a “seal of quality” that some camps choose to pursue. Some people may look for summer camps using their searchable database of accredited camps, but chances are families in your community will find your camp through other means.

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

For some kids, summer camp isn't an option without scholarships. If you're interested in providing access for limited-income families, consider asking families to donate to a scholarship fund when they register their kids. In 2014 at Deer Ridge Farm in Guilford, VT, Lisa and Jerry included this language on their camp registration form: *“Our prices reflect our 1:3 or 1:4 ratio. Please donate to support quality summer experiences and the socio-economic diversity of our groups. If you have financial needs, please contact us and we will try to help your child get here!”* On their website, they also encourage local families to seek scholarship support from their school counselors or social service agencies.



Campers at Farm Camp, Stone Barns Center for Food and Agriculture, Pontico Hills, NY.

PROGRAM PLANNING

As soon as you decide to offer camp, develop a timeline of tasks to complete. Below is a sample schedule from Stone Barns Center for Food and Agriculture in Pocantico Hills, NY.

| | |
|------------------|--|
| September | Send out evaluation to previous summer's campers. |
| October | Set dates and post on farm website. |
| November | Draft staff position announcements, plan for scholarships, prepare brochure. |
| December | Hire camp director, set up online registration, set up and post job descriptions. |
| January | Post brochure. |
| February | Open registration/busing/scholarship materials. |
| March | Begin hiring process and ordering supplies, t-shirts. |
| April/May | Hiring and registration, CPR/first-aid training, Department of Health training, carpool lists. |
| June | Staff training, open house, camp begins. |



Summer Farm Camp, Shelburne Farms, Shelburne, VT

Determine the Theme, Philosophy and Culture of Your Camp

Every farm is different from the next, and therefore every farm camp will take on its own identity. Work with the resources you have on your property to think about a common theme for the week or a theme for each day.

For Shelburne Farms' Outdoor Adventures Camp, in Shelburne, VT, each camp has an overarching question, and each day has a theme. The activities, snacks, and morning meeting all correspond to the theme of the day.

Parents will want to know if your camp has educational goals. Develop a detailed description of the camp, and share it along with a schedule of activities for the week (see example on facing page).

Offering a schedule, even if "free time" is part of it, will help kids feel comfortable going to a new place for the first time. Find a balance between variety and predictability, such as holding a morning meeting each day but discussing new ideas at each meeting, or serving a snack at the same time each day, but changing the snack item. Find a few friends who will provide honest feedback, and ask for their opinions about how you articulate your camp theme and philosophy.

Together with your campers, you'll build a camp culture. On the first day, you can help campers identify what values or agreements they want to adhere to throughout their time at camp. Setting rules for the week can be accomplished by asking kids what a caring, respectful community looks like. When they create working agreements, they will be more likely to adhere to them. For tips on creating working agreements, see [Forming Ground Rules \(Creating Norms\)](#) by the School Reform Initiative.

Safety, both physical and emotional, is essential in any camp culture. By setting expectations on day one, you can create a safe environment for campers. For the many other safety precautions to be taken, see the "Risk Management" section later in this chapter.

Sample Camp Schedule | Shelburne Farms, Shelburne, VT

DISCOVER the FARM 2014

What nourishes you?

