Pathways
FOR SUSTAINABLE FOOD

How to organize an open day for agricultural students to explore and better understand pasture-based farming systems?

Guidelines for advisors and livestock farmers

INSTITUT DE L'ELEVAGE idele

This guide was developed as part of the European Pathways project, which aims to explore tomorrow's food systems. It presents a methodology resulting from a collective effort between the French Livestock Institute (Institut de l'Elevage) and a group of dairy farmers practicing pasture-based grazing in the Grand Ouest region. Its purpose is to support advisors and farmers in organizing an on-farm open day for agricultural education.

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APPROACH TO THE WORK CARRIED OUT WITH THE PATHWAYS GROUP

Some pasture-based farmers in the Pathways group regularly welcome school groups on their farms to explain their working methods and their vision of livestock farming in relation to current and future agricultural challenges. During these exchanges, **they observed that young people in agricultural training (from high school to technical diploma) receive little or no education on grass management and grazing, and have little or no understanding of the holistic approach required to manage pasture-based systems.**

Their interest is often focused on techniques related to intensifying milk production and simplifying work, with the robotization of farms often leading to a reduction or even a cessation of grazing. In contrast, the pasture-based systems represented by the Pathways group prioritize maximizing cost reductions by optimizing grass use through grazing.

Farmers are convinced that pasture-based systems offer solutions to many current challenges: water quality, carbon storage, biodiversity restoration, generational renewal, attractiveness of the farming profession, quality of working life, decision-making autonomy, reduced mental workload, and societal acceptance of livestock farming.

Based on this observation, they decided to focus their efforts on raising awareness among this audience of future farmers and advisors by sharing key messages about the benefits and functioning of pasture-based systems.

Three open days were organized as part of the Pathways project in 2024 and 2025, respectively:Ferme du Chênot (Mayenne)GAEC Vert de Lait (Côtes-d'Armor)Ferme du Bois (Orne)

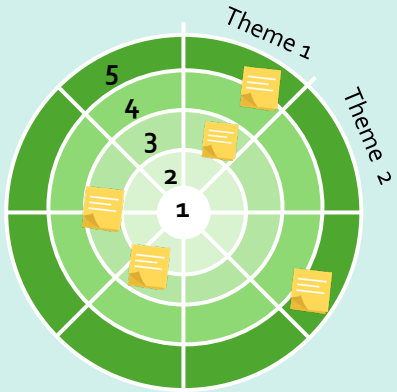
1. Defining the target audiences and key themes for open days

During an initial group meeting, the farmers identified a priority action to work on together. In smaller subgroups, they shared current practices that promote carbon storage on their farms and discussed what could or should be implemented. They then identified the barriers and levers for adopting these practices. This meeting highlighted their desire to showcase what is already being done on pasture-based farms through the group's experience and testimonies, and to communicate the advantages of these systems.

At a second co-construction meeting, the goal was to define the target audiences, key messages, and the form of communication. Using a brainstorming approach with post-it notes, the farmers first listed the objectives and messages to convey, then the potential target audiences. The objectives were later grouped into broad themes. The selection of priority targets was made after discussions about their relevance to these objectives, followed by a voting process using stickers. **The farmers identified agricultural education as a key target audience because it directly reaches both current professionals (young farmers in initial training, professionals in career transition, and project leaders preparing for installation) and future advisors, technicians, and staff from technical, financial, and administrative organizations.** It was therefore a priority to inform this audience about the benefits of livestock farming in grass-based forage systems.Next, the farmers inventoried their experiences in terms of communication. The final, participative part of the meeting focused on launching the organization of open days in detail, covering the framework (venue, equipment, needs, themes, points of attention) and identifying the specific considerations for communicating with learners.

Facilitating the first meeting

1. Work focus
2. Current practices on your farm
3. Actions you want to test/develop
4. Barriers encountered
5. Solutions to overcome these barriers
   → proposed actions to develop with the group



Facilitating the second meeting

Defining the action and its targets

1. Which targets are we aiming for?
2. What are the objectives of our action?
3. Are there specific objectives for certain targets?

