
FORK IN THE ROAD

BY TAMARA SCULLY

DIGGIN' IN

Summer farm camps reconnect kids with food and a whole lot more.

Want the kids to realize that healthy living means fresh food, a clean environment and an active lifestyle? Looking for outdoor summer camp and vacation alternatives? Now, a new type of program combines food, nature and exercise into a fun and educational experience. Enter “farm camp,” a way to bring city, suburban and even rural kids back onto the farm, to spend a few days doing what previous generations of kids did naturally—work, play and experience all nature has to offer on a real working farm.

“I want to do this all summer next year,” said Debra Barnett’s nine-year-old son after attending HealthBarn USA’s farm camp. With reactions like this, it is evident that on-farm experiences can play a vital role in reconnecting kids to the natural world.

BACK TO THE FARM

Talk to any farmer, and eventually—probably sooner rather than later—you’ll hear the incredulity in their voices as they lament the fact that today’s consumers don’t really know the origins of their food.

An increasing interest in rediscovering the benefits of food grown and raised locally, however, is empowering small farmers. People are re-connecting with the natural process of food through farmers markets, CSAs and food co-ops. Another option is farm camp, a way to help the next generation reverse the trend of food ignorance.

ON-FARM EDUCATIONAL CAMPS

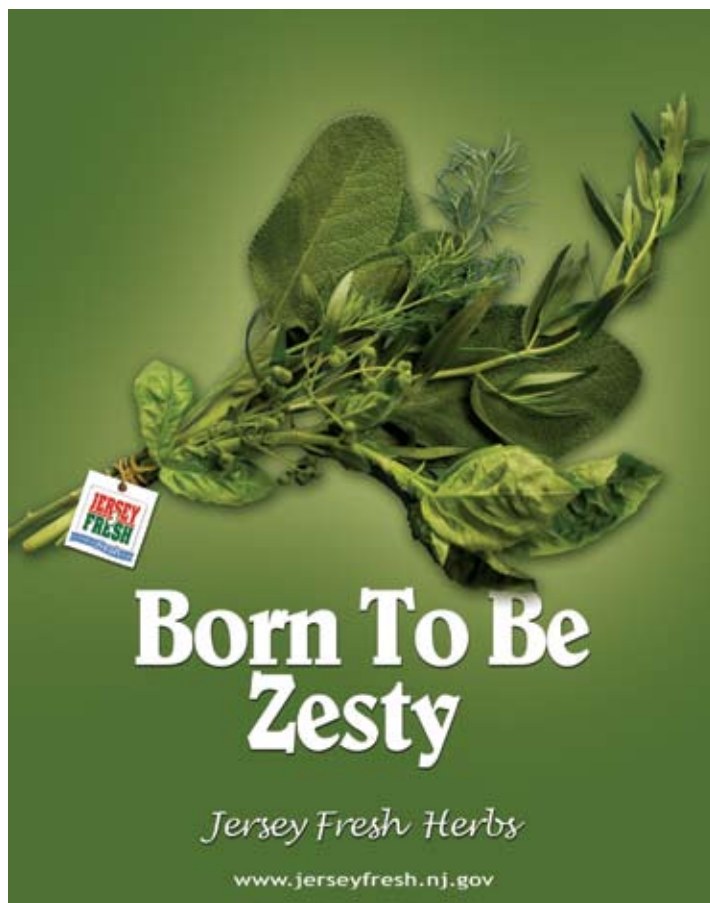
“We started farm camp three years ago because we thought it was important that kids know where their food comes from and how it gets to their table,” says Meredith Compton, who along with husband Jeremy owns and operates **Peaceful Valley Orchards** in Pittstown. “Even though we live in a pretty rural area we didn’t think many kids were aware” of the connection between farm and fork.

At Peaceful Valley, the five-day farm camp incorporates numerous aspects of food, farming and fun into an unforgettable kid-friendly experience. From seed starting, soil health, animal care, farm equipment and harvesting food to take home for dinner, these kids learn a lot. Even the business aspects of running a farm and market are explored. Integrated Pest Management techniques, insect and disease identification and beekeeping and pollination are other topics included in the first-hand experience.

“We think it’s important for them to know that the actual growing of the crops is only 50 percent of the process. If you can’t sell it, then it doesn’t matter,” Compton says. “We don’t want it to be a classroom-type environment; that’s too much like school for them. They also play a lot of games and in the sprinkler and run around down by the pond.”

