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# Open Farm Day

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**Canada**

# Videos, student tours and newcomer interest add to Open Farm Day success

To say that that New Glasgow dairy farmers Abe and Elaine Buttimer enjoy Open Farm Day is putting it mildly.

“It’s my favourite day of the year,” says Abe of the Island’s annual agricultural awareness event when farms throw open their gates to the public to give them a better appreciation of the industry.

Since first participating 15 years ago, the Buttimers have only missed it once, and that was for their daughter’s wedding. “She seemed to think that was more important,” Abe says with a laugh.

That dedication to sharing the experience of farming explains why Open Farm Day is still going strong. The 24th edition took place on September 18th with more than 20 farms participating, covering traditional crops, livestock, and lesser-known parts of the industry like honey production and alpacas.

With funding help from the federal and provincial governments through the Sustainable Canadian Agricultural Partnership, Open Farm Day is spearheaded by the PEI Agriculture Awareness Committee and managed through the office of the PEI Agriculture Sector Council. Council Executive Director Laurie Loane continues to be impressed by the staying power of the event, from its support in the agricultural community to the enthusiasm of the thousands of visitors who flock to the participating farms every year.

“ I think we tapped into a desire by people to re-connect to the farm, especially families with children who only know their food as coming from the grocery store. ”  
- Laurie Loane

“For those of us in the industry, it’s been an incredible opportunity to showcase how technologically advanced farming has become.”



In addition to in-person farm visits, this year’s Open Farm Day also included virtual farm tours through videos and a pre-event tour of the participating farms by Grade 3 students. Loane says the video tours came about as a by-product of the pandemic.

“Even COVID-19 couldn’t stop us, but it obviously changed how we could reach the public,” she says. With public events locked down in 2020 and 2021, videos of participating farms were posted online.

Although it was originally intended as a temporary measure, the event organizers soon discovered it opened up the experience to people who were not able to visit farms in person even when pandemic restrictions were lifted.

“We started hearing from nursing homes and disability groups that were happy that they were now able to participate as a group. It really changed our way of thinking.”

The video option has also worked well for farms which, caught in the middle of early fall harvests, couldn’t host hundreds of people on their operation at the same time.

“But we can use film to show people how that harvesting happens,” says Loane. “The videos have led to a wider participation of farms in Open Farm Day, and a greater variety of farms. Adding a pre-event tour of farms by Island Grade 3 students has added another educational component to the public awareness campaign.”

The students are invited to tour a dairy farm and a commodity operation in their local area.

"It's a tremendous way to introduce the industry to young students who don't have a farming background," says Loane. "It gives them a chance to see how farms operate and to ask questions.

"We also hope they will ask their parents and grandparents to take them to Open Farm Day to show them what they learned."

Abe and Elaine Buttimer were among the first farmers to sign up for the Grade 3 tours, and love the students' enthusiasm and questions, especially if they have a new-born calf on hand.

"We'll usually get the students to suggest names for the calf."

The Buttimers have noticed a growing number of newcomers among their visitors during Open Farm Day.

"It's great to see new Islanders taking the time to learn more about our number one industry," he says.

Loane says Open Farm Day is now a regional initiative, meaning hundreds of farms in Atlantic Canada are taking part in the annual open house.

Meanwhile, the Buttimers remain as enthusiastic about participating in Open Farm Day as they were in