| FOOD | WATER | SHELTER | COMMUNITY | JOY |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 9:00 - 10:15 Welcome and Check-in Make a journal, games, and Community Circle | 9:00 - 9:30 Entry Activities | 9:00 - 9:30 Entry Activities | 9:00 - 9:30 Entry Activities | 9:00 - 9:30 Entry Activities |
| | 9:30 - 9:45 Community Circle | 9:30 - 9:45 Community Circle | 9:30 - 9:45 Community Circle | 9:30 - 9:45 Community Circle |
| SNACK | SNACK | SNACK | SNACK | SNACK |
| Farm Discoveries In small groups | Farm Discoveries In small groups | Farm Discoveries In small groups | Farm Discoveries In small groups | Farm Discoveries In Small Groups |
| | | | | 12:00 Celebration! |
| LUNCH | LUNCH | LUNCH | LUNCH | LUNCH |
| 1:30 Lake and Free Time Join us at the lake for swimming, rock skipping, fort building, and more! | 1:30 Choice Time <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Farm • Feast • Find | 1:30 Lake and Free Time Join us at the lake for swimming, rock skipping, fort building, and more! | 1:30 Choice Time <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Farm • Feast • Find | 1:30 Lake and Free Time Join us at the lake for swimming, rock skipping, fort building, and more! |
| 3:15 End of Day Circle in small groups | 3:15 End of Day Circle in small groups | 3:15 End of Day Circle in small groups | 3:15 End of Day Circle in small groups | 3:15 End of Day Circle in small groups |
| 3:30 Camper Pick-Up <i>After care until 5:00</i> | 3:30 Camper Pick-Up <i>After care until 5:00</i> | 3:30 Camper Pick-Up <i>After care until 5:00</i> | 3:30 Camper Pick-Up <i>After care until 5:00</i> | 3:30 Camper Pick-Up <i>After care until 5:00</i> |

Fun Ideas for Your Farm Camp!

- Egg collecting and washing
- Harvesting veggies
- Transplanting
- Weeding
- Cooking
- Dissection (flower, gizzard, egg, seeds, compost)
- Foraging
- Fairy houses
- Instruments
- Egg drop
- Plant identification
- Field journals
- Dance/yoga/movement
- Murals
- Weaving
- Storytelling
- Building wallows for pigs
- Feeding pigs
- Spraying pigs with water
- Scavenger hunts
- Compost screening and turning
- Using natural dyes
- Taking temperature of compost
- Felting
- Flower mandalas
- Pest Identification
- Preserving
- Seed saving
- Ice cream making
- Agroforestry (design your own tree)
- Pickling
- Water testing and pond skimming
- Hiking
- Pollinator observation and tracking
- Reading
- Flower pressing
- "Mud kitchen" (pots, pans, spoons, mud, and imagination)
- Paper making
- Writing recipes
- Washing produce
- Seed art
- Free play

Hooves and Halters Camp

Gale Woods Farm, Minnetrista, MN

Ages 10–13. What does it take to get a chicken, sheep or calf ready to show at a fair? Learn how to care for, select, train, groom and show animals. Train your own chicken and lamb, and work in pairs to train a calf.

VT Farm and Forest School

Drift Farmstead, Roxbury, VT

Ages 3-7. Using our imaginations we will become farmers in both the field and forest of Drift Farmstead. We will find out what life is like for different farm animals, exploring what they eat and what their homes are like. Farm campers will also tend the vegetables, taste, explore and have lots of creative time in the forest.

Resources for Activities

- *Project Seasons and Cultivating Joy and Wonder* are Shelburne Farms publications filled with activities.
- [Farm-Based Education Network](#) is a resource hub for people who offer farm-based education.
- [Edible Schoolyard Network](#) has a searchable database of activities in a variety of subjects.
- [Life Lab](#) offers webinars, lessons, activities, and even some garden jokes on their online site.
- Parents may also be a source of ideas for camp activities. When you're just starting out, consider having a focus group with a few parents you know and ask them what they would like to see at a farm summer camp.

Farm Camp

Terra Firma Farm, North Stonington, CT

Back for its 14th year, we here at Terra Firma Farm's Farm Camp look forward to continuing our tradition of inviting curious young minds into the daily operations of our working farm. We realize that while most children are not going to grow up to be farmers, they will be the next generation of stewards of the land. From June to August, Terra Firma Farm is home to over 400 campers. Wearing their Farm Tees, they are frolicking around the fields, pastures, and barn learning how to grow food and be good farmers. Campers become a part of daily life on the farm. They help collect eggs, milk cows and move the pigs, as well as participate in hands-on and creative activities that connect them to food and farming.

Join our family farm for the week and make memories that last a lifetime! We have a strong passion for youth and strive to provide an unforgettable, rewarding, and refreshing hands-on farm experience for each child.