Other area farm camps echo that programming. At **Terhune Orchards** in Princeton, the five-day day camp includes hiking, swimming and a field trip. Fruit and vegetable growing and harvesting, farm animal care, insect control, beekeeping and arts and crafts round out the program. Focusing on farming and nature, the camp provides an intensive overview of farm living.

Similar programs are offered at **Fernbrook Farms** in Chesterfield Township. Here, day campers are told to “go to the store and buy clothes that you can throw away at the end of the day,” says Maryanne Hutson, marketing and development coordinator. “Our programs are all hands-on, all very active.” Fernbrook combines “agricultural and environmental education” into a program of hiking, butterfly catching, wilderness survival, wool spinning, animal care and gardening. Offerings also include a spring break farm and nature program.





Another option is the **New Jersey Museum of Agriculture's** Farm Fun camp in North Brunswick. Their week-long program incorporates pick-your-own farm visits, a look at farming from the historical perspective, a visit to farm animals at Cook College and arts and crafts.

On Abma's Farm and Market in Wyckoff, **HealthBarn USA** offers year-round programs and camps that focus on growing and harvesting, along with cooking, nutrition and good eating. "Empowering children and families to live strong, energetic lives," HealthBarn USA's concentration on healthy foods includes educational trips to the supermarket, a vendor booth at a nearby farmers' market and even a chance to eat well at a local restaurant.

Started in 2005, the program is led by HealthBarn USA founder and nutritionist Stacey Antine who, after becoming familiar with traditional treatments for childhood weight challenges during her internship at New York's Beth Israel Medical Center, saw the need for better alternatives. "I believe that all children and families need to be educated about the importance of being active and eating a diet full of fresh, nutritious foods, so that they understand why they should eat less of the convenient, processed food that is available everywhere. The farm is a perfect place to have this experience. Not only does [the program] celebrate living a healthy-lifestyle, it will make a difference in their long-term health and well-being." HealthBarn USA also offers assembly presentations and other programs during the school year.

For the younger set, **Farm Fun Day Care** in Lafayette, provides hand-on learning in a safe, outdoor environment. Gardening, animal care, arts and crafts, drama, dancing and farm science are incorporated into the daily routine. Located on a working farm, this program for preschoolers offers an option to traditional day care, providing children with real-life experiences, much as they would have if they were growing up on a farm.

"Organic gardening is our main focus in summer," says owner Linda Grinthal. Most enrolled children are part-timers, and Farm Fun anticipates being able to accommodate some "summer session" youngsters as space permits. Canning of the harvest is one popular summer and fall activity that, according to Grinthal, grandparents love to participate in along with the children.

In the Warwick, New York, area and easily accessible from Sussex County, **Free Spirit Nature Camp** is located on a 200-year-old work-

ing organic farm. Gardening, animal care and observation of daily farm activities are part of the experience. While the camp doesn't exclusively focus on farming, its inclusion is part of its mission of environmental education. According to Director Kate Fox, wilderness survival skills, nature study, folklore, green lifestyles and primitive technology leave campers with a better understanding of the world around them and their place in it.

Also across the state line, **Journey's End Farm Camp**, near Scranton, Pennsylvania, provides a fun and intensive learning experience. Focusing on "community life on a farm," owner Kristin Curtis says that Journey's End is a balance of play and work with activities such as milking a cow, weeding a garden or raking hay. A Family Camp program is also available, offering families the opportunity to stay and learn together.

Another option in central Pennsylvania, designed specifically for girls aged 8–14, is **Hameau Farm**. This two-, four- or six-week camp experience includes animal care on a working farm, family-style meals and active outdoor activities such as biking, hiking and canoeing. Hameau Farm also offers Farm Family Weekends and Counselor's Apprentice Programs for girls who have aged out of the camp, as well as an overseas option.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Another way to experience on-farm learning—along with a good dose of history—is to enroll in **Howell Living History Farm's** camp programs, run by the Mercer County Park System. Daily chores of egg collecting, pumping water from the well, planting a garden, digging potatoes and providing animal care are accomplished using good old-fashioned circa-1900 techniques. A horse and plow, some basic farm implements and elbow grease are all that is required. Ages 6–8 and 9–12 are accepted for the summer program.

Another back-in-time experience is found at **Fosterfields Living Historical Farm**, part of the Morris County Park Commission, which also reflects the realities of turn-of-the-20th-century farm living. Dubbed the "History Survival Camp," Fosterfields' authentic offerings include trips to nearby Cooper's Mill and Historic Speedwell.