Inventory of existing resources

1. Inventorying farmers' communication experiences
2. Inventorying existing sources

Concretizing the action

1. Organizing open days
2. Format
3. Content/themes
4. Logistics
5. Points of vigilance

2. Using data to substantiate and illustrate the key messages

Once the open day themes were defined, the farmers collectively considered which indicators to use to highlight the multiple benefits of pasture-based systems. At first, they were free to suggest any indicators they wished, with feasibility discussions taking place afterward. A set of indicators was then compiled to demonstrate the advantages of pasture-based systems compared to average regional practices, which are characterized by higher milk production per cow, greater reliance on maize silage and concentrates, and less emphasis on grazing.The selected criteria cover a broad range—economic, social, and environmental—to illustrate the varied strengths of pasture-based systems. Various metrics (impact per hectare and impact per kilogram of product) are prepared in advance to facilitate discussions and enrich the debate.

Economic indicators

- Milk production per cow and selling price
- Time spent grazing
- Amount of concentrates distributed
- Feed cost
- Fertilization costs
- Veterinary expenses
- Disposable income per work unit
- Share of subsidies in gross output
- Operational costs/output
- Annual capital/asset

Social indicators

- Weekly working hours
- Number of days off per year
- Number of lactations per cow

Environmental indicators

- Carbon footprint (kg CO_2 eq/L of milk produced and kg CO_2 eq/ha, including imported feed)
- Fuel and energy consumption
- Water quality indicator
- Biodiversity indicator
- Nutrient efficiency

After assessing the data available to us, we decided to use three complementary—but not exhaustive—datasets in relation to the indicators sought by the farmers:

- **The CAP'2ER database** allows us to compare the environmental results of our group with those of over 5,200 dairy farms in the Grand Ouest region (Brittany, Normandy, Pays de la Loire) that conducted a CAP'2ER assessment between 2013 and 2022. The CAP'2ER® diagnostic tool, based on life cycle analysis, evaluates both environmental impacts and the services provided, using a multicriteria approach. Several farming typologies were studied: organic farms, those with less than 30% maize in the forage area (SFP), and those with more than 30% maize.

- **The Inosys Réseaux d'élevage database** enabled us to position the farms in our group relative to the economic results of 116 farms in the Grand Ouest region, which are monitored annually as part of a partnership between the Chambers of Agriculture and the French Livestock Institute. Results are also analyzed by type of farming system. The Inosys farms generally fall within the upper range of the average results from the RICA (Farm Accountancy Data Network), but their results are achievable for the majority of farmers. These are mostly farms operating on a routine basis.

- It is important to compare farm results using the same method for calculating indicators. As a result, **about ten volunteer farmers from the Pathways group shared their economic data and completed a CAP'2ER assessment**. The group's average results are compared with those of more conventional and representative systems in the Grand Ouest region. These benchmarks will help demonstrate to students that the host farm of the "open day" is not unique; it is part of a network of farms with different practices but sharing common goals of reducing costs and enhancing grass utilization through grazing.

Three levels of interpretation to understand how pasture-based systems work

Visited farm: Farmer's testimony to embody the discussion and share their life story and career path. They have the credibility to speak to students and are listened to.

Pathways Group: the farmer who opens their doors is not unique; other equally high-performing farms exist in the region.

Databases enable students to gain a broader perspective on the visited farm as well as other, more traditional systems in the region.

ORGANIZING AN OPEN DAY: A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE

1. Find a farm willing to host an open day

Not all farmers feel comfortable with this exercise, especially when facing students who may critically assess less productive or different systems than what they know (from internships, family, etc.). For a first experience as an advisor, we recommend relying on an **experienced farmer** who is accustomed to presenting their farm to various audiences. A farmer who knows their talk and figures only needs support with creating visual aids (if they don't already have panels) and logistics.

