

The Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont's **FARMER CORRESPONDENCE PROGRAM**

Information Packet for Teachers

About the program

NOFA Vermont's Farm to Community Mentors have been expanding agricultural awareness by nurturing relationships between communities and their local farms since 2000. As part of our work, the Farmer Correspondence Program matches classrooms with farmers based on interests and grade levels. Farmer pen-pals correspond with students during the winter and spring, educating them about life and work on the farm.



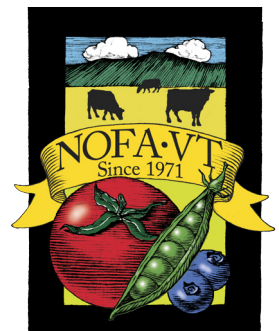
The Farmer Correspondence Program has been a wonderful complement to my existing curriculum. I have connected it with my students' work in writing and the library. Our farmer visited for two library classes and gave students a great deal of first-hand information about how to produce maple syrup and how to turn it into a business. My students used that information and additional research to produce a blog about how to make maple syrup. They also demonstrated what they had learned about sugaring by writing narrative stories that explained the process. In addition, my students had many opportunities to practice writing letters as we corresponded back and forth with our farmer. Our participation in this Program gave me an interesting jumping off point to enrich my curriculum in a variety of ways.

—THERESA WHITE, A 4-6 TEACHER AT ROXBURY VILLAGE SCHOOL

How it works

Educators are matched with a local farmer and receive four letters during the year. Teachers may use the letters as they see fit to meet educational goals. They can also shape students' responses to help achieve those goals, using drawings, letters, or other tools. This program is free to schools and youth-based organizations.

NOFA Vermont is a member-based nonprofit organization working to grow local farms, healthy food, and strong communities in Vermont. Our members are farmers, gardeners, educators and food lovers of all sorts – everyone who wants to help us create a future full of organic food and local farms.



Why incorporate the program in the classroom?

There are many advantages for incorporating the Farmer Correspondence Program into the classroom, including:

- The program immerses students in local heritage, food systems, ecology, landscapes, cultural experiences and opportunities that can enhance language arts, mathematics, history, science and social studies through Common Core connections and Next Generation Science Standards.
- The program connects students to where their food and fiber comes from and the amount and types of labor that are needed to raise farm products.
- The program boosts students' awareness, interest and appreciation for their local community and farmers, and reenergizes educators.
- The program also demonstrates farming and farmers as a real-life possible career.



Next Generation Standards K-12 Connections to Program

Grade Level	Topic Connections	Standard
3, 4, 5	Cause & effect of weathering	4-ESS2-1
6, 7, 8	Cause & effect	MS-PS1-4
9, 10, 11, 12	Cause & effect	HS-LS3-2
K, 1, 2	Systems	K-ESS3-1
3, 4, 5	Systems	3-LS4-4
6, 7, 8	Systems	MS-PS2-4
9, 10, 11, 12	Systems	MS-LS2-5
3, 4, 5	Energy & matter	5-LS1-1
6, 7, 8	Energy & matter	MS-ESS2-4
K, 1, 2	Structure & function	2-LS2-2

This program offers a wonderful opportunity to address Common Core Standards (CCSS), while learning about a farm right in our community. There are so many educational directions you can go with this program. One letter my class received inspired us to locate Iceland on the globe. The educational possibilities seem endless.

— BETH ABBOT-KOCH, A
KINDERGARTEN TEACHER AT
FAYSTON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

The Farmer Correspondence Program also addresses the New Generation Science Standards (NGSS) through real life experiences with agricultural systems and life cycles.

Corresponding with farmers and field trips to farms helps students learn how farmers work with, and adapt to, the natural systems that are intertwined in working landscapes. Weather, climate, natural resources, climate change, human impact are all core issues that farmers work with on a daily basis and continually develop solutions in order to create a sustainable business. The stories and experiences that farmers share with the students is the foundation towards many conversations and curricular integration.