For a historical sleepaway camp, try **Country Dreams Farm** in the Adirondack Mountains of New York. Its weeklong camp for ages 11–17 incorporates the daily activities of a circa 1880s farm into a learning experience that is fun, active and educational. Farm animals, a garden and even a farm dinner for the entire family round out the authentic activities.

No matter which camp you choose, camp counselors are the key to a great experience. Safety is always emphasized, and all farm camp programs have a low staff-to-child ratio and staff with professional backgrounds, both to ensure safety and to enhance learning. Don't hesitate to ask for credentials and medical emergency plans.

Campers who have "aged out" often return as counselors at many of the camps. In this way, they can continue to enjoy the farm experience while creating a memorable program for others. Hannah Duerr of Pittstown is too old for Peaceful Valley's camp this year, but is looking to return as a junior counselor. Younger brother Eric is enrolled in the camp. Their mother, Colleen, calls farm camp "a week of just getting dirty" and having a lot of fun while learning. □

2008 SUMMER FARM CAMP GUIDE

Almost every camp is accepting applications right now. Summer sessions fill quickly, so act soon!

DAY CAMPS

BERGEN COUNTY

HealthBarn USA at Abma's Farm and Market

Weeklong day camp Ages 5–12. Sessions from June 23 to August 29. 700 Lawlins Road, Wyckoff. Stacey Antine, MS, RD .201-891-2066 healthbarnusa.com

BURLINGTON COUNTY

Fernbrook Farms Education Center

Weeklong day camps, ages 6–11 and 12–14: sessions from June 23–August 29. Spring camp, ages 6–11: March 24–28. Route 545, Chesterfield Township. 609-298-4028 fernbrookfarms.com

HUNTERDON COUNTY

Peaceful Valley Orchards

Weeklong day camp Ages 7–10. July 7–11 or July 14–18. 150 Pittstown Road, Pittstown. Meredith and Jeremy Compton, owners. 908-730-7748 peaceful-valleyorchards.com

MERCER COUNTY

Howell Living History Farm

Weeklong day camp Ages 6–8 and 9–12. 2008 session dates not yet verified at press time. 101 Hunter Road, Titusville. Kathy Brilla, farm camp coordinator. kbrilla@howellfarm.com. 609-737-3299 howellfarm.org

Terhune Orchards

Weeklong day camp Ages 7–10. July 14–18 or July 21–28. 330 Cold Soil Road, Princeton. Pam and Gary Mount, owners 609-924-2310 terhuneorchards.com

MIDDLESEX COUNTY

New Jersey Museum of Agriculture

Weeklong day camp Ages 6–11. Sessions from July 4 to 18. College Farm Road, North Brunswick. 732-249-2077 agriculture-museum.org

MORRIS COUNTY

Morris County Parks' "History Survival Camp" at Fosterfields Living Historical Farm

Four-day programs Ages 7–10, July 8–July 11. Ages 11–14, July 22–July 25. 73 Kahdena Road, Morristown. 973-285-6537 morrisparks.net

SUSSEX COUNTY

Farm Fun Day Care

Year-round agriculture/nature-based day care; full- and half-day sessions. Ages 2–6. Some summer spots may be available. 27 Pierce Road. Lafayette. Linda Grinthal, owner 973-579-7382

NEW YORK

ORANGE COUNTY (Warwick, New York area)

Free Spirit Nature Camp

Four-day, one- or two-week sessions. Ages 4–14. Westtown Kate Fox, director. 845-361-2267 FreeSpiritNatureCamp.com



OVERNIGHT CAMPS

PENNSYLVANIA

Hameau Farm

Sleepaway camp for girls ages 8–14. Two- to six-week sessions. June 29–August 8. 6364 State Route 655, Belleville, 717-667-3731 hameaufarm.com


Journey's End Farm Camp

Sleepaway camp for ages 7–12. Two- or three-week sessions. June 22–August 9. Family camp, August 11–17. 364 Sterling Road, Newfoundland. Kristin Curtis, owner. 570-689-3911. Journeysendfarm.org

NEW YORK

Country Dreams Farm

Sleepaway historic farm camp. Ages 11–14 or 15–17. One-week sessions. July and August. 2008 session dates not yet verified at press time. 260 Pellerin Road, Plattsburgh. Melissa Monty-Provost. 518-561-8941. whinny.org/cdfarmssummercampinfo page.htm



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