



ALL ABOUT FOOD



FARM VISIT GUIDE

Revised 2008



ALL ABOUT FOOD



FARM VISIT GUIDE

If you ate today, thank a farmer and many other people ... mechanics, scientists, truck drivers, food processors, retailers and advertisers ... to mention just a few. The production of food involves much more than farming. It is a complex system which is connected with many other sectors of the economy.

This **Farm Visit Guide** accompanies *All About Food: Agri-Food Facts* and serves as a guide in planning out-of-classroom experiences allowing students to experience first-hand what they learned about farming and agriculture. The agri-food system touches everyone's life on a daily basis. This guide serves as a useful tool in helping students learn about the connection between them in their role as consumers and the farmer's role in the agri-food system.

Ontario Agri-Food Education Inc. and provincial/territorial Agriculture in the Classroom (AITC) organizations across Canada would like to thank **FARM CREDIT CANADA** for funding the development and reprint of the **All About Food Farm Visit Guide**.



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If you ate today,
thank a farmer
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Additional copies of **All About Food: Farm Visit Guide** can be obtained from the Agriculture in the Classroom organizations as noted above, or visit the national AITC website www.aitc.ca.

Egalement disponible en français.

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FARM VISIT GUIDE



A visit to a working farm is possibly the most effective way to teach students about agriculture. A first-hand experience provides students with the opportunity to talk directly to people who know about farming. At the same time, being immersed in an unfamiliar setting will leave a more lasting impression than classroom work.

Farm visits can help students develop the skills of an independent learner as they plan, question, observe, record and discuss what goes on at a farm. This resource should provide appropriate activities and information to help students get the most out of their out-of-classroom experiences. The following guidelines and ideas are intended to complement in-school programs for all levels (from Kindergarten to grade 12).



Goals for the trip

The focus of your visit and what you hope to accomplish through a field trip will greatly influence the outcome of your trip. Each farm field trip will have aims and objectives specific to the area of study, students' grade level, and the type of farm being visited.

Consider the needs of your students before planning a trip. What will they gain from the experience? What will you ask of them before or after the trip?

Although there is much to be learned on a farm, not everything can fit into one visit, nor is everything appropriate for all groups of students. Consider the following in order to gain a better idea of how trips can be focused:

- ✓ The history of the farm, the farm family, farming in the region, a specific type of farm
- ✓ The variety of non-food products that come from farming
- ✓ Environmental issues surrounding farms – pesticide use, biotechnology, sustainability, crop rotation
- ✓ Farming as a business: costs, marketing, finding a niche, specialization, bookkeeping
- ✓ The farm as an ecosystem: inputs, outputs, energy flow, and nutrient cycles
- ✓ How weather and changing seasons affect farm success
- ✓ The sensory richness of the farm environment, including sights, sounds, smells and textures
- ✓ The connection between farm activities and products and the food we eat
- ✓ How a farm/rural lifestyle is different from an urban lifestyle
- ✓ Multiculturalism and how markets are changing (what we sell, how we grow it)



Choosing a farm

After deciding on the focus of your trip, it will be easy to identify the type of farm you are looking for and what you require of that farm.

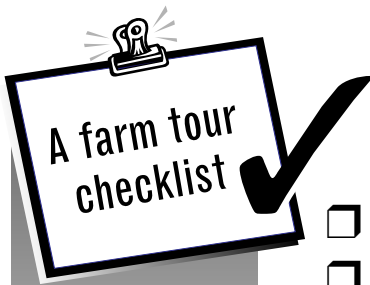
The easiest way to search for farms is on the internet through local directories. You can also contact your province's Agriculture in the Classroom office for some suggestions and recommendations (www.aitc.ca or check the contact list in the back of this resource).

Try to find a farm that matches your needs. Most modern working farms are specialized, and your students should be aware that they will not see the whole range of farming in one visit. For young children who are having their first experience on a farm, it may be appropriate to go to one of the hobby or day-camp farms that have a variety of animals. Although they do not accurately reflect modern agriculture, the range of animals and activities can help young children to learn more about farm animals and products. When studying a specific product, you should try to find a farm with that specialty. Dairy farms are interesting because of the range of activities and the many uses of technology. Intermediate or senior classes studying topics such as genetics, soil conservation, energy or ecology may benefit from visiting a farm that involves breeding stock or the development of certified seed.