The Farm's pastures, barns and animals provide countless opportunities for campers to learn about teamwork, environmental stewardship, math, science, the arts, carpentry and more. The possibilities are endless! We hope that you join our past and present Farm Camp families and, as I like to say, "Lettuce Turnip The Beet!"

See you on the farm,

Farmer Brie

Staffing: Recruitment, Screening, Supervision, Training

As the American Camp Association writes, “There is no greater responsibility than bringing the right people to your camp.” Always review resumes and check references. Interview candidates and don’t be afraid to wait for the right fit. Part of the success of your camp will rely on having strong instructors who have a good working relationship with each other.

When hiring staff, the rate of pay can be based on level of experience with children, as well as:

- First-aid/CPR certification (expected for all).
- Lifeguard certification (paid at a higher rate).
- Classroom licensure/experience (paid at a higher rate).
- Willingness to participate in overnights/extended camp days (paid at a higher rate).

Recruit camp staff through:

- Friends and family.
- Colleges and universities. Share your advertisement on education, environmental studies, and agriculture listservs.
- Post in the Jobs section of the [Farm-Based Education Network](#).
- Post in local newsletters of related organizations or regions.

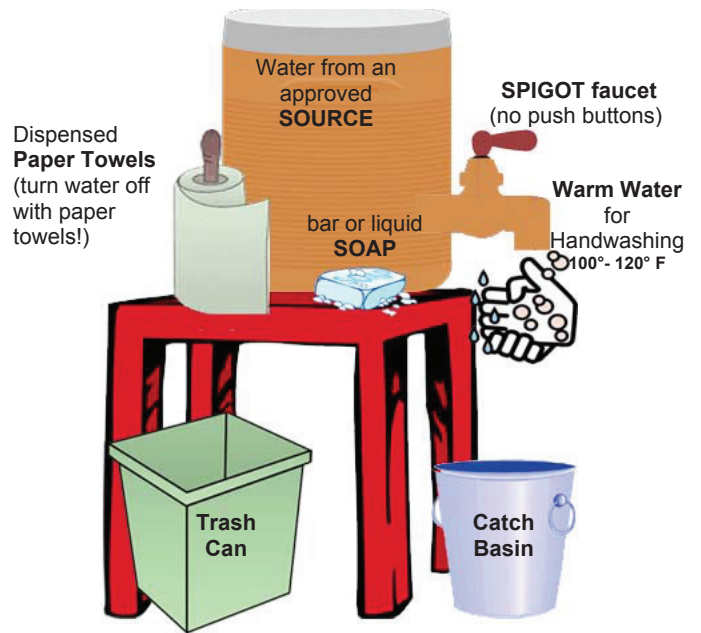
Staff should be trained in first aid and child CPR. They should also know how to be safe on your farm. Perform background checks on hired staff by checking the state sexual offender registry and state driving records.

American Camp Association recommendations for day-camp staff-to-child ratio:

- One staffer for every 8 campers ages 6 to 8.
- One staffer for every 10 campers ages 9 to 14.
- One staffer for every 12 campers ages 15 to 18.



Contact your local chapter of the American Red Cross to learn about available trainings near you.



A simple portable handwashing unit. SOURCE: North Carolina State University Extension.

Site and Facilities

When considering your farm’s facilities, safety should be a number-one priority. Make sure you have adequate shelter from inclement weather and that you have cordoned off any areas that may be unsafe. Keep equipment and any chemicals off-limits, and make sure kids know how to be safe around your animals.

The “Resources” page of [SafeAgritourism.com](#) has lots of printable signs you can download and use to mark off-limits areas, parking, electric fences, etc.

Designate a safe spot for parents to drop off and pick up kids each day, and systems for check-in and check-out that ensure every child is accounted for at all times. Campers may generate extra traffic on your road, so plan accordingly.

Make sure that you have clean, functional bathrooms and handwashing facilities near animals and eating stations.

