Carding wool, collecting eggs, planting seeds, and harvesting vegetables are just a few activities that kids can help with when they attend a farm-based summer camp. As campers learn about food, forest, and fiber production, farms are strengthening ties with their communities and adding value to their farm business. This chapter will walk you through many of the steps for planning a farm summer camp, including business planning, sourcing activities, marketing, and risk management.

### Business Planning

Create a business plan for your camp. Consider elements such as clientele, duration (day or residential), environment, risk management, financing, staffing, summer or year-round programming.

For community-oriented farms such as CSAs, camps are a good way to strengthen connections with families. When kids have fun at your farm, it builds customer loyalty and the return on investment is long-term. Some farmers find that spending time with kids is a nice change of pace, and they may be comfortable taking a loss or merely breaking even because it improves quality of life. Others want their camp to be profitable, like any sound business. Regardless of your financial goals, all farmers need to employ careful planning and budgeting to develop a camp. Remember, always track your spending.

When building a camp budget, there are two types of expenses: operating and capital. Funds used to provide services during the current year are operating expenses. Expenditures on projects that last more than one year are capital expenses. Personnel expenses will likely be your most expensive part of camp.

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**What’s Inside?**

- Business Planning
- Program Planning
- Sample Activities
- Staffing
- Site and Facilities
- Food
- Marketing
- Risk Management
- Evaluation

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“**It is critical to treat camp like a business or it will absolutely fail, and to know in your head and heart that if you treat camp only as a business it will also fail absolutely; so always make your choices about the business of camp with the greatest care.**”

— Rodger Popkin, Blue Star Camps and former American Camp Association national president
### Sample Summer Camp Budget

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income</th>
<th>Number of campers</th>
<th>Tuition</th>
<th>Revenue</th>
<th>Net Revenue after Providing Any Financial Assistance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Farm Camp — July (one week)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>$250</td>
<td>$3,000 (12 x $250)</td>
<td>$2,750 (one scholarship)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farm Camp — August</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>$250</td>
<td>$2,750</td>
<td>$2,750 (no scholarships awarded)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL Income</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>$5,500</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Expenses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expenses</th>
<th>May</th>
<th>June</th>
<th>July</th>
<th>August</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Operating Expenses</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personnel: Lead Teacher ($18/hour)</td>
<td>$540 (30 hours planning, outreach, registering)</td>
<td>$180 (10 hours planning)</td>
<td>$900 (15 hours planning, 35 hours teaching)</td>
<td>$900 (15 hours planning, 35 hours teaching)</td>
<td><strong>$2,520</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personnel: Assistant Teacher ($14/hour)</td>
<td>$70 (5 hours planning)</td>
<td>$140 (10 hours planning)</td>
<td>$560 (5 hours planning, 35 hours teaching)</td>
<td>$560 (5 hours planning, 35 hours teaching)</td>
<td><strong>$1,330</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office Supplies</td>
<td>$50</td>
<td>$15</td>
<td>$15</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td><strong>$80</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camp Insurance (varies greatly depending on existing policies and your comfort with risk)</td>
<td>$200</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td><strong>$200</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooking/Food Supplies</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>$50</td>
<td>$50</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td><strong>$100</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Capital Expenses</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity Supplies (journals, art supplies) ($250 spread out over 2 years)</td>
<td>$125</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td><strong>$125</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First-aid Kit Supplies ($100 spread out over 2 years)</td>
<td>$50</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td><strong>$50</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Signage Supplies</td>
<td>$100</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td><strong>$100</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depreciation of Buildings, Driveway</td>
<td>$50</td>
<td>$50</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>$100</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL Expenses</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>$4,605</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Snapshot of Camp Pricing around Vermont