Planning and arranging the trip

- ★ Trip arrangements must be made well in advance in order to accommodate all parties involved. Seasonal responsibilities may make it very difficult for a farmer to host a tour during busy periods on the farm. Similarly, many farms cannot handle large groups of students all at once, so you must ensure that the farm can host your group.
- ★ Parents and school administration also require fair warning of trips. Be sure to get approval for your field trip well ahead of time so that you can confirm dates with the farmer and so that you can send notice of the trip home to parents/guardians no less than two weeks ahead of time.
- ★ A phone call for planning a visit to the farm can establish the details of your field trip.
- ★ Confirm the reason for the trip and the expectations that you and the farmer might have. What background will the students be bringing with them? What can the farmer expect them to know and to be able to understand? Help the farmer prepare to relate to the students at an appropriate level. You can also provide suggestions for ways that actively involve students so that they are encouraged to use a variety of learning skills. Know the route that you will travel and any noteworthy sights along the way.
- ★ Determine where the bus can park and turn around. Also find any washroom facilities that students may use in an emergency. Try to avoid the necessity of a whole class needing to go into the farm home for this purpose. If you are having an extended trip, try to find a park that has washroom facilities. This might also provide a good location to stop for a picnic lunch. Sometimes you can make arrangements with a nearby school.
- ★ Be prepared to provide written assurance that the school board insurance covers the students while they are at the farm. In addition, the farmer should notify his/her agent of the trip. If an additional premium is required the school should offer to cover the cost.
- ★ Establish the role that parent volunteers might fulfil while you are at the farm. You may want to assign some teaching responsibilities to each volunteer; they will appreciate your guidance in knowing how they can interact with the students and enhance the learning experience.
- ★ Give the farmer a timeline or outline of how you have planned your day. Knowing exactly when you plan to do certain activities will help the farmer plan various parts of the tour to best suit your needs.



To ensure that your farm field trip is successful, make sure that:

- the information, lessons and activities on the trip have links to the curriculum
- all students have returned a permission form (and payment, if applicable) before the trip
- everyone is clear on the schedule, appropriate behaviour and farm safety
- you have all medical instructions and tools for those students with special needs
- you have confirmed the date, time and other information with the farm and the bus company
- students know what to wear to the farm and what to bring / what to leave at home
- students are equipped with writing utensils, paper and anything else they will need to complete activities and assignments
- you have effectively introduced material to students ahead of time so that they have an idea of what they will see and so that they can ask informed questions



Students who are not accustomed to the farm environment may not realize certain safety hazards. When planning your trip, you should work with the farmer to ensure that the farm area is as safe as possible. As a class (and ahead of time), you should establish and discuss a set of safety guidelines. Review this with the class the day before the field trip.

Consider the following for your list:

- | | |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Areas that are out of bounds <input type="checkbox"/> Touching or handling of animals <input type="checkbox"/> Slippery surfaces <input type="checkbox"/> Manure pits <input type="checkbox"/> Overhead obstructions <input type="checkbox"/> Tools/machinery – especially those in operation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Chemicals: fertilizers, pesticides, treated seeds and medicines <input type="checkbox"/> Safety of animals: no littering, no pins on name tags, no sudden movement or noises <input type="checkbox"/> Proximity to animals <input type="checkbox"/> Washing hands <input type="checkbox"/> Stairways <input type="checkbox"/> Fire hazards: absolutely no matches, cigarettes, lighters |
|---|---|



Pre-trip activities

As the date of your farm visit approaches, introduce your students to what they will be learning. A combination of activities such as the following will ensure that students have a meaningful, worthwhile experience.

- ★ Introduce your topic – what is it? Why do we need this product or service? How does it directly affect students?
- ★ Give background information on the subject, outlining its importance and developments through history.
- ★ Develop a topic-specific vocabulary list. You may want to refer to some terms in the glossary (page 6).
- ★ Collect and examine news articles about the subject you are studying (for example, students could read about BSE before visiting a beef farm).
- ★ Ask students what they expect the farm to be like, then review these expectations after the trip – were they right?
- ★ After researching the topic, have students make a list of questions for the farmer. They can bring these with them to be asked during discussion time at the farm.
- ★ Playing a trivia game or doing a fun worksheet like a crossword will help students remember facts about the subject. Make sure to make materials and lessons fun so that they have an active interest in visiting the farm.
- ★ Keep students interested by playing a game on the way to the farm. This could be something like a “Rural Bingo” where students have pre-made Bingo cards with items such as a tractor, silo, corn field, that they try to fill by observing their surroundings on the way to the farm.