If you have neighbors, consider how camp activities may affect them. Early morning noise, smoke from a bonfire, or curious kids playing near property lines may all pique your neighbors concern. Remember to invite them to an

end-of-week performance put on by campers, or a family and friends feast during the week. Good relationships with your neighbors are critical!

Make sure you have a fire-drill plan and review it with campers on their first day.

Food

The simplest approach to feeding kids at camp may be to ask families to pack bag lunches and snacks. However, your farm is a natural setting to cook with kids, and it's a logical place to encourage healthy eating habits. Think about simple, fresh snacks to prepare with the group.

[Connecting Classrooms, Cafeterias, and Communities:](#)

[A Guide to Building Integrated FTS Programs](#) by VT

FEED, has helpful tips for introducing new foods to kids. Shelburne Farms' *Cultivating Joy and Wonder* has full lessons for making pizza, bread, apple sauce, and more with kids. The lessons include learning objectives and material lists as well as enduring understandings and directions for each activity.

Be sure to make frequent handwashing part of the routine during food preparation and consumption. You should go over proper handwashing technique with your campers on the first day of camp.

It is imperative that you look into regulations around serving food at your farm. Your Department of Health or town sanitarian will have resources to help you navigate the restrictions and opportunities.

Recipe Resources

Websites

- [VT Food Education Every Day](#)
- [Life Lab](#)
- [Edible Schoolyard Network](#)

Books

- [Garden Gastronomy](#), City Blossoms
- [Pretend Soup](#), Mollie Katzen
- [Honest Pretzels](#), Mollie Katzen
- [Salad People](#), Mollie Katzen
- [Healthy Body Cookbook](#), Joan D'Amico
- [Grow It, Cook It](#), DK Publishing
- [Cultivating Joy and Wonder](#), Shelburne Farms

Marketing

When marketing your camp, you'll want to consider your "brand." Look at how other camps in the area are marketing themselves to gather ideas. Think about all the ways your camp is unique and choose some words that describe what you offer. (It may help to develop a "why" statement. For example, "The purpose of my camp is to _____, so that _____.") Gather testimonials from campers and families, and include them on your marketing materials.

Ask open-ended questions that give parents and campers the opportunity to respond freely. Listen and reflect on their answers. Don't merely seek affirmation of your efforts.

Remember parents may be signing up for multiple camps, so any way you can simplify your information and registration process will be appreciated. At the same time, you need to provide enough details so that camp families will know why they should register for your camp!

Word of mouth is the most important marketing method! Also consider advertising in the following places:

- Community bulletin boards
- Elementary school
- Town recreation department
- Libraries
- Community newspapers
- Churches
- Social media
- Community newsletters
- Parent blogs

Risk Management and Insurance

There are several ways to mitigate the inherent risks of having visitors on your farm. Talk openly with your insurer about them. Also, communicate clearly with camp families about roles, responsibilities, and concerns. Below are some questions you might ask families or include on a health form. (See sample health form on next page.)

Sample Emergency Health Form

Camp Name, Session, and Date: _____

Child Name: _____ Age: _____

Gender: _____ Date of Birth: _____

Parent/Guardian: _____

Local Address: _____ City, State Zip: _____

Home Phone: _____ Cell Phone: _____

HEALTH INFORMATION

Is your child's tetanus shot up to date? () YES () NO () Unknown

Is your child allergic to bee stings? () YES () NO () Unknown

I give consent for my child to receive the following as needed:

| | |
|---------------|----------------|
| Ibuprofen | () YES () NO |
| Acetaminophen | () YES () NO |
| Benadryl | () YES () NO |

If your child is currently taking **medication**, do you request and grant permission to administer it? () YES () NO () N/A

Please state medication(s), dosage and interval: _____

In the event that your child experiences an allergic reaction, do you grant permission to administer the **EPI-PEN** that you have provided? (This question is for children with allergies that will be bringing their own EPI-PEN.) () YES () NO () N/A

Please specify any **concerns or special needs** for your child. We would like to know how best to provide support, including how to relate with him/her, and what accommodations, if any, will be needed. Please attach special care plans and indicate if a staff member or other adult is needed to regularly assist your child during the program.