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Farm</th>
<th>Camp Price</th>
<th>Hours</th>
<th>What’s Included</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Full Moon Farm, Hinesburg, VT</td>
<td>$250/child</td>
<td>6-hour day</td>
<td>healthy snacks from the farm each day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shelburne Farms, Shelburne, VT</td>
<td>$265/child</td>
<td>6-hour day</td>
<td>does not include meals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deer Ridge Farm Camp, Guilford, VT</td>
<td>$300 – $325/child</td>
<td>6-hour day</td>
<td>includes lunch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farm &amp; Wilderness, Plymouth, VT</td>
<td>$935/child (= $467/week)</td>
<td>6-hour day for two weeks</td>
<td>does not include meals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Barn Yard, Roxbury, VT</td>
<td>$500 (= $250/week)</td>
<td>7-hour day for two weeks</td>
<td>includes lunch</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

LICENSING AND ACCREDITATION
The Vermont Department of Children and Families issues licenses for camp programs, but camps operating for under 13 weeks consecutively are exempt from licensure. To confirm that your camp does not need to be licensed, visit the Vermont Department of Children and Families Child Development Division (CDD) website or call the licensor on duty at (800) 649-2642.

Being accredited by the American Camp Association is a “seal of quality” that some camps choose to pursue. Some people may look for summer camps using the searchable database of accredited camps, but chances are families in your community will find your camp through other means. As of October 2014, there were six accredited camps in Vermont. For more information on accreditation, visit the American Camp Association.

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE
For some kids, summer camp isn’t an option without scholarships. If you’re interested in providing access for limited-income families, consider asking families to donate to a scholarship fund when they register their kids. At Deer Ridge Farm in Guilford, VT, Lisa and Jerry include this language on their camp registration form: “Our prices reflect our 1:3 or 1:4 ratio. Please donate to support quality summer experiences and the socio-economic diversity of our groups. If you have financial needs, please contact us and we will try to help your child get here!” On their website, they also encourage local families to seek scholarship support from their school counselors or social service agencies.
**PROGRAM PLANNING**

As soon as you decide to offer camp, develop a timeline of tasks to be completed. Below is a sample schedule from Stone Barns Center for Food and Agriculture in Pocantico Hills, NY.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Task</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>September</td>
<td>Send out evaluation to previous summer’s campers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October</td>
<td>Set dates and post on farm website</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November</td>
<td>Draft staff position announcements, plan for scholarships, prepare brochure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December</td>
<td>Hire camp director, set up online registration, setup and post job descriptions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January</td>
<td>Post brochure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February</td>
<td>Open registration/busing/scholarship materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>Begin hiring process and ordering supplies, t-shirts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April/May</td>
<td>Hiring and registration, CPR/first-aid training, DOH training, carpool lists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td>Staff training, open house, camp begins</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Determine the Theme, Philosophy and Culture of Your Camp**

Every farm is different from the next, and therefore every farm camp will take on its own identity. Work with the resources you have on your property to think about a common theme for the week or a theme for each day.

For Shelburne Farms’ Outdoor Adventures Camp, each camp has an overarching question, and each day has a theme. The activities, snacks, and morning meeting all correspond to the theme of the day.

Parents will want to know if your camp has educational goals. Develop a detailed description of the camp, and share it along with a schedule of activities for the week (see example on facing page).

Offering a schedule, even if “free time” is part of it, will help kids feel comfortable going to a new place for the first time. Find a balance between variety and predictability, such as holding a morning meeting each day but discussing new ideas at each meeting, or serving a snack at the same time.
each day, but changing the snack item. Find a few friends who will provide honest feedback, and ask for their opinions about how you articulate your camp theme and philosophy.

Together with your campers, you’ll build a camp culture. On the first day, you can help campers identify what values or agreements they want to adhere to throughout their time at camp. Setting rules for the week can be accomplished by asking kids what a caring, respectful community looks like. When they create working agreements, they will be more likely to adhere to them. For tips on creating working agreements, see Forming Ground Rules (Creating Norms) by the School Reform Initiative.

Safety, both physical and emotional, is essential in any camp culture. By setting expectations on day one, you can create a safe environment for campers. For the many other safety precautions to be taken, see the “Risk Management” section later in this chapter.
Fun ideas for your farm camp!