At the farm

While at the farm, be sure not to lose your focus. Students should be looking for specific information in order to fulfill a requirement (an assignment, quiz, information for a project).

Some suggestions on keeping students engaged and focused:

- ★ Give each student a different piece of information to collect during the day. Do not assign these until just before the trip (i.e. on the bus) so that students cannot look on the internet or research the answer before arriving at the farm. You also might want to double check with the farmer to be sure that all the questions will be answered at some point during the day. This activity should keep students engaged and listening while they wait for their specific piece of information to come up.
- ★ Pre-arrange workstations with the farmer. Students can rotate through these stations in small groups; this allows for more hands-on experiences. Each group must be accompanied by a teacher or volunteer. Also, remember that it is not necessary for all students to be involved in the same activities. You could have some experiences common to all students while having others



At the farm

(continued)

that are spread out among the groups. This can enhance the value of sharing sessions back at school because students will then be teaching something new to their peers. Variation can also be achieved by having each group record information in a different way. One group could be working as radio interviewers using a tape recorder as they ask questions and collect farm sounds. Another group could prepare a newspaper report while taking notes and photographs. If possible, you could have a television crew with a video camera. With permission of the farmer you could have a group collecting real materials for use and display in the classroom. What textures or smells are they able to find? Containers such as plastic tubes, pill vials or film canisters can be helpful for this task.

- ★ Create a treasure hunt sheet for students. This could ask for the collection of information or of physical items. If you are asking for samples of soils, for example, you must be sure that all items are cleared with the farmer.




After the farm

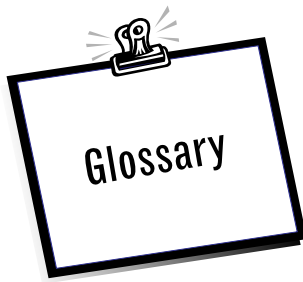
What students learn after their farm visit is equally as important as what they learned beforehand. Ask students what they thought was most interesting about the farm. Make charts, diagrams and presentations based on the trip. Also ask students what they did not learn but wish they had. These questions could form the basis of a research assignment.

Sharing information is important. This can be done as a class, in small groups, or through a collaborative project like a class newspaper where each student contributes an article related to the farm trip or topic covered during the visit.

Make connections with students. Do they realize how important agriculture is in Canada? How dependent are we on the industry? Put things into perspective: everyone eats, needs medicine and uses other products from animals and agriculture. Make the link from students as consumers to farmers as producers.

In addition to following up with student lessons, it is important to follow up on the trip with the farmer by sending a thank-you. Including some comments or work from the students will give the visit purpose, prove that the trip was worthwhile and recognize the farmer's efforts and time spent with the class.

Finally, evaluate the trip for your personal records. Would you do it again next year? What would you do differently? Keep this record for future reference so that you can improve your out-of-classroom experiences.



Antibiotics: A class of drugs usually produced by living organisms (molds, bacteria or green plants) which can inhibit or kill undesirable bacteria. Example: penicillin.

Barn: Place where animals, feed and/or machinery may be housed.

Biotechnology: The interaction of biology with human technology. The means or way of manipulating organisms on a molecular level.

Breed: (1) Variety of animals within a species. (2) To produce offspring.

By-Product: Feeds produced as a result of industrial manufacturing, plant or animal processing. Examples: distillers grains, beet pulp, meat and bone meal, fish meal.

Chaff: Husks or other seed coverings and other plant parts separated from seed during harvest or processing.

Crop Rotation: Growing different crops, in recurring succession, on the same land each year. Rotation usually is done to replenish soil fertility and to reduce pest populations in order to maintain production levels in future years.

Feed Additives: Products added to basic feed mixes to improve the rate and/or efficiency of gain, prevent certain diseases or preserve feeds.

Food-Borne Illness: The sickness resulting from eating food contaminated with either bacterial toxins or by certain bacteria in the food, often resulting in vomiting and/or diarrhea.

Grain: Any of the common cereal seeds. Examples: oats, barley, wheat.

Minerals: Inorganic feed elements essential for life.

Nutrients: Feed components required for the maintenance, production and health of animals (water, carbohydrates, lipids, proteins, minerals and vitamins).

Palatability: The appeal and acceptability of feed. Affected by the taste, odour, texture and temperature of the feed.