Grade Level	Program Connections	Standard
1, 2, 3	Text types and purposes	CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.1 W.2 W.3
4, 5, 6	Production of writing	CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.4 W.5 W.6
7, 8, 9	Research	CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.7 W.8 W.9
1, 2, 3	Key Ideas and details	CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1 R.2 R.3
1, 2, 3	Comprehension & Collaboration	CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.1 SL.2 SL.3

Vermont Standards Connections to Program

Grade Level	Program Connections	Standard
Pk-12	Sustainability	3.9
Pk-12	Understanding Place	4.6

The Farmer Correspondence Program correlates well with both of Vermont's standards of sustainability and understanding place. Farmers are continually challenged with the sustainability of their business, the environment, climate and community. Students learn an abundant amount of information and details about the surrounding community, heritage of Vermont, and the local environment through the program.



Download a brochure of the program:
<http://nofavt.org/resources> »

Real Life Example of Curricular Ties to the Program

COMMON CORE GRADE 6 — CCSS.MATH.CONTENT.6.G.A.4

Big Ideas: Three dimensional figures

Understandings: How to represent three-dimensional figures in solving real-world problems

Real life example: Through the Farmer Correspondence Program sixth grade students can work with their farmer to help them with a real farm process. The farmer may need to build a new chicken coop or pig house. The students can write to inquire how many chickens or pigs the house needs to hold and they can then create a three-dimensional figure to represent the needed surface area of the buildings. The figures can then be represented in real life by providing the farmer with dimensions for a coop or house.

The Farmer Correspondence Program at NOFA Vermont



Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont
www.nofavt.org

Following is an example of a letter to a classroom from a farmer, Judith Irving. She owns and operates Fat Toad Farm which is a goat dairy which specializes in making caramel. (March 26, 2015).

Hi all – It’s raining (not snowing!!!) out. Yeah! And there’s mud everywhere, which I’m sure is the same for you. But we all know mud is a good thing. Here are answers to your questions:

How are the quadruplets doing? They actually did fine. I’m not really sure if we kept one or not (although I take care of the goats every day, sometimes I’m not sure which kid belongs to which mom and so much is happening during kidding season, that it is hard to remember every birth). So, either 3 or 4 of them found new homes and are happily there now.

Why do you breed a Boer buck if it is a meat goat and you don’t keep their kids? Since we end up selling most of our kids (120 out of 140), it’s good to have some of them part meat goat because lots of the people who want to buy our kids are raising them for meat. Pine Island Farm – www.pineislandfarmvt.com – check that out and then if you have any other questions, I’ll be happy to answer them.

NEW NEWS!

Goats out to pasture — We usually start putting the goats out to pasture in middle to end of May. It’s totally dependent on how fast the fields dry up and how fast the grass grows. The grass needs to be about 6-8 inches high before we put them out and the field cannot be soggy at all because of parasites.

Taking the goats out – We did not take the goats out ONCE all winter and that says a lot about what a hard winter it was. It was always too windy, too cold or too icy. We hope to start taking them out for browse walks soon. We cut down a lot of trees for firewood this winter and the goats LOVE nibbling on the branches and buds.

Top milkers – We do have some good milkers, in fact, the herd in general is producing much more milk than they did last year at this time. This is partly because we have increased the amount of protein they are getting in their grain. I’ll get you a list of our top milkers next time.

Caramel selling – No, this is not a particularly busy time for selling caramel. We try to do a lot of special sales on our web site and with e-mailers so we can keep some cash coming in. It has also been a really slow “first quarter” (that means January-February-March) all over the U.S. because of the winter. There were several times when I talked to some of our stores in the Boston area when they said people just were not leaving their houses and no one had come into their store for weeks. That’s not good for business.

Caramel and nursing – the 20 or so kids we have still are still nursing. We do end up milking their moms with the rest of the herd because they will always have extra milk as long as we milk them. They of course do not have as much as they moms whose kids are not here. All of the milk we are making now is going into caramel. We are making caramel 5 times a week. We use 510 pounds of milk each time. You do the math, as they say.

Eating Caramel – I actually never get sick of caramel and I use it every day in a hot drink I make in the morning. I do really love it on vanilla ice cream with nuts.

Hope you all thoroughly enjoy the beginning of spring, as slow as it always is in Vermont.