

Module 6 – Funding and business models

One of the key challenges to overcome when delivering a farm visit for schools is funding. This can include paying for transport, staff cover in school and the farm visit itself. This module explores the range of considerations that need to be taken into account and some ideas on how these funding needs can be met.



What are the goals of this module?

Unit 1. Why do farm visits cost money?

Get familiar with the background cost implications of a bio farm visit with pupils and young people - for farmers as well as for teachers.

Unit 2. How much will my visit cost?

Identify which different aspects of the farm visit will cost money, both in terms of the visit itself and transport to and from the farm.

Unit 3. How do I pay for my visit?

Exploring the various funding streams that may be available, together with options for saving costs and raising money to pay for your visit.

After finishing this module I will have learnt....

1. to understand the factors involved in undertaking a farm visit which will have cost implications for both farms and schools.
2. to identify how much a biofarm visit may cost, including:
 1. transport to the farm,
 2. the cost of the farm visit.
3. to explore different options for funding the visit.

Unit 1 – Why do farm visits cost money?

In this unit I will learn how to:

1. understand from the perspective of the farmer why an educational farm visit might cost money.
2. understand from the perspective of the school why an educational farm visit might cost money.

Introduction to the topic:

When setting up visits, many farms and / or schools report that a lack of sufficient financial resourcing is one of the main barriers to maintaining and extending farm learning opportunities. In a previous EU funded project, two thirds of the nine farms that completed case studies raised the issue of visit costs as a barrier to successful farm visits. Since there are so

many different options to visit a farm and since, for example, transport to the farm can be very expensive, it can hard to state what a visit may cost – A three of four day residential on a school farm will invariably cost a lot more than a half day visit.



Chapter 1 – Farmers: understanding the costs of hosting a visit

In order for a farm to host a visit, there are invariably associated costs that will impact the business. The impact of the financial costs that are associated with the school visits can often be challenging to a farm, as whilst they do not want to ask for too much money from a school, it is important that farms are able to make the businesses sustainable.

Opening your farm for school visits, even as a one-off event, will have cost implications for the business. If you add up the value of your labour in leading the visit and covering the farm work you would have been doing; the cost of marketing materials; investing in facilities for your visitors, you may be surprised at the money involved. However, with prior planning it should be possible to recoup or lower these costs.

If you are only opening your farm as a one-off event, you may well feel that you can justify subsidising the day yourself to some extent, especially if you expect to increase your own sales of produce as a result. If, on the other hand, you would like to make school visits an integral part of your organic farming business, you will need to take a much harder look at the financial side of things, possibly as part of an overall package of diversification options on your farm.

If financing is a serious concern, you will need to research the possibilities of accessing funding or whether you will be able to cover costs by charging visitors?



Chapter 1 – Farmers: understanding the costs of hosting a visit

Questions to ask yourself as a farm opening for visits

These questions are not meant to discourage farms from offering educational activities, but if you are going to spend any time and money developing your education offer, it is worth researching interest in your local area, as well as the current destinations for school trips and other potential target groups.

- What is your motivation? I want to teach children, where foodstuff comes from; I want to show my work and my workplace to children; I want new income opportunities; I want to strengthen customer loyalty with programs for children.
- Think about who it is that you are aiming your activities at; is there a demand for what you are offering?
- What are your potential target groups, will they be willing to cover the cost of a visit? Some schools in affluent areas may be more prepared to pay than in disadvantaged areas.
- Research the market, find out who the competition is and what they are charging?



Chapter 1 – Farmers: understanding the costs of hosting a visit

What resources do I have to offer?

It is important to identify what resources you may require in order to start hosting educational visits. Once you've created a list of required resources, start to look at what you already have in place and what you will need to develop. This will help you as part of your costing exercise. Some of the things you may consider are listed below:

- Do you have a classroom facility or covered area for use during wet weather or for lunches?
- Who will host the visits? Will it be yourself or will you employ educational staff?
- Do you have toilets on site? If so, how many? Large school groups will require more toilets.
- Do you have hand washing facilities on site? If so, how many? Large school groups will require more hand wash basins.
- Can you walk around the farm easily and safely or do you need to improve access, gates, fencing and even consider a trailer for transporting visitors?

