

The **BARNYARD** Goes to **SCHOOL** ...and what it takes to get there!

BY CHRISTINA BELLAS, INTERPRETER SPECIALIST

Visiting a farm is truly exciting to children but, sadly, many children cannot visit Farmpark. For educators, finding money to support field trips can be an obstacle. Daycares and preschools often have children who are too young to visit. For many schools, transportation may not be available or affordable. With these difficulties affecting a field trip, what is a teacher to do? Call Lake Metroparks Farmpark for an outreach program, and we can bring the farm to you!



Farmpark outreach programs offer children opportunities that they may not get anywhere else. Depending on the program, students can make ice cream, mix bread dough or meet farm animals up close and personal.

This year we developed a new outreach program to bring the story of The Little Red Hen into the classroom. This is an exciting opportunity for children to learn how to make bread. As I tell the story I use storyboard pieces to explain the steps the Little Red Hen took to make her bread. This approach helps simplify the concept of grain by teaching children that a farmer buys seeds, then plants and fertilizes the seeds, harvests the grain, and finally takes the grain to a processing plant where it is ground into flour. Students assist me in making the bread by helping to measure ingredients and mixing the dough. They fulfill several State of Ohio Academic Standards while discovering that Ohio is a state where wheat is grown. As importantly, they learn how much we depend on farmers to grow the wheat we need for cooking and baking.

One of Farmpark's most popular outreach programs is Barnyard Goes to School, and we do just that: we bring farm animals into the classroom. We carefully screen the animals taken into schools. All outreach program animals must have a calm and relaxed disposition as well as enjoy being petted by 30 to 100 or more kids. Handling farm animals is not an easy task and transporting them can be a challenge. Our outreach sheep travels in a sheep-sized traveling crate, and he is trained to step up a wooden ramp into our outreach van.

When I travel with animals in our large van, I bring true amusement to other drivers. People will often pull up next to the van out of curiosity to see what is traveling inside the big crate; they give funny looks as they realize "it's a sheep!" When I reach my destination, people stop and stare and some even come over to ask questions.



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One program took me to Lakewood with our outreach animals. As I was taking the sheep out of the van in the school parking lot, two utility technicians working nearby did a double take as if to say, "We can't believe what we're seeing."

The classroom brings its moments too, whether it's the chicken that insists on flapping its wings at the wrong time or the turkey that gobbles louder than I can talk. Each class is memorable for me as well as the students. Occasionally, when I'm loading the van and the children are waiting for their rides home, I hear, "Mom, that lady brought a sheep to school!" Unlike the nursery rhyme Mary had a Little Lamb, it is not against the rules to bring a Farmpark sheep to school!

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