- Egg collecting and washing
- Harvesting veggies
- Transplanting
- Weeding
- Cooking
- Dissection (flower, gizzard, egg, seeds, compost)
- Foraging
- Fairy houses
- Instruments
- Egg drop
- Plant identification
- Field journals
- Dance/yoga/movement
- Murals
- Weaving
- Storytelling
- Building wallows for pigs
- Feeding pigs
- Spraying pigs with water
- Agroforestry (design your own tree)
- Scavenger hunts
- Compost screening and turning
- Taking temperature of compost
- Natural dyes
- Felting
- Flower mandalas
- Pest identification
- Preserving
- Seed saving
- Ice cream making
- Pickling
- Hiking
- Water testing and pond skimming
- Pollinator observation and tracking
- Reading
- Flower pressing
- “Mud kitchen” (pots, pans, spoons, mud, and imagination)
- Paper making
- Writing recipes
- Washing produce
- Seed art
- Free play

Looking for Sources for Activities?

- VT FEED’s free, downloadable guide, Connecting Farms to Schools and Communities, has excellent activities that focus on dairy, bees, poultry, maple, gardens, soil, and compost.
- Project Seasons and Cultivating Joy and Wonder are Shelburne Farms publications filled with activities.
- Farm-Based Education Network is a resource hub for people who offer farm-based education.
- Edible Schoolyard Network has a searchable database of activities in a variety of subjects.
- Life Lab offers webinars, lessons, activities, and even some garden jokes on their online site.
- Parents may also be a source of ideas for camp activities. When you’re just starting out, consider having a focus group with a few parents you know and ask them what they would like to see at a farm summer camp.

Sample Camp Description | Charlotte Green Thumbs Camp


Your thumbs will turn green after a week in Charlotte’s school gardens this summer! Play and work with friends to deepen knowledge and boost excitement about vegetables, fruits, seeds, pollination, decomposition, and garden ecosystems. Become an animal lover during our walking field trip to visit sheep at nearby Fifth Fence Farm. Each afternoon, transform into a chef to prepare a daily snack using ingredients just harvested from the garden. Don’t forget to save some energy for playing on the playground, creating garden-themed art, exploring around the base of Pease Mountain, and making discoveries in and out of the gardens.

Sample Camp Description | Barn Yard Camp

The mission of the Barn Yard Camp is to provide a fun, safe environment for kids to learn about stewarding the land and their health and well-being through experience growing, cooking, and eating fresh food from the farm. Group activities will strengthen team building and shape self-confident children for years to come.

Children will start the morning with some barnyard stretches to get the blood flowing. Following the morning stretch, the children will feed the animals and tend to the garden. A daily educational theme will lead the garden exercise. After the morning “chores,” the children will prep and cook their farm lunch. After lunch the kids will spend time in the woods and fields to make themed crafts. Late afternoon children will explore their inner talent. Fun acting games and activities will lead to an end of camp.
Staffing:
Recruitment, Screening, Supervision, Training

As the American Camp Association writes, “There is no greater responsibility than bringing the right people to your camp.” Always review resumes and check references. Interview candidates and don’t be afraid to wait for the right fit. Part of the success of your camp will rely on having strong instructors who have a good working relationship with each other.

When hiring staff, the rate of pay can be based on level of experience with children, as well as:
- First-aid/CPR certification (expected for all)
- Lifeguard certification (paid at a higher rate)
- Classroom licensure/experience (paid at a higher rate)
- Willingness to participate in overnights/extended camp days (paid at a higher rate)

Recruit camp staff through:
- Friends and family
- Colleges and universities. Share your advertisement on education, environmental studies, and agriculture listservs
- Post in the Jobs section of the Farm-Based Education Network
- Post on your town’s Front Porch Forum, a daily email digest.

Staff should be trained in first aid and child CPR. They should also know how to be safe on your farm. Perform background checks on hired staff by checking the state sexual offender registry and state driving records.

American Camp Association recommendations for day-camp staff-to-child ratio:
- One staffer for every 8 campers ages 6 to 8.
- One staffer for every 10 campers ages 9 to 14.
- One staffer for every 12 campers ages 15 to 18.