Chapter 2 – Schools: understanding the costs of going on a farm visit

Getting children outdoors and letting them experience a real working farm will reconnect them with where food comes from, and will provide them with an enjoyable experience and lasting memories. Host farms will be more than happy to talk about how a working farm functions and the different aspects of food production. By building good links with your local farm, schools are able to set up a regular programme of visits throughout the year and learn about the natural cycles from planting right through to harvesting. But, in order for a school to visit a farm, there are invariably associated costs that will need to be considered. The impact of the financial costs that are associated with the visits can often be challenging to a school, as they may have a limited visit budget and may not wish to ask for too much money /be unable to ask for money from parents.

Chapter 2 – Schools: understanding the costs of going on a farm visit

Will the visit benefits outweigh the cost implications?

Due to the costs involved from the school's perspective, it is important to consider whether a visit to a biofarm fits your learning requirements. It may also be that you will need to justify your plans to colleagues and / or senior management before you start to spend money on organizing the visit. A visit to a biofarm will have a range of benefits to pupils, teachers and / or parents. A farm visit can:

- provide a stimulating and versatile outdoor classroom
- support the curriculum with engaging activities before, during and after a visit
- contribute to developing children's social and personal skills
- create interest and motivation that can be carried back to classroom activities
- help children understand where their food comes from
- teach children in a direct, hands-on way about many important topics include nutrition, animal welfare, sustainability and conservation
- allow for physical exercise
- increase children's appreciation and understanding of the natural environment
- give children first-hand experience of farming and the countryside
- show children the importance of good husbandry
- introduce children to some of the issues around agriculture and rural affairs
- raise awareness of careers available in the countryside
- provide an opportunity for children to meet people from different backgrounds
- allow children to understand risk and how to manage it
- provide teachers with an opportunity for professional development by gaining farming and countryside knowledge, and experience of outdoor education

Chapter 2 – Schools: understanding the costs of going on a farm visit

What are the cost implications of visiting a biofarm?

In order for your school to visit a local biofarm, there will be a number of cost implications for the host farm, as well as the school. Some farms may choose not to charge for the visit, whilst others will need to recoup some of their business outgoings by charging a fee. Costs to the farm may vary - If you add up the financial cost of the farmer's time in leading the visit, as well as covering the farm work they would have been doing; the cost of marketing materials and investing in facilities for visitors, you can see how hosting a visit can have implications on a farm's budget.

As well as costs for the farm that are often passed on to the visiting groups, It is important to identify what outgoings you may have as a school. Once you've created a list of visit requirements, start to look at what you already have in place

and what you may need to buy in. Some of the things you may consider are listed below:

- Will those staff that are on the visit need teaching cover back in school? Are there enough staff to cover this, or will you need a supply teacher?
- Have you arranged transport to the farm? If so, how much will this cost?
- How many children are you taking on the visit? Some farms charge a flat fee, whilst others may charge per child.
- Do you need to purchase any equipment to facilitate the visit (spare boots for disadvantaged pupils, equipment for conducting on-farm experiments or activities)?
- Do your insurance cover visits to farms or do you need an additional policy?

Unit 2 – How much will my visit cost?

In this unit I will learn how to:

1. Find out about farm visit costs
2. Find out about transport costs

Introduction to the topic:

The associated costs for schools coming to visit a farm can often be a barrier. These costs are usually split into two categories – charges by the farm for hosting the visit and the cost of transportation to and from the farm. Whilst the costs are real and can add up, it is worth remembering that a good visit is worth spending money on for the benefits to the pupils. It is also possible to find ways of saving money through careful planning, or to raise money to pay for the visit.

Chapter 1 – Farm visit costs

Visit costs will usually be one of the first conversations that a school has with a farm when they are planning their visit. Some farms, especially those that specialize in educational visits, may choose to post their visit costs on their marketing materials. Less established and smaller visit set ups may not have marketing materials, so schools will need to discuss costs on the telephone or in person as part of the farm pre-visit.

Free visits

Some farms may not charge a school to come and visit them. This may be because the farmer has decided that their overheads are not that high and they don't need to charge for a visit. Other farms like to offer visits for free because they feel it important that children understand where their food comes from. Other farms may be in receipt of government funding that means that they don't need to charge the visiting school. Another approach that some farms take is to offer a free guided farm walk, but to charge for any additional activities such as a cooking or planting seeds. It may be that you are confident in leading the farm visit yourself without the input of a farm guide, in which case you may be able to negotiate a free or cheaper visit.

Flat rate

Flat rate charges will vary from place to place. Charges will usually be for a day visit. The day will usually run between 10am and 2.30pm (allowing time for travel from and to school), with a lunch break of 30 to 45 minutes. This will vary between farms, so it's always good to ask what the charge includes. An average daily charge is usually between £100 and £150 for a school group. Some farms may charge less and occasionally, visits can be as high as £300.

