

93a.) Sharing Your Farm is an article about “Hosting Farm Tours”.

The article below was written for the September 2013 “Soil Sisters Tour the Farms Day” in Green County, Wisconsin. Sugar Maple Emu Farm was one of the “Farm Tour” participants.

Sharing Your Farm: Six Ideas from Women Farmers for Hosting Farm Tours

Some of the highlights that are covered are:

1.) Know Your Objectives

2.) Prepare Guests

3.) Set Your Rules

4.) Set The Stage

5.) Share yourself

6.) Collaborate

Sharing Your Farm:

Six Ideas from Women Farmers for Hosting Farm Tours 2013

Summer ushers in farm tour season - those months when everything is in full, abundant bloom and it's the perfect time to open *your* doors and celebrate your farm with the public. Granted, it's also that crazy- busy time of' year when your farm to do list is long. By thoroughly thinking through your vision and planning ahead, your farm tour day will go much more smoothly and be more fun for all.

Last August, a group of area Wisconsin women farmer friends and I organized a local public farm tour that showcased seven women-owned operations committed to sustainable and organic agriculture. We called the event "Soil Sisters: South Central Wisconsin Women in Sustainable Agriculture Farm Tour Day," and applied for, and received, a Youth Educator Grant through the USDA's Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program.

Several hundred people made a day of wandering the Wisconsin back roads and checking out this diversity of farms - which, because we're in a pretty conventional agriculture area, prompted comments like, "I didn't know we had so many women farmers growing so many different things around here.

Building off last year, our local group decided to host a repeat Soil Sisters tour this year: Sunday, Sept. 8, 2013. A warm welcome to come join us for the day here in Wisconsin!
More information and maps available at: www.soilsisterswi.org .

If you're already planning *or* thinking about hosting a farm tour yourself, here are some compiled tips and ideas from our Soil Sisters hosts to help get you on your way!

1. Know Your Objectives

Before you invest time in planning the logistics of your farm tour day, step back and think big picture on why you are doing it. What are your goals? Why do you want people to come to your place, and what do you want them to take away? This is an important, often overlooked first step that can then help direct and focus the rest of your plans.

For our soil sisters tour last year, thanks to the SARE Youth Educator grant, our primary focus was on youth education and connecting young people to the principles behind sustainable agriculture. Each farm then organized a different free activity for kids to learn about their farming philosophy. Grassroots Farm (www.grassrootsf-armllc.com) for example, facilitated a "Build A Bouquet" activity (an agriculture twist on the "Build a Bear" idea), where kids wandered down the garden rows picking flowers while farmers Gail and Lindsey Carpenter, a mother-daughter team, shared what a certified organic farm is all about. Dela Ends of Scotch Hill Farm (www.scotchhillfarm.com) grew "bean teepees", beans trellised to poles forming a teepee, creating fun areas for kids to crawl into and experience the garden.

Remember, it's OK to have multiple goals and for one of them to be generating income. While income may come from future CSA memberships from people who visit, take advantage of opportunities for on farm sales by setting up a farm stand with easy-to-read pricing. Is managing sales too much to handle on a busy farm tour day? That happened to me until I "outsourced" the farm stand to our son, Liam, now 11 years old. My husband, John, and I still harvest and set it up, but he manages sales and gets a profit split - good entrepreneurial motivator for Liam, especially

since no one can say no to a kid selling tomatoes!

2. Prepare Guests

How ever you communicate your tour specifics, from your website to a Facebook event, help your guests maximize their farm tour experience by coming prepared.

"It may seem obvious, but it's important to remind folks that they will be visiting a working farm and that they must wear sturdy footwear, as sandals and Flip Flops are not practical," advises Gail Carpenter of Grassroots Farm. "Also, remind folks to bring sunscreen, insect repellent and a hat for sun protection." Let folks know what items you'll have for sale, and to bring a cooler and cash if you don't take credit cards.

3. Set Your Rules

Remember: it's your farm, your rules. It's your right to set policies and procedures for your farm tour day to ensure everyone is kept safe. Just make sure to clearly communicate everything to guests, both beforehand and on-site as they arrive.

Another member of our Soil Sisters group, Joylene Reavis of Sugar Maple Emu Farm (www.sugarmapleemu.com) gives guided tours on the hour and half hour throughout the tour day, so everyone has a safe and facilitated farm experience. "We do not allow people to wander around the farm without a guide, and we also pen our livestock guardian dogs for these events so they do not overwhelm visitors, especially little kids", Reavis adds.

Visiting dogs can be an issue. Consider a "no dogs" policy for your tour. "Many times in our first couple of years of farm tours, we experienced people who were not savvy about farms and who brought city dogs with no experience in a setting with other animals," recalls Carpenter. "People would even unleash their dogs, which is always a recipe for disaster." Whatever your dog policy, make sure it is communicated to your visitors.

4. Set the Stage

Create a feeling of welcome as people approach your farm. For our Soil Sisters tour, each host farm created a colorful display of farm boots and balloons at the edge of their driveway. This simple display clearly and creatively communicated to visitors they were at the right place.

Set up clear signage for parking logistics, as well as, a "welcome table" as folks arrive. You can collect attendee information via a sign-in sheet and provide information on your tour schedule and activities.

5. Share Yourself

Add your personality to the day by sharing your interests and expertise.

We created recipe cards with farm host favorite recipes that folks could take home, ideally along with some purchased produce or meat to make the recipe. Kriss Marion of Circle M Farm (www.circlcmfarm.com), is a fantastic fiber expert, and set up various hands-on activity stations where attendees could try things like wool felting and spinning.

6. Collaborate

Don't feel like you have to do it all yourself! Open public farm tours are one of those "all hands-on

deck" and the "more the merrier" type of days; recruiting some volunteers outside of *your* own family will really help. Reavis has tours down to a science: She knows she needs three to four people to run a tour, with one person giving the tour, one *or* two selling products, and one handing out samples. Some of our Soil Sisters hosts tapped into their CSA membership *for* potential volunteers, as well as, local 4-H youth to help host the welcome table and kid's activities.

With every tour and each person we physically connect to our land and growing philosophies, we plant seeds for food system change. Above all, have fun and enjoy the day. We look forward to seeing some of you for our Soil Sisters tour September 8!

Soil Sisters: South Central Wisconsin Women in Sustainable Agriculture Farm Tour

Sunday, September 8, 2013

11am-4 pm

Visit an inspiring cross-section of women farmers in south central Wisconsin committed to a healthy, fresh future for our children. From eggplants to emus, sheep to solar energy, bed & breakfasts to beef - these seven farms on these family friendly tours offer a unique diversity of farm experiences, showcasing the summer's bounty in one fun-packed afternoon. Free and open to the public. Organized by the MOSES Rural Women's Project.

New for 2013: Some farms will be hosting workshop intensives the day prior, Sat. Sept. 7. Please see the website for more information, directions and farm details: www.SoilSisterswi.org .