Sample Camp Description

Full Moon Farm Camp in Hinesburg, VT, is a time for children to explore and connect with many aspects of farm life. While farmers have always taught their children to work alongside them, farm children have also always found ways to slink off and create imaginative worlds of wonder in the corn fields, haylofts, and adjoining woods. At Full Moon Farm, we aim to create that balance between work and play. Throughout the camp, children will learn valuable skills to use throughout their lifetime while also savoring the creativity of childhood and the “dog days” of summer. Since we are still testing the waters and because we are a production farm, the camp will only be offered for six one-week day camps during the summer.
Site and Facilities

When considering your farm’s facilities, safety should be a number-one priority. Make sure you have adequate shelter from thunderstorms and that you have cordoned off any areas that may be unsafe. Keep equipment and any chemicals off-limits, and make sure kids know how to be safe around your animals.

Designate a safe spot for parents to drop off and pick-up kids each day. Campers may generate extra traffic on your road, so plan accordingly.

Make sure that you have clean, functional bathrooms and handwashing facilities near animals and eating stations.

If you have neighbors, consider how camp activities may affect them. Early morning noise, smoke from a bonfire, or curious kids, playing near property lines may all pique your neighbors interest or concern. Remember to invite them to an end-of-week performance put on by campers, or a family and friends feast during the week. Good relationships with your neighbors will minimize the risk of zoning complaints or hard feelings.

Make sure you have a fire-drill plan and share it with campers when you go over camper expectations on your first day.

Food

The simplest approach to feeding kids at camp may be to ask families to pack bag lunches and snacks. However, your farm is a great setting to cook with kids, and it’s a logical place to encourage healthy eating habits. Think about simple, fresh snacks to prepare with the group. A Guide to Taste Testing Local Foods in Schools by VT FEED (Vermont Food Education Every Day), has helpful tips for introducing new foods to kids. Shelburne Farms’ Cultivating Joy and Wonder has full lessons for making pizza, bread, apple sauce, and more with kids. The lessons include learning objectives and material lists as well as enduring understandings and directions for each activity.

Be sure to make frequent handwashing part of the routine during food preparation and consumption. You should go over proper handwashing technique with your campers on the first day of camp.

As of 2014, the Vermont Department of Health issues licenses to sleep-away summer camps, which fall into the same category as bakeries. Licensing requirements can be found on the Vermont Department of Health website or by calling the department. There are no relevant licenses for day camps, although the public health sanitarian in your area will be responsible for investigating any complaints.

Recipe Resources

Websites
- VT Food Education Every Day
- Life Lab
- Edible Schoolyard Network

Books
- Pretend Soup, Mollie Katzen
- Honest Pretzels, Mollie Katzen
- Salad People, Mollie Katzen
- Healthy Body Cookbook, Joan D’Amico
- Grow It, Cook It, DK Publishing
- Cultivating Joy and Wonder, Shelburne Farms
Marketing

When marketing your camp, you’ll want to consider your “brand.” Look at how other camps in the area are marketing themselves to gather ideas. Think about all the ways your camp is unique and choose some words that describe what you offer. (It may help to develop a “why” statement. For example, “The purpose of my camp is to ________, so that __________.”) Gather testimonials from campers and families, and include them on your marketing materials.

Ask open-ended questions that give parents and campers the opportunity to respond freely. Listen and reflect on their answers. Don’t merely seek affirmation of your efforts.

Remember parents may be signing up for multiple camps, so any way you can simplify your information and registration process will be appreciated. At the same time, you need to provide enough details so that camp families will know why they should register for your camp!

Word of mouth is the most important marketing method! Also consider advertising in the following places:
- Community bulletin boards
- Front Porch Forum
- Find and Go Seek
- KidsVT
- Elementary school
- Town recreation department
- Libraries
- Community newspapers
- Churches
Risk Management and Insurance

There are several ways to mitigate the inherent risks of having visitors on your farm. Talk openly with your insurer about them. Also, communicate clearly with camp families about roles, responsibilities, and concerns. Here are some questions you might ask families or include on a healthy form:

- Will kids show up with bug spray and sunscreen already applied?
- What will happen in the event of a cancellation?
- How will you handle disciplinary issues?
- What are the emergency contact numbers for each child at camp?
- What allergies do your children have?