Pasteurize: The controlled heating of a food to a very high temperature for a very short time period in order to destroy all harmful bacteria.

Protein: Naturally-occurring compounds containing nitrogen, carbon, hydrogen and oxygen, and sometimes sulphur or phosphorus. Proteins are made up of complex combinations of amino acids and are essential for animal growth, production and reproduction.

Roughage: A term used to describe a feed high in fibre (greater than 18% crude fibre). Roughage tends to be bulky, coarse and low in energy. Examples: hay, silage, straw.

Silage: Feed preserved by an anaerobic (no oxygen) fermentation process. Examples: corn silage, haylage, high moisture corn.

Silo: Structure used to store forage. Stores it in a manner that prevents spoilage over long periods of time.

Sterilization: The process of eliminating all viable life forms; nothing is left living in a sterilized product.

Vitamins: Organic compounds that function as parts of enzyme systems essential for many metabolic functions.

Field Crops

Demonstrate an old-style grinder and let the students take turns grinding wheat. Sift the flour. Examine, feel, and describe the bran that remains in the sifter. Identify a variety of crops (wheat, corn, soybeans, canola, flax, etc.). Describe where crops are grown and how they are processed. Examine and classify a variety of seeds. Compare different types of bread.



QUESTIONS TO GUIDE THE STUDENTS

Q How does the farmer plan what he is going to grow each year?

A The farmer takes into account the market prices, his crop rotation needs, and the probable weather at the time of seeding.

Q What is the purpose of crop rotation?

A Crop rotation involves the planting of a different crop each year on a particular field. Crop rotation helps prevent the buildup of a particular disease in the soil and straw residues in the field. It helps prevent the infestation of insects in a field. Different crops use different soil nutrients, so rotating crops helps manage soil fertility.

Q What is zero till?

A Zero till is the practice of using specialized zero-till equipment to seed a crop directly into the stubble of the previous year's crop without tilling the land. The advantage of zero till is that both the soil and moisture are conserved by the avoidance of turning the soil. In some cases better weed control is also achieved.

Q What does the farmer spray his fields with, and why? Are there alternatives to spraying the crops?

A Farmers spray fields with a variety of herbicides, fungicides, and pesticides according to the need of the crop at the particular time. Most farmers today will determine whether or not they will gain economically in terms of improving crop yield by applying the chemical, looking at "economic thresholds". Insect, weed, disease, and pest control is also managed with tillage, crop rotation, resistant varieties, and the management of seeding dates.

Q What crops are most profitable?

A The profitability of a crop depends on many things: the supply of the crop that year, which affects price, the costs of inputs, world demand, supply, and the performance of the crop that year.

Q What costs are involved in producing a crop? What is the cost of farm machinery?

A Costs incurred by the farmer in growing a crop include: land rent or mortgage, seed, oil and fuel for the field operations, equipment, machinery repairs, fertilizer, pesticides, labour (usually supplied by the farmer), storage, depreciation, and interest. The cost of farm machinery varies greatly depending on the type of machinery. A new combine, for example can cost more than \$100,000.

Q Why do farmers need assistance from the government from time to time?

A The risks of weather (hail, flooding, drought, wind) make disaster assistance crucial to the viability of the industry, which depends on credit and regular payments to banks and suppliers. Food production is seen as an important part of national security and national economic well being, and family farms a crucial national value to protect.

Q How long does it take for crops to mature?

A It varies from crop to crop, thus when weather forces farmers to seed late they choose varieties which mature the fastest.

Q What is a winter crop? A spring crop?

A A winter crop is planted in late August or early September. The crop begins to grow before the winter freeze, developing the root system. In the spring, the established plants will grow very quickly and the crop will be ready to harvest in July. Typical winter crops are rye and winter wheat. Spring crops are sown May-June, and harvested August-September.

Dairy Farm

While visiting a dairy farm, students should look for each step of the milking process. This includes the milking machine, the pipeline system and holding tanks. They should also be aware of other equipment, for example a machine that measures the temperature of milk. Students can gain a lot from simple experiences like feeling the vacuum of the milker on their fingers. Older students could calculate: how much milk per milking cow, what is each cow's volume of milk per day, how many glasses of milk is that?



QUESTIONS TO GUIDE THE STUDENTS

Q → When does a cow begin to give milk?

A → After she has a calf – at approximately 2 years. Until that time she is called a heifer.

Q → How often is a cow milked and how much milk does an average cow produce?

