



On the Farm: A Youth Group Program to Explore our Food System

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Goals:

- Connect teens to a local farm and give them a hands-on “food experience”
- Celebrate Jewish holidays (*Tu Bish’vat, Pesach, Sukkot*) and the concept of harvest in a meaningful way, rooted in Jewish texts and values
- Collect and deliver produce to people in need (demonstrating the concept of *Pe’ah*, or gleanings)

Supplies:

- Bus/van/cars
- Discussion questions and text study (1 for every 2 students)
- Clothes that you can get dirty in
- Pencils and paper for writing questions to ask farmers

of Facilitators needed: 1 for every 10 students

Facilitator Responsibilities:

- Lead discussion on way to/from farm
- Supervise field trip
- Engage with students, farmers, and farm workers

Program Outline:

This program can be run either as 3 separate sessions or as a single-day, 3-part program, with discussion on the bus/van on the way to and from the farm.

Session One/Part One: Preparing for Your Visit

- Text study and food system questions

Session Two/Part Two: On the Farm

- Gleaning

- Meet your local farmers
- Session Three/Part Three
- Wrap up/bringing it home
 - Thanking your farmers

Procedure:

Part One: Before your farm visit (either as a separate session or while en route to the farm), each participant will be given a copy of the Living Talmud text study on food practices. Facilitators will break participants into groups of about ten students and lead a guided discussion of the texts, connecting Jewish values and principles around issues of environmental stewardship & sustainability, hunger & poverty, and labor issues within the modern food system.

Facilitators should ask participants if they have ever been to a farm, and when/why those who have been to a farm made the visit. Facilitators should also explore with participants if and why they think it is important to personally visit and interact with the place and people who produce their food. Also, briefly discuss the ideas behind local eating (connecting with farmers, connecting with the land, lower environmental impact of locally grown food, supporting your local economy, etc.), asking students if they think these values are important to consider when making food choices – and if they are Jewish values. Up until now, have participants considered Jewish values (see Living Talmud for examples) when making food choices? Ask them how they might incorporate the concepts from Living Talmud into discussions concerning local farming, *tzedekah*, and food purchasing practices.

Facilitators should then provide participants with a writing utensil and paper, and invite them to write down any questions they have about our food systems, farming, sustainability, or any of the ideas discussed in the text study. Facilitators should help students brainstorm question ideas, and suggest sample questions as needed. When students are ready, the questions should be collected and quickly reviewed by the facilitator. Facilitators may answer questions as time (and their expertise) permits, and should compile those questions to be answered by the farmers.

Part Two: Visit a local farm. (Note: This visit will need to be prearranged. Local Harvest, www.localharvest.org, can help you find a farm in your community.) What happens during your visit will depend on the group and on the capabilities of the farm. Some groups may tour the farm and talk with farmers, some may spend the day working on the farm, some may pick produce for a local food shelter, and some may combine elements of these activities.

While on the farm, participants should take advantage of opportunities to pick fresh produce (apples, pumpkins, berries, or whatever else is in season) as they are able. Consider donating produce to a local food bank or soup kitchen to demonstrate the concept of *Pe'ah*, leaving the corners of your field to those in need.

Facilitators should emphasize and encourage participant-farmer interactions. When the group arrives, the facilitator should give a copy of the questions to the farmers, giving them time to prepare answers and setting a time, during a break or at the end of the visit, for the farmers to respond to the questions, as well as additional ones that may have emerged for participants during the visit.

Part Three: Either on the way home or in a separate session, facilitators should lead a discussion about the experience on the farm and what participants learned from the visit.

Discussion Questions for Chaperones/Facilitators

1. What most surprised you about visiting the farm?
2. How often do you think about where your food comes from?
3. (Especially if the participants were in multiple groups during the visit): Does anyone have an experience to share from our visit?
4. How do the Jewish values and texts we studied relate to farming, poverty, and environmentalism? Did you see any of these values in action on the farm?
5. It is often said that Judaism is, at its root, an agricultural religion. Do you think this is still true in your lives today? How do the Jewish holidays help us connect with the agricultural seasons and calendar?
6. How can people benefit by visiting places where food is produced? What is the benefit of eating local? Do you think these activities reflect Jewish values?
7. Did the produce you saw on the farm look different than the fruits and vegetables you buy in your grocery store?
8. (Question requires advance prep – everyone needs to bring in one piece of produce from home): Look at your produce from home. Where does it come from? Let's calculate how many miles away that is from here. Now, let's compare with the distance we traveled to bring food directly back from the farm.
9. Do you think you will engage more, less, or the same amount with local farms and farmers after today's visit?

Follow Up

Once students return home, facilitators should set aside a few minutes to write letters from individual participants or a letter from the larger group, to the farmer(s) for facilitating your visit and teaching you about food systems.

After the program has concluded, consider ways to expand upon what was learned: future farm visits, examining your own synagogue's food policy (**link to policy guide**), and even starting your own congregational garden (**link to garden guide**).