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**SHELBURNE FARMS**

_Summer Camp 2014 (Ages 6-17)_

**Emergency & Health Information**

- **Camp Name, Session, and Date:**
- **Child Name:**
- **Age:**
- **Gender:**
- **Date of Birth:**
- **Parent/Guardian:**
- **Local Address:**
- **City, State Zip:**
- **Home Phone:**
- **Cell Phone:**

**HEALTH INFORMATION**

- **Is your child’s tetanus shot up to date?** (YES) (NO) (Unknown)
- **Is your child allergic to bee stings?** (YES) (NO) (Unknown)
- **I give consent for my child to receive the following as needed:**
  - Ibuprofen (YES) (NO)
  - Acetaminophen (YES) (NO)
  - Benadryl (YES) (NO)
- **If your child is currently taking medication, do you request and grant permission to administer it?** (YES) (NO) (N/A)
- **Please state medication(s), dosage and interval:**
- **In the event that your child experiences an allergic reaction, do you grant permission to administer the EPI-PEN that you have provided?** (This question is for children with allergies that will be bringing their own EPI-PEN.) (YES) (NO) (N/A)
- **Please specify any concerns or special needs for your child. We would like to know how best to provide support, including how to relate with him/her, and what accommodations, if any, will be needed. Please attach special care plans and indicate if a staff member or other adult is needed to regularly assist your child during the program.**
- **Allergies** (YES) (NO) (N/A)
- **Dietary Restrictions** (YES) (NO) (N/A)
- **Physical Limitations** (YES) (NO) (N/A)
- **Behavioral Concerns** (YES) (NO) (N/A)
- **Aide Required** (YES) (NO) (N/A)
- **Other** (YES) (NO) (N/A)
- **Comments:**

**IN CASE OF AN EMERGENCY**

- **Name of Child’s Physician:**
- **Physician’s Phone:**
- **Insurance Provider:**
- **Account #:**
- **Name of Primary Account Holder:**

**If a parent/guardian cannot be contacted in an emergency, please contact:**

- **Emergency Contact Name:**
- **Relationship:**
- **Phone (during program hours):**
- **Phone (alternate):**

**I hereby authorize any additional medical treatment deemed necessary in the event of emergency or injury:**

**PARENT/GUARDIAN SIGNATURE:**

---
Have any of the children ever been stung by a bee?
Are there other health considerations to be aware of?

Insurance to carry when operating a summer camp include general liability, accidental medical coverage, property damage, workers compensation and business interruption.

When choosing camp insurance, compare limits of liability (the maximum that your insurance policy will pay if a liability loss occurs), deductibles, exclusions, and other policy terms. When policies appear “discounted,” they may not include as much coverage as you should have.

Evaluation

At the end of camp, evaluate the camp from the perspective of campers, families, staff, and your own eyes. Ask questions that will prompt answers to inform how you run camp the next year. You may want to ask parents what they thought of the communications you sent out, registration process, signage, camp hours, before/after care, etc. Ask kids and parents about their favorite activities and memories, and what they learned at camp. Take time to tally up the hours you put in, and reflect on your success as a supervisor, host, educator, leader, and administrator. All of this information, along with the financials, should help you decide whether summer camp becomes a perennial offering on your farm.
While there are many things to consider when planning for summer camp, the amount of fun you’ll have should not be overlooked. Exploring your farm, fields, and forest with kids allows you to see your property through a new lens and rediscover its magical places. Farm camp can also strengthen your connection with your community and diversify your farm business.

Your farm, family, and market are always changing, so make a plan for evaluating your camp regularly and adjust as needed. This flexibility will bring resilience to your business and is critical for helping your farm reach its overall goals.