A → A cow is milked twice a day - usually every 12 hours and produces approximately 6,500 litres or the equivalent of 26,000 glasses in a year.

Q → Does a cow give milk all year round?

A → No, she has a rest or “dry” period for about two months before she gives birth to a calf.

Q → What illnesses might a cow be susceptible to?

A → A cow may get an udder infection called mastitis, foot rot, respiratory or digestive problems, to name a few.

Q → Who looks after sick cows, and how might they be treated?

A → The farmer and veterinarian work as a team to try to prevent sickness and treat it naturally or with medication as needed.

Q → How does the milk get from the cow to the carton?

A → The milking machine is a suction system which draws milk from the cow into a pipeline to a large bulk cooling tank. A tank truck comes to the farm every day or every other day and takes the milk to a processing plant or dairy to be packaged or made into one of many dairy products.

Q → What nutrients do cows need?

A → Cows need water, protein, carbohydrates, vitamins, and fats.

Q → What other jobs does a dairy farmer have to do besides milking the cows?

A → Feeding and caring for animals, preparing the soil and planting, caring for and harvesting crops, repairing machinery, and keeping records are a few of the jobs he/she has.

Q → What are the main breeds of dairy cows in your province?

A → Holstein, Ayrshire, Jersey, Guernsey, etc.



Beef Farm

Students can be provided the opportunity to observe and discover the uses for various tools in the cattle industry. Students can also classify beef by-products as to what they are used for, what part of the animal they come from, etc. Emphasize the fact that almost every part of the cow is used for something. Students should look for different methods of identification – for example, what does the ear tag tell a farmer?



QUESTIONS TO GUIDE THE STUDENTS

Q Why don't beef cows give milk?

A They do, but only enough to feed their own calves. Beef farmers select animals that convert more feed into muscle than into milk.

Q How do beef cattle differ from the dairy cattle?

A Beef cattle have shorter bodies and shorter legs. They have thicker necks and appear fatter because they have more muscle covering their shoulders, ribs and rump. The muscle is the meat we eat.

Q Are both males and females raised for beef?

A Yes. Males are usually castrated when they are young and are then called steers. Young females are called heifers.

Q What are the main breeds of beef cattle in your province?

A Hereford, Angus, Shorthorn, Charolais, Simmental, etc.

Q What is a cow-calf operation?

A Some farmers keep a herd of cows for the purpose of giving birth to calves. The calves are nursed by their mothers, usually in a pasture field, for seven to nine months. They are then weaned and sold to a feedlot operator who feeds them until they are ready for market. The cows are bred to produce a new crop of calves the next spring.

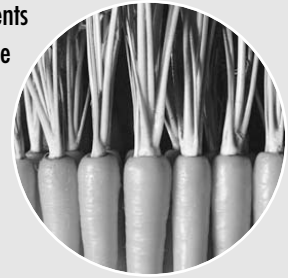
Q What happens to a beef animal when it leaves the farm?

A It is taken to a sale barn or stock-yard where it is sold by auction to a slaughter house or meat packing plant. After the animal is slaughtered the carcass is cut in half and the two "sides" are hung in the cooler. The sides are cut into roasts, steaks, or ground into hamburger and packaged for sale to the consumer. The hide and many of the other parts are used to make by-products.



Fruit/Vegetable Farms

Explain the various products obtained from fruits and/or vegetables. Display some of these for the students to see or taste. Show the students, on a large map, areas where an abundance of fruit is grown. Have the students name fruits and vegetables that are abundant in your area. At a fruit or vegetable operation, observe varieties of one type of plant. There are many different types of tomatoes, peppers and apples but these are all classified under broad names. Also point out the differences between fruits and vegetables and sort them into categories based on the part eaten, for example, root, leaves, flower, fruit.



Q → **What is a market garden?**

A → A market garden is a farm where vegetables are grown to be sold fresh to the consumer at a roadside stand, farmers' market, or nearby grocery store.

Q → **Some farmers don't sell directly to the consumer. What happens to their fruits and vegetables?**

A → Their vegetables and fruits are sold to processing plants to be canned, frozen, dried, pickled, or made into products such as soup, jam, or ketchup.

Q → **Why would a farmer decide to grow vegetables?**

A → Some areas of the province have the right soil and a proper climate for growing vegetables. It also helps if they are located near a large population of consumers.