() Allergies () Dietary Restrictions () Physical Limitations () Behavioral Concerns () Aide Required () Other

Comments: _____

IN CASE OF AN EMERGENCY

Name of Child's Physician: _____ Physician's Phone: _____

Insurance Provider: _____ Account #: _____

Name of Primary Account Holder: _____

If a parent/guardian cannot be contacted in an emergency, please contact:

Emergency Contact Name: _____ Relationship: _____

Phone (during program hours): _____ Phone (alternate): _____

I hereby authorize any additional medical treatment deemed necessary in the event of emergency or injury:

PARENT/GUARDIAN SIGNATURE: _____ Date: _____

- Will kids show up with bug spray and sunscreen already applied?
- What will happen in the event of a cancellation?
- How will you handle disciplinary issues?
- What are the emergency contact numbers for each child at camp?
- What allergies do your children have?
- Have any of the children ever been stung by a bee?
- Are there other health considerations to be aware of?

To operate a summer camp, you should carry insurance for general liability, accidental medical coverage, property damage, workers compensation and business interruption. When choosing camp insurance, compare limits of liability (the maximum your insurance policy will pay if a liability loss occurs), deductibles, exclusions, and other policy terms. Policies that appear “discounted” may not include as much coverage as you should have.

Evaluation

At the end of camp, evaluate the camp from the perspective of campers, families, staff, and your own eyes. Ask questions that will prompt answers to inform how you run camp the next year. You may want to ask parents what they thought of the communications you sent out, registration process, signage, camp hours, before/after care, etc. Ask kids and parents about their

favorite activities and memories, and what they learned at camp. For parents, you may want to do this by email using a Google Form or Survey Monkey form. For kids, it's best to gather their feedback directly while they're at camp. Take time to tally up the hours you put in, and reflect on your success as a supervisor, host, educator, leader, and administrator. All of this information, along with the financials, should help you decide whether summer camp becomes a perennial offering on your farm.

While there are many things to consider when planning for summer camp, the amount of fun you'll have should not be overlooked. Exploring your farm, fields, and forest with kids allows you to see your property through a new lens and rediscover its magical places. Farm camp can also strengthen your connection with your community and diversify your farm business.

Your farm, family, and market are always changing, so make a plan for evaluating your camp regularly and adjust as needed. This flexibility will bring resilience to your business and is critical for helping your farm reach its overall goals.

Also in this series:

How To...

- Host Weddings on Your Farm
- Host Dinners on Your Farm
- Develop a Farm Stand
- Develop a Farm Stay
- Develop a Pick-Your-Own Business
- Develop a Tour on Your Farm

A Guide to Successful Agritourism Enterprises

Download at uvm.edu/vtagritourism



REFERENCES: Insurance information from Ian Garner, [Camp Insurance 101](#).

The information contained in this publication is deemed correct and accurate and is based on research at the time of writing. This publication is for educational purposes only and does not constitute legal advice or an interpretation of the law. It is recommended that you consult an attorney about specific legal concerns.

The original 2014 edition of this publication was made possible by support from the U.S. Small Business Administration and The Canaday Family Charitable Trust. It is also the result of tax-supported funding from USDA, Rural Development, and as such cannot be copyrighted. It may be reprinted with the customary crediting of the source. Each chapter was published as a result of a project of the Rutland Regional Planning Commission, Farm-Based Education Network and Vermont Farms! Association, coordinated by Vera Simon-Nobes. Reviewed by Lisa Chase, University of Vermont Extension; Dana Hudson, VT FEED; Misse Axelrod, The Barnyard Farm; Tai Dinnan, Charlotte Green Thumbs Camp. Design by Holly Brough, Shelburne Farms.

2019 funding provided by the Agriculture Marketing Resource Center (AgMRC), located at Iowa State University, www.agmrc.org. AgMRC is a national website dedicated to providing information to producers and service providers on value-added agriculture businesses.

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