

## FARM EVENTS – HOW THEY DID IT

### Farm Tours

**Sugar Maple Emu Farm**, Mike & Joylene Reavis, Brodhead, Wisconsin, hosted an annual “Tour the Farms” Open House that was always held the Saturday before Mother’s Day. This, by design, happens to fall during one of the weekends of National Emu Week (N.E.W.). Their farm had been a part of the local Chamber of Commerce “Tour the Farms Day” for over 9 years with very good results. Visitor numbers to their farm on this day would average from 200-600 each year.



### Here is how they presented their tours.

They would spend most of April transforming two stalls of their three-stall garage into an on-farm store. For wall partitions they used silver tarps with plastic lattice panels placed every so often. These tarps hid the other parts of the garage and the bare studs on the walls. The tarps and panels were hung using plastic wire tie straps looped over drywall screws drilled into the side of the rafters. Two glass display cases held the decorated egg shells along with other emu related items and doubled as counters. Posters and pictures collected over the years decorated the walls. Several wooden shelves displayed the emu oil products. Tables displayed smaller posters, magazine articles and related information plus an additional table for signing the guest book and giving meat samples.

To start the farm tour they would show a 15 minute video about emus. A portion of this video was filmed on their farm by college students from Northwestern Illinois University working on a Media Class project. The video is very entertaining and explains a lot about emus and the emu industry. They set-up chairs and benches for video viewing in one end of their garage, which is turned into a “store” for the summer. This video is followed by a guided tour to the emu pens showing visitors the different size emus, all the time telling them about the birds and pens that they are seeing and answering lots of questions.

They tried to make the tour entertaining with lots of “fun facts” about their emus, like these:

- “We have a pair of emus that came to our farm with only numbered tags and no names. We refer to this pair as the “Doe’s”, John and Jane.”
- “We also have a male who came from Oklahoma that we named “Okie”. His mate is Annie, which makes her ‘Annie Okie’”.
- “Fred has been successfully paired with several different females over the years. He firmly believes that if you can’t be with the one you love, love the one you’re with.”

Visitors are reminded that they do name their breeders because they interact with these emus several times each day and they will probably be around for quite a few years. They NEVER name their process birds because every farmer knows that you never name something that you may someday have to eat. Farmers know that is what they are raised for. After the tour, visitors were invited to visit their “emu store” to look around.

They have lots of posters and information placed around the store and all products are displayed on shelves with prices. Decorated emu egg shells and jewelry are displayed in glass display cases. Some years they had week old chicks on display in a large dog cage with tarps on 3 sides and a heat lamp. Other years, they opted not to display the chicks, since it was rather traumatic for the chicks to be in strange surroundings. When emu chicks were displayed, the cage was placed on a card table and they always placed a long banquet table in front of it so that people could not touch the cage.

With three to four people acting as hosts for the day, they could comfortably handle 35 people per pen tour that was scheduled for every half hour (they could, and often times did, increase the size of the pen tour if they absolutely had to). They usually had 1 person giving 20-minute tours, 1 or 2 people selling products and 1 or 2 others handing out samples, answering questions and controlling the video.

In order to keep things moving smoothly, **they started their tours with a video on the hour and again on the half hour.** They did this all day long from 9:30 AM until 4:30 PM. After the video, either Joy, her husband Mike, or their granddaughter, Emily, would act as the tour guide for that tour. They would take each group to visit the livestock guardian dogs, which were penned up for the day, and then they visited the process emus followed by the breeder pens. While they were gone, the next group was in the store watching the video. Hosts in the store answered questions and sold products during this time. By the time the next group had finished the video, tried a drop of emu oil and tasted some emu meat, the tour guide was back for the next group. This continued throughout the day until 4:30 PM.

They did NOT allow people to wander around their farm without a “guide” and they did pen their rather large “Livestock Guardian” dogs (1 Akbash & 1 Maremma) for this event so they did not overwhelm or traumatize visitors, especially little children.

They had heated emu brat pieces on toothpicks to taste, with Ritz Crackers offered to “clear the pallet”. They would make emu BBQ served on a quarter of a slice of white bread. The meats were

kept warm in crock pots. These Open House events are the only time during the year that they would give taste tests of their emu meat. Their “helpers”, who happened to be local emu growers, were at the first table as you walk in the door to hand out the meat samples, remind visitors to sign the guest book and answer questions. They provided a Guest Book that they encouraged visitors to sign with their name, town and that day’s date. This gave an idea of how many people had visited and how far they have traveled.

Besides their short driveway, which was used for handicapped parking, they had a ½-acre grass field near to the garage that was used for parking. They had plenty of signs directing people to the parking area and to the off-road walking path that led them to the on-farm store, where the tours started.

Those inquiring about the “Farm Tours by Appointment”, “National Emu Week Open House”, “Tour the Farms Day”, “Soil Sisters Farm Tours” or the “Fall Harvest Trail Farm Tours”, were encouraged to go to their website, [www.SugarMapleEmu.com](http://www.SugarMapleEmu.com), clicking on EVENTS, then clicking on a link.

Pictures of their Open House can be found at the beginning of this article and on their website “NEWS” page along with other articles.

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#### **4 D Acres Everything Emu, Mike & Dee Martin, Louisburg, Kansas, do it somewhat different:**

They set up a store in the front of their barn, where they sell emu oil, emu oil products, and meat – everything from the emu, as well as, their free-range chickens. In a pen right next to this barn is Barney, their pet, where visitors, especially children, can pet him if he chooses to come over to the fence. Dee is in front of his pen to answer questions and explain as to why they chose to raise the emu. She covers all the basic facts about their diet, pen size, breeding and hatching operation and answers any question.

Mike is stationed in the barn to make the sales and to explain the emu oil and the other products. He also hand out an emu sticker or a 4 D coloring book to all the children – and they also give out an emu stick pin (lapel pin). It is 200 ft. from the back of their house to the front of the barn where the people can park and then head in on gravel. Thus, they can accommodate 22 cars at a time.

They only have the hours open 9 am – 4 pm that Saturday and 10 am – 4 pm on Sunday. People are free to come and go as they please, spend as much time with us as they like and even eat a lunch, if they brought one, at two picnic tables. They have the driveway and parking area set up with metal electric fence posts and international orange flagging tape. They do not let people cross that tape or wander anywhere else on the farm.

This year there are 14 farms scattered around their county featuring several wineries, beef, goats, alpacas, pigs, etc., with each stop having an educational component. In addition to Barney we also have baby chicks on display in a pen in the barn – this is behind a glass door so they can see but not touch. For our 10th anniversary of the “Scenic Miami County Farm Tour”, we all tried something different – one of the high schools came out and filmed each stop and then they made some short video coupled to a QR code so it could help answer some of the questions. These were posted to the

county tour site, [www.miamicountyks.org/484/Spring-Farm-Tour](http://www.miamicountyks.org/484/Spring-Farm-Tour) . Each year something a little different is planned.

This event takes place in early May. They also do private tours for groups, such as, a charter bus of about 50 people, who will spend about 60 – 75 minutes with them.

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