

There's a Farmer in My Classroom

A Virtual Agricultural Education Program for
Elementary Students



My name is Sara Preston, and I am a farmer, educator, and advocate for agriculture. I'm reaching out to share an opportunity to partner in a program that is making a meaningful impact in classrooms and communities.

As a farmer, I see every day how agriculture shapes our country. But through my work as an agricultural educator, I've also seen firsthand how disconnected many students, both urban and rural, are from where their food comes from. Many truly believe food begins at the grocery store, highlighting the growing need for accessible, accurate agricultural literacy opportunities.

That's why I created There's A Farmer in My Classroom, a virtual program designed to bridge this gap and complement existing agricultural education efforts. Through interactive farm tours, real-world connections with farmers, and classroom-ready resources, the program brings agriculture directly into schools in a way that is engaging, flexible, and impactful for both students and teachers.

The impact is lasting. Students often recall specific farms, animals, and lessons long after participating. Many form personal connections to the farmers they meet and gain a deeper understanding of how their food is produced—creating a foundation of trust, curiosity, and respect for agriculture that extends beyond the classroom.

Through support of There's A Farmer in My Classroom, partners play a direct role in:

- Expanding access to agricultural education for more students, classrooms, and communities
- Strengthening connections between farmers and the next generation
- Providing educators with high-quality, farmer-led resources that are both relevant and easy to implement
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This program is rooted in a shared commitment to responsibility, transparency, and the future of agriculture. By helping students better understand where their food comes from, we are building informed consumers, thoughtful advocates, and potential future leaders within the industry.

Together, we have the opportunity to strengthen the connection between agriculture and the communities it serves.

This document provides additional insight into the program, its impact, and opportunities for partnership. I would welcome the opportunity to connect and explore how we can work together.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Best,
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Executive Summary

Objective of There's A Farmer in My Classroom

Creating a program focused on agricultural education through engaging programming and authentic connections to students.

Overview of the Program

Imagine students across the state stepping onto a farm without ever leaving the classroom—watching cattle graze, seeing crops grow, and meeting the farmers who make it all happen. There's A Farmer in My Classroom is a year-long virtual adventure designed to bridge the gap between students and the farms that feed them.

Created by Sara Preston, a 6th-generation farmer and passionate ag educator, this program offers interactive and flexible experiences that fit seamlessly into any classroom. Through live farm tours, real-world connections, and hands-on resources, students will discover where their food comes from, meet the people who produce it, and explore the diversity of Iowa agriculture.

There's a Farmer in My Classroom focuses on four offerings:

Virtual Farm Tours – Travel across Iowa's farms, from cattle ranches to cornfields, and see agriculture in action.

There's A Cow in My Classroom – A special program for second graders, bringing the world of beef cattle right to their screens.

Quarterly Live Sessions – Chat with a real farmer, ask questions, and get an inside look at farm life.

Bi-Weekly Teacher Newsletters – Packed with ag-themed lesson plans, activities, and grant opportunities.

Teachers can easily integrate agriculture into their curriculum while also building their own agricultural literacy, helping them feel more confident teaching the subject.



About the Founder

Sara Preston

Sara Preston, a 6th generation farmer, was raised on a small livestock farm in southern Minnesota. With deep roots in the 4-H and FFA organizations, Sara has always cherished the opportunity to share and teach her passion for agriculture with others.

She holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Agricultural Marketing and Communications, with a minor in Animal Science, from the University of Wisconsin-River Falls. Sara's professional background encompasses diverse roles, including positions within the farm credit system, a state commodity group, Iowa State University Extension, and Ag in the Classroom. These experiences, coupled with her dedication to volunteer work, have significantly honed her speaking, writing, and teaching abilities, enabling effective communication with youth.

Now residing in Northern Iowa, Sara farms with her husband, Jared, their three young children, and Jared's multi-generational family. They operate a cow-calf and row crop farm outside of Swea City.

Sara's advocacy efforts have allowed her to collaborate with various organizations and companies, sharing insights about their farm and the agricultural industry. As a speaker, she connects with audiences of all sizes and age groups, ranging from elementary classrooms to professional organizations, bringing agriculture to life in a way that is approachable, engaging, and impactful.



Program Details

Before talking about the goals and offering of the program, let's start with some of the challenges teachers are experiencing that reflect the intentionality around the program.

Pain Points

Working with preschool through eighth grade teachers in the past four years, common pain points have become very clear. They include:

Teachers have too much on their plates

Creating curriculum, behavioral issues in students, larger class sizes due to the lack of teachers available; there is a lot riding on the teachers. This program gives teachers the chance to breathe, catch up on some tasks while students can virtually learn and engage with a farmer.

Lack of funds and bus drivers for additional programs

Not having the funding available to pay for additional programs in schools and trying to find a bus driver to take classrooms on field trips are two huge challenges many schools face. We want to offer a free program and resource for classrooms while also getting to "see" farms without the headache of logistics.

Teachers are being asked to do more with little resources

Even though plates are already full, many teachers are being asked to do one more thing but not always feeling like they have the resources to successfully and confidently complete the task. This is where an expert in the agricultural industry can step in and help engage the students while supporting teachers.



Programming Goals

When examining these pain points, these are goals and solutions for this program to be successful for both students and educators.

Bring more agriculture into the classroom

Agriculture literacy is extremely important, especially as both students and staff continue to be more removed from the farm. By introducing *There's a Farmer in My Classroom* into these classrooms, we give students a real life experience to American agriculture and a better understanding of where our food comes from.

Cultivate authentic relationships with an American farmer

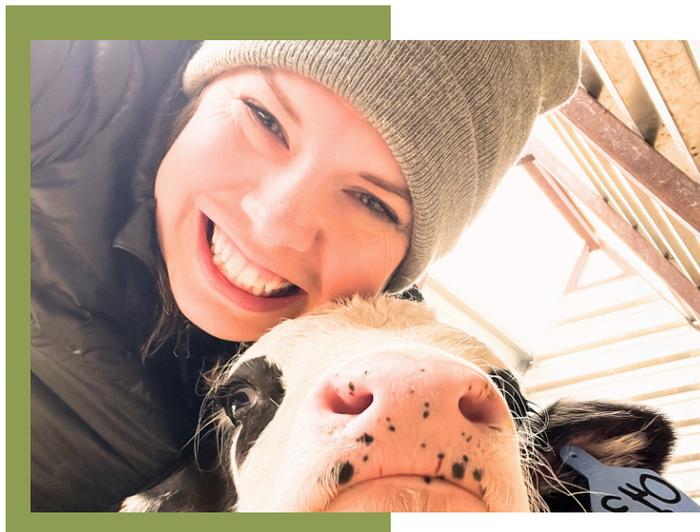
One take-away from the pandemic was people, specifically youth, need relationships and want authentic connections. What sets this program a part is that Sara will be creating that trust and interaction with the students and then will be taking them to additional farms to meet other farmers.

Create engaging and creative ways to educate students

Finding creative outlets to connect with students that gets them excited and engaged in the material or topic is a priority of this program.

Easy, simple tasks for teachers with this program doing the heavy lifting

Teachers don't need one more thing to worry about or create. By signing up to be involved in this program, we do the heavy lifting, creating all the video and written content. Their big ask will be to log on the video platform or joining a live Q&A when possible.



Programming Deliverables

Through There's A Farmer in My Classroom, elementary teachers can access four unique offerings that provide engaging curriculum while fostering connections and deeper insights into agriculture.

1. Passport to Agriculture Video Series

Students will virtually see a variety of farms and learn about the impact they make in the state. Every month there will be a new video that will be released from showcasing a farm across the state of Iowa.

Content for this program may include but not limited to:

- beef cattle
- dairy cattle
- sheep
- swine
- goats
- chicken layers
- turkeys
- corn
- soybeans
- cover crops
- niche industries

In each of the videos, students will join Sara as she will travel and showcase a variety of farms and the roots of the agricultural industry here in Iowa. Students will also have the opportunity to be introduced to the farmers that own these farms across the state that Sara and the class will be virtually touring.

These videos will show the behind the scenes of the farm so kids can have a greater understanding of how these farms work as well as their commitment to a high quality, safe, food supply that we grow and raise here in Iowa.

This program will be done virtually with teachers getting access to a platform (this is laid out more in the Implementation section) that will hold all of the videos of the farm tours. These will be pre-recorded videos so the educator can use them when time is fit for their classroom.



2. There's A Cow in My Classroom

“There’s a Cow in My Classroom” is a program Sara launched during the pandemic to creatively connect with students despite restrictions. Initially intended as a temporary solution, it quickly became a beloved initiative that has continued to grow in popularity, inspiring us to expand its reach and impact.

The program allows classrooms to “adopt” a cow for the school year, providing a hands-on, engaging way for young students to learn about beef cattle and the daily life of farmers.

How It Works:

1. Receiving A Class Cow:

- At the beginning of the school year, teachers sign up to receive their classroom cow. Each class gets to name their cow, fostering a sense of ownership and excitement.

2. Monthly Updates:

- Teachers and students receive regular update videos about their cow, covering topics such as the cow’s growth, daily care, and the role of farmers in ensuring animal well-being.
- These updates include insights into the broader beef cattle industry, tailored to elementary learning levels.

3. Calving Season Excitement:

- In February or March, the class cow gives birth to a calf, providing a unique learning opportunity.
- Students are informed of the calf’s arrival with an announcement video and are given the chance to name the new calf—a heifer (girl) or a bull (boy).

4. Learning about Calf Development:

- Post-calving, students explore how the cow cares for its calf and how the farmer ensures the calf’s growth and health.
- These lessons highlight important concepts such as the life cycle, nutrition, and the symbiotic relationship between farmers and animals.

Program Benefits:

- **Interactive Learning:** The program integrates videos, naming activities, and real-world agricultural examples, making learning fun and memorable for students.
- **Connection to Agriculture:** By forming a bond with their cow and calf, students gain a personal connection to agriculture, fostering trust and transparency.
- **Core Standards Alignment:** All materials are designed to complement classroom curricula, helping teachers meet educational standards while introducing agriculture-related topics.



3. Hosting Quarterly Live Videos

Students will get the chance to connect with Sara and another guest farmer live. They will give an updates on what is happening on the farm and then have a Q&A session for the kids having conversations, stories and ideas in their back pocket just in case questions get scares (which rarely happen when you are talking to an engaged group of kids).

4. Bi-Weekly Email as Resource/Farmer Connection

Every other week we will connect with the teacher giving suggestions on great agriculture books, lesson plans, even discussion around industry topics and answering questions from previous live sessions. We have learned from going into classrooms that often the teacher is learning just as much or sometimes more than the students about agriculture. We also know that to get adults engaged they need to know, like and trust you so this a way that we as farmers can be a resource for teachers giving them the facts in a fun way while also building the connection to a farmer.

Power of Impact

Every connection made through There's a Farmer in My Classroom leaves a lasting impression on students, teachers, and the future of agriculture. Here's how this program is planting seeds of understanding and growing real world impact in today's classrooms.

1. Cultivate Future Consumers Who Value Agriculture- By connecting students directly to where food comes from, sponsors help create informed consumers who understand and appreciate agriculture, building trust and loyalty for the future.
2. Build Authentic Connections Between Families and Farmers- Putting real faces and stories behind agriculture fosters curiosity, empathy, and lasting trust, helping companies strengthen their reputation as a community partner.
3. Inspire the Next Generation of Agricultural Leaders- Exposure to real-world challenges and careers in agriculture sparks interest in future professions, growing the workforce pipeline and ensuring agriculture remains strong.
4. Strengthen Local and Statewide Communities- Students develop pride in agriculture and see their community's role in feeding the world, this program with the help of generous sponsors are recognized as champions of both education and rural vitality.
5. Empower Teachers with Tools That Last All Year- Providing ready-to-use, engaging resources ensures agriculture is taught consistently and effectively, keeping our sponsors' support visible and appreciated by educators, students and families alike.



Implementation

Methods of Delivery

The primary methods of delivering content for the "There's A Farmer in My Classroom" program are through direct communication with teachers and the use of the Teachable platform. These methods ensure ease of access, comprehensive resources, and alignment with educational standards.

1. Email Communication:

- Teachers receive regular updates via email, including announcements about newly available virtual farm tours and reminders about funding/professional development opportunities.
- For the "There's A Cow in My Classroom" program, emails also provide specific instructions and supplementary resources to enhance the classroom experience.

2. Teachable Platform:

- Virtual tours are hosted on Teachable, a user-friendly platform that consolidates all necessary materials for each lesson in one place.
- Each lesson includes:
 - Teacher Directions: Clear, step-by-step instructions for integrating the tour into classroom activities.
 - Background Information: Comprehensive details to help teachers feel confident and informed, giving the background on lessons that they may not have much knowledge or experience with
 - Grade-Specific Worksheets: Downloadable, core standards-aligned worksheets designed for students to complete during the tour, reinforcing key concepts.
 - Videos and Photos that support the specific lesson
- The platform is structured to make it easy for teachers to access, download, and implement these resources effectively.

3. Welcome Kits are mailed to teachers so they have a printed copy of some information. Knowing that teachers have many things on their plates, sometimes it can be helpful to have a piece that they can put in their hands. These welcome kits include a personalized, hand written note to help connect and build the relationship of this program.

This delivery approach prioritizes accessibility, educational value, and ease of use, allowing teachers to seamlessly integrate agricultural literacy into their classrooms.

Screenshots from Teachable to give a better visual:

The image displays three screenshots from the Teachable platform. The first screenshot on the left is a 'Curriculum Preview' page for 'Meet Your Iowa Farmer Instructor', showing a table of contents with sections like 'Introduction', 'Welcome to There's A Farmer in My Classroom', 'Overview of Iowa's Agriculture Industry', 'Types of Farms in Iowa', 'Beef Farm::Preston Farms', 'Livestock Farms', and 'Dairy Farms'. The middle screenshot shows the lesson content for 'Meet Your Iowa Farmer Instructor', featuring a text block with a greeting to 4th graders and a paragraph about Sara Preston, an agriculture educator. The right screenshot shows a video player titled 'Visiting an Iowa Beef Farm' with a thumbnail image of Sara Preston and a play button overlay.

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Learn more about There's a
Farmer in My Classroom at
farmerinmyclassroom.com or
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