Cost per pupil

Farms that charge for the school to visit can charge anywhere between £1 and £10 per child, depending on the location of the farm and content of the visit. Most farms would typically charge somewhere in the region of £3.50 per child, with a minimum amount of approximately £100. Residential visits will cost a lot more, depending on facilities, but can have a greater positive impact on the experience of the children attending.

Checklist:

- Identify suitable farms in your area for a visit.
- Look at websites / promotional materials to see if the charges are listed.
- If there is no website, call or email the farm.
- Ask the farm if they are part of any government funded schemes that allow for free visit. If so, ask the farm if they have capacity to offer you a free visit.
- If the farm does not receive any funding, ask how much the visit will cost.
- Find out what the visit cost includes. Does it include a farm walk and / or additional educational activities?

Chapter 2 – Transport

There are a range of transport options available to a school wishing to visit a local biofarm. Transport options and prices may vary from country to country, but there are general considerations that will apply to all when considering costs.

Walking to your local farm

Walking to a local farm is a great solution to potentially high transport costs. If your local farm is easily accessible and routes to the farm are safe, why not try walking? Some schools incorporate the walk into the day's activities, for example stopping to undertake art activities, observing land use in the area or even foraging for wild foods. You could even ask the farmer to meet you at the school so they can walk with you as well? It is a good idea to plan the route with the farmer and make stops along the way to undertake an activity or two to ensure pupils remain engaged.

Public transport

Some schools are in an excellent position to be able to use public transport to get to their link farms. This is great experience for small groups of pupils and provides an opportunity to develop essential life skills. If this is an option, it might be worth contacting your local transport company to see if they are able to offer discounts for travelling school groups.

Community Transport

You may have a charitable community transport organisation in your area that operate a minibus service for the local community. Typically, these organisations can provide access to transport for voluntary, community and school groups. They provide subsidised transport options for groups who couldn't otherwise afford to pay for private transport services.

Link up with your local secondary school or college

If you are a kindergarten or primary school, you may find that your local secondary school can help with transport by providing a minibus and driver as part of their community outreach work. Secondary schools and colleges will often own a few minibuses, so it's worth getting in touch to see how you can work together.

Hiring a coach

Before hiring a coach, have a think about the size of the group that will be going to the farm. If the group is only small, you may be able to hire a minibus or half-sized coach. This should work out cheaper than hiring a full-sized coach. If you do need to hire a full-sized coach, you might think about how you can maximise its use. Premium rates are often attached to the times around the start and end of the school day when coaches are doing the morning pick up and afternoon drop off. Between these times can sometimes be quiet for coach companies, so you may be able to negotiate a cheaper rate. If this is possible, just ensure that you leave for the farm after school has started and return back before school finishes.

Another way to maximise the use of your coach is to try and work your farm visit so that you can fit two visits into one day. Talk to the farmer and coach company and work it so that one group is taken to the farm in the morning. The coach then brings this group back to school at lunchtime and returns to the farm with a second group for an afternoon visit. If you are to do this, be aware that the visits will be shorter, so plan well to ensure that all your required content is covered. This may only work if the farm is a relatively short drive from your school.

Checklist:

- Look to see if there are farms within walking distance from the school to save transport costs
- Investigate whether there are any farms on public transport routes to avoid hiring a bus
- Look out for any community groups or secondary schools that can offer a free mini-bus
- Order a bus that is appropriate for the size of group and see if you can timetable more than one trip during the day
- Try different coach companies from you school area and your destination as prices can vary a lot



Unit 3 – How to fund the farm visit

In this unit I will learn how to:

1. Access funding for the farm visit
2. Raise our own funds to pay for the farm visit

Introduction to the topic:

Visiting a farm, even just once, can be a life changing experience for a young person. For many teachers, their aim is to enable pupils to visit a farm during their time at school in order they may better understand not only how food is produced, but also to have a clearer understanding of the food choices they can make. Funding farm visits can often be an issue. This unit introduces a few ideas that might help reduce the cost of farm visits and transport.

Chapter 1 – Access funding for your visit

Across Europe, there are a number of public and private funding schemes that offer financial support to schools and farms, allowing educational visits to take place. It is worth exploring these opportunities from the perspective of your own country to see what may be available. Every country will have different funding opportunities, but they will usually fall into either funding from public sources (e.g. local municipalities) or private funding that the school or farm can access.

