



When having guest to your farm building

Farmers are looking to find more ways to make their farm profitable these days as well as opening their farms up to teach the public about agriculture. Both are very important, and while doing that its equally important to make sure farmers keep in mind what qualifies to be a farm building or structure to maintain the farm exemption under Virginia's building code. When reviewing the companion handout "Understanding Virginia's Farm Buildings Exemption" you will see to qualify the building must be used for certain things in the farming operation. The building must be used **PRIMARLY** for one of the six listed uses listed in the definition listed in the Virginia Code §36-99. Because the use must be "primarily" there does leave room to have guest to your farm for tours and other educational events.

Whether you are conducting on farm sales of one of your items produced, or having a school tour of your farm, its paramount that you take caution and prepare for those that aren't typically used to being on a farm. Also taking safety precautions help insure the welfare of the guest and your farm exemption.

Here are a few tips to keep in mind when having guest on your farm and in your buildings that have been exempt from building inspections.

Make Guest Safety Priority Number One

Often, we think of our farms just like our home, we know what door sticks, or what light doesn't work. When you have guest on the farm it's important to make sure they don't encounter things that could cause farm even by accident. Walk around your farm, take a friend or family member with you and let them look through fresh eyes to make sure you catch things that may need to be fixed or addressed before you open yourself up to guest (and the liability).

Decide What Is Off Limits

Are there areas that are just too risky to have guest? Areas that items stored that need to be locked up? Make sure you think about areas that are best to keep the visitors out of or at arm's length to make sure they are kept safe.

Provide handwashing and sanitizer stations if you have areas where guests can interact with animals. It may be a scary word but it's important to think about potential biosecurity risk, it is vital to keeping your herds/flocks safe. Additionally, guest may not know if they're allergic to something until it's too late, which can create a larger issue out of something originally thought harmless. Consider integrating handwashing into your farm tour.

Set Up Bathrooms

You can count on guest needing to use a rest room when they are visiting your operation. So, you need to be prepared when Mother Nature calls. If you have facilities on your farm, make sure they are clean and clear of any hazards. You may have to rent portable facilities to have on tour days and remember handwashing options along with the bathroom.

Position Employees Strategically

Make sure you have enough employees or volunteers to handle the guest on hand the day of visitors. Make sure you have lots of eyes around to help with the tour and avoid wondering guest or hands. Extra employees or help can help you prevent an accident or future headaches.

Provide Good Lighting and Clear Paths

Avoiding people from tripping or falling is important as is any potential accident you could have on the farm. Make sure all tools are in their place, and any loose items are clear of where your guest will or could go.

Print Off the Rules

Lay out some rules for the tour, say where they aren't allowed. You want to make their visit enjoyable as well as educational. It's OK to let them know what the "rules of the house" are how important it is to their safety.

Clearly mark any areas they should not go, it can only help your day go smoother. Often when you have on farm buyers or tours many will have young people with them. Make sure the adults with them know the potential for accidents or areas that are strictly off limits.

Be prepared for an accident

Make sure you have at least basic first aid supplies on-hand, as well as fire extinguishers, emergency numbers, and all exist marked if an enclosed area.

Go to <https://safeagritourism.org/> and print off helpful checklist to help prepare you for the big day.

Is Your Farm Ready for Visitors?

Having visitors to your farm is a fantastic way to help people learn, add to your community and create an atmosphere of joy and friendship. But it also involves some risk. Learn the risks, minimize them and your farm will remain a hit in your community!

How does the Virginia Code §36-97 and Virginia Administrative Code (VAC) 13VAC5-63-200 Chapter 2 define the meaning of the farm building or structure.

"Farm building or structure" means a building or structure not used for residential purposes, located on property where farming operations take place, and used primarily for any of the following uses or combination thereof:

1. *Storage, handling, production, display, sampling or sale of agricultural, horticultural, floricultural or silvicultural products produced on the farm;*
2. *Sheltering, raising, handling, processing or sale of agricultural animals or agricultural animal products;*
3. *Business or office uses relating to the farm operations;*
4. *Use of farm machinery or equipment or maintenance or storage of vehicles, machinery or equipment on the farm;*
5. *Storage or use of supplies and materials used on the farm; or*
6. *Implementation of best management practices associated with farm operations.*

Notes to remember:

- *Must be located on property where farming operations take place*
- *Must be used primarily for any of the 6 uses or combination of described above*