Q → **What kinds of vegetables are grown in your province?**

A → Some of the more common are carrots, onions, potatoes, tomatoes, peas, and beans. Some of the less common are artichokes, zucchini, vegetable marrow, parsnips, and shallots. Many new types are grown now because people from other countries bring new ideas about good things to eat.

Q → **How are vegetables harvested?**

A → Farmers often hire students and migrant workers to pick vegetables. Mechanical harvesters are used for some types of vegetables. Some tomatoes have been specially bred to withstand being handled by mechanical pickers.



Greenhouse/Horticulture

In a greenhouse, students should be looking for different methods of farming. How are greenhouse-grown vegetables different from those grown as a crop outside? What are the advantages and disadvantages of a greenhouse? Students should observe the types of plants grown in a greenhouse and could analyze reasons why some plants are not often grown indoors while others thrive there.



QUESTIONS TO GUIDE THE STUDENTS

Q → What serves as soil for the crop in the greenhouse?

A → Flowers for cutting may be grown in natural soil under the glass. Potted plants are usually grown in soilless mixture based on peat moss. Tomatoes may be grown in slabs of rock wool — looking very much like fiberglass insulation.

Q → How are the plants reproduced?

A → Plants may be reproduced by seeds (tomatoes, petunias), by cuttings (poinsettias, chrysanthemums), or by bulbs (lilies, tulips).

Q → What features of a greenhouse help conserve energy?

A → Solar blankets, automatic vents and fans, and computer controlled lights and heaters are a few possibilities.

Q → How are the products marketed?

A → Cut flowers often go to wholesalers or retailers to be sold. Potted plants may be sold to wholesalers or directly to retailers such as supermarkets and garden centres.



Q → What pests affect the crop and how are they controlled?

A → Common pests include aphids, thrips, whiteflies, mealybugs, mildew, and bacterial and viral diseases. They may be controlled by careful sanitation and chemical sprays. Whenever possible they are controlled by introducing predators or parasites that feed on the pests.

Q → Are there seasons in the greenhouse industry?

A → Seasons are mostly dictated by the market. Some plants such as poinsettias, roses, lilies and chrysanthemums are most valued if they are available to coincide with a particular holiday.

Q → How are the plants fed?

A → Fertilizer is dissolved in the water given to the plants. Carbon dioxide may be added to the air to improve growth.

Q → What is special about the crops grown in this greenhouse?

A → Each crop has its own characteristics and needs. Some are pinched, pruned, or disbudded. Many require specific temperature or humidity. Special techniques are used to encourage flowering or fruiting. Each crop has its own requirements for harvesting, handling, picking, and shipping.

For More Information.....

Agricultural Universities and Colleges in each province are reliable and plentiful sources of information.

AGCare - www.agcare.org

Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada - www.agr.gc.ca

Agriculture in the Classroom - www.aitc.ca

Canadian Federation of Agriculture - www.cfa-fca.ca

Ontario Farm Animal Council: Virtual Farm Tours - www.ofac.org

Agri-Web Canada - www.agr.ca/agriweb

Canadian Agriculture at a Glance - Classroom Lessons - www.statcan.ca/english/kits/agric04/lesson.htm

Growing Canada - www.growingcanada.ca

Interested in locating a farm visit with your students? Contact your provincial Agriculture in the Classroom organization for help and suggestions. Visit www.aitc.ca for provincial contacts and websites.

www.ontariofarmfresh.com

www.farmvisit.com



Farming is more than food

Some of the many non-food products that come from Canadian farms...

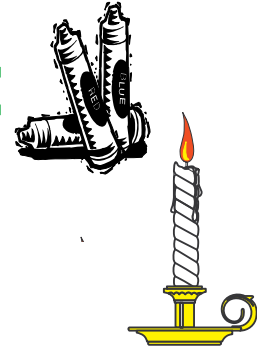
CORN

- bicycle tires
- toothpaste
- degradable plastic
- disposable diapers
- road de-icer
- wallpaper
- ethanol fuel



CATTLE

- makeup
- film
- crayons
- candles
- car polish
- medicines
- leather
- sports equipment



SOYBEANS

- solvents
- paint
- wood glue
- cattle feed
- printer's ink
- diesel fuel



HOGS

- fabric dyes
- footballs
- makeup brushes



SHEEP

- wool clothing
- soap
- baseballs
- shaving cream
- sutures (stitches)



CANOLA

- suntan oil
- oiled fabrics
- makeup





See how much fun agriculture can be?

Thanks for taking time to learn about Canada's agriculture industry.

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