

Fifth grade Farmers

Feeding pigs and goats, gathering eggs and milking cows, cleaning the bunk house, building an outdoor bread oven, cooking meals for fifty with vegetables they harvested earlier in the day: these are some of the adventures awaiting Rutgers Prep fifth graders, who will soon spend four days on a working farm. On October 10th the fifth grade class will board the bus with four of their teachers and head for Athol, Massachussets. Destination Farm School: a three hundred acre working farm welcoming student groups eager to rise before the sun and learn by doing.

Fifth grade teacher Jane Chamberlain returns to Farm School every fall with a new group of fifth graders. She sees a fascinating spirit of simplicity and wonder take hold in each of the students as they experience together this new relationship with the natural world and their connection to the earth. “The kids get to know one another and interact in a completely new situation. As teachers, we learn to understand everyone of them in a whole new way. The experience is one of the most valuable they could ever have at this age. How tall a cow is, how great the taste of a freshly dug carrot is, how it feels to split and stack wood, how you might survive if you found yourself alone and unprepared in the woods: this is learning you can’t come by in a classroom.”

The fifth graders who have never been away from home before are a little apprehensive about the trip. They are being reassured by the sixth graders who went last year and are eager to encourage them with their own enthusiastic memories. Sixth grader Max Gottlieb of Old Bridge remembers loving the work as well as the leisure: “My favorite part was jumping in the haystacks after the chores were done.” “Cooking the potatoes and carrots right after we dug them up was amazing,” adds Sam Weingarten of Somerset.

Diego Miller, fifth grader from Somerset, is looking forward to being at the farm. “I really want to take care of the animals. But I guess I will have to clean the bunkhouse, too. That’s OK.” Ben Sweetman of Rocky Hill says, “I have never been away from home for such a long time. But it will be fun because I will be with so many of my friends.”

The twelve permanent workers at Farm School all love what they do, and are patient and knowledgeable teachers. The autumn colors will be in full splendor. The teachers and fifth grade students are preparing and packing well. The farm trip promises to be an excellent educational adventure.