Public funding – national government and municipality

Many countries have some form of public funding that can be used for farm visits, however, it is not possible in this short section to give a complete guide to the wide range of conservation and diversification grant schemes available. These are constantly changing as new funding becomes available, new schemes are introduced and old ones dropped or modified. There are also regional and local funds that are applicable to specific municipalities / local authorities. Whilst it is unlikely that there will be one specific scheme which will cover all your funding requirements, with a bit of creative thinking, a number of schemes may be applicable. Often environmental and educational schemes can be molded to meet your own requirements. We would advise that you carry out an internet search to identify public funding schemes that are specific to your country. It might also be worth contacting the government department responsible for the environment and rural affairs, to see if they can advise.

Chapter 1 – Access funding for your visit

Private funding - local and national companies

Many companies often have corporate social responsibility budgets to support local community groups and schools. These companies will often prefer to fund something tangible like equipment rather than staff time, but may look to fund and help with specific events for under-privileged groups. In the past, companies have been known to help with the purchase of growing equipment or wellington boots. It may be advantageous to speak to companies that already supply your farm, or food and farming companies as a first point of contact as these will have an interest in educating young people. You may also be able to provide them with nice photos and anecdotes for their annual report, or offer teambuilding opportunities for their staff to help out with visits, subject to the appropriate child safety checks.

Private funding - School and parent support

Private funding for farm visits usually comes from schools that are prepared to pay for their farm visit. Schools will usually pay for the trip from their core funds, but may also ask for donations from the parents for the farm visit and transport costs. Schools may not have specific funding for a farm visit, but if you can prove that it is valuable for meeting curriculum targets, or personal, social and health benefits for the pupils, they may be able to justify spending the money. Many schools take children on geography field trips or residential stays – why not argue that these should be done on a farm? It is important to emphasize that what you are offering is more than just a fun summer day out, and more of an educational and skill-enhancing experience.

Private funding Charity support

Sometimes, charitable organizations that work in the environmental sector can secure funding for farm visit opportunities. These may have been supported by funding from grant-giving trusts and the national lottery which they are able to access through their charitable NGO status. Farm-visit coordinating organizations may have direct contact with teachers and host twilight sessions for them to raise awareness of farm visits, so this can be a useful way to promote your visit opportunities. Others may also offer funding for residential stays for school groups from inner-cities if you are able to facilitate accommodation or camping on the farm.

Checklist:

- see if there are farms that receive state or municipal funding to pay for the visit
- Investigate whether there are funding sources or sponsorship you can access
- Look to see if the school/friends of the school group/parents are happy to pay for the visit
- Some charities and grant givers can offer funding for farm visits

Chapter 2 – Raise your own funds to pay for the visit

Class savings account

Some schools have operated a class savings account in order to raise money for school visits to farms. Each class in the school has a savings account, which they are responsible for keeping topped up. There are many ways the pupils raise money, for example, harvesting produce from the school garden and cooking seasonal recipes that is then sold to parents and the local community with all the profits going into the class savings account. If the class feels they need a little help in being able to afford something they can put together a presentation in order to ask the Head teacher for a loan. This great model is easily transferable to other schools.

Parent Teacher Associations and Friends of the School groups

Many schools have approached their PTAs to allocate existing funds or to raise funds for farm visits. Cake sales, 'wear what you like' days, jumble sales and seasonal fairs and fetes have all been sources of fundraising for schools. These events can raise money for extra-curricular activities such as farm visits.

School Food Markets

This exciting initiative involves local food producers setting up stalls at the schools and selling their produce to parents and member of the community. Often the school will charge local producers a small fee for a stall, which can then be used to fund visits to farms. Schools will also have their own stalls selling produce grown in the school grounds or crafts produced by the children. The income generated from these stalls can also go towards funding the farm visit.

Sell your old tech

Everyone has got an old mobile phone tucked away in a drawer somewhere. You may consider using one of the many websites on the internet to sell your old phones to raise funds for farm visits. There are loads of sites that buy a range of unwanted consumer electronics, as well as old CD's. Maybe you could ask parents for any old items and then sell them to one of the many companies out there?

Local trusts, societies and agricultural colleges

It is a good idea to investigate opportunities in your local community for outdoor education. There are many charities, trusts and societies across the UK that may be able to offer you funding towards school's visits, provide you with in-school activities or even provide free services on their sites. Agricultural shows and colleges in your local area may also be able to offer some support for farm education so why not get in touch with them?

Tips and further information: