



Put the *Wild* into Your Child: Use a Trip to the Farm to Spark a Healthy Change!

Does your child know where fruits and vegetables come from?

Does she realize that carrots grow *in* the ground?

Has he ever seen a tomato or a watermelon ripening on the vine?

If the answer is no, a trip to a nearby farm for more than the pony rides and a petting zoo may be a way to enlighten the whole family to the benefits of fresh-grown foods, and to encourage your children to make healthier food choices.

Here's how to start your adventure:

- First, find a “pick-your-own” farm in your area. Local Harvest (<http://www.localharvest.org/>) offers a farm-finding tool and tips. Your local paper may also publish a list of farms—watch for one seasonally or search your paper’s Web site for past lists.
- Sign up for hands-on activities if available, such as making applesauce or churning butter from fresh milk.
- While at the farm, encourage everyone to try new foods and ask questions! You might be surprised by how willing your children will be to taste a radish, a purple tomato, or a blackberry that they’ve picked themselves. Chances are they’ll be more excited about plucking an apple from a tree than picking one off of the grocery store shelf.

If the nearest farm is too far away, don’t give up! There are other options, such as growing your own produce—pots and planters work if you don’t have a garden. Or, you can visit your local farmers’ market, where kids can see a variety of locally-grown produce, ask questions of the farmers directly, and (best of all) taste free samples.

Another benefit of having your children pick or grow their own food is that it may make them more eager to help you out in the kitchen! If you’re looking for healthy recipes for those extra helping hands, visit the **We Can! (Ways to Enhance Children’s Activity & Nutrition)**® Web site (<http://wecan.nhlbi.nih.gov>). Developed by the National Institutes of Health, **We Can!** provides resources for parents, caregivers, and communities to help children ages 8–13 maintain a healthy weight by improving food choices, increasing physical activity, and reducing screen time.

So, explore both the Web site and “the wilds” together with your family; by doing so you just might have them trying new, healthy foods and helping you with supper, too!