For less experienced farmers—especially those without presentation materials—everything needs to be prepared, which requires more time. To ensure the host farmer feels confident speaking and comfortable on the day, it can be helpful to invite other experienced farmers to participate. They can help steer the discussion and ask questions of the host farmer. In any case, opening one's farm is not trivial and requires preparation to handle potential criticism and questions from students.

Finally, willingness alone is not enough! The farm must also be selected based on its **proximity to agricultural education institutions**. Teachers struggle to secure funding for buses and sometimes rely on students over 18 to use their own vehicles. Ideally, the farm should be within about an hour's drive of the institutions so that teachers can reasonably organize a half-day trip, given budget constraints and travel time.

Ideally, choose a farm located within a 30-minute drive of agricultural education institutions

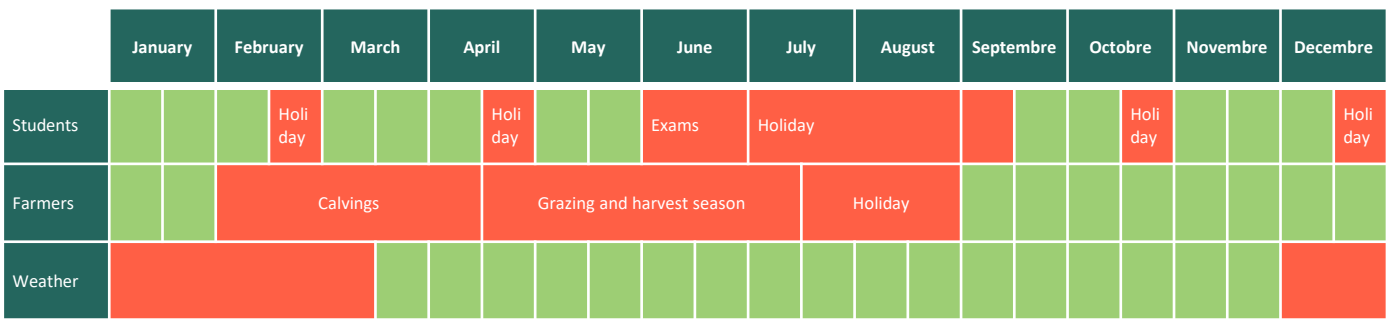
2. Choose the right time of year

Finding a date that fits the schedules of farmers, students, and teachers is essential but complex and requires good planning. Farmers with grass-based systems and spring-calving herds **face intense workloads at the end of winter for calving and in spring for harvests**. Meanwhile, students are unavailable during school holidays, exam periods, and weeks of internships or work placements on farms.

Autumn: the most suitable season for an open day on grass-based farms

In addition to these constraints, there is the issue of unpredictable weather: harvest dates, which are uncertain in late spring, can prevent farmers from participating, while winter conditions are not conducive to organizing open days. As a result, truly suitable time slots are limited. In this context, the most suitable season for our group is autumn. **However, initial contact with the targeted training programs should be made before the summer to ensure the educational day is integrated into their schedules from the start of the academic year.**

Availability calendar (highlighted in green) for students and farmers



3. Define the open day's format

Generally, teachers do not have a full day to spare for a farm visit, so organizing such an event as a **half-day** is recommended. Given that they need time to travel after the start of classes, the farm visit cannot begin before 10 AM and must end by 12:30 PM so that students can go to the cafeteria. **The content of the visit should be designed to fit a one- to two-and-a-half-hour time slot.**

If multiple classes are invited, it is recommended to divide the students into **level-based groups** and rotate them through different workshops to facilitate listening and exchanges. This format requires inviting external speakers to the farm. In the Pathways program, we have hosted up to 120 students at once, divided into three groups of 40. Ideally, groups should be limited to **15–30 students maximum**, depending on the level, to ensure active listening and diverse interactions, as some students are less comfortable speaking up in larger groups.

Available time slots for school groups: 10:00 AM–12:30 PM or 2:00 PM–4:30 PM

Limit group size to 15–30 students

Example of the schedule used during the Pathways open days events

As part of the Pathways project, we decided to highlight the multi-performance of grassland-based farming systems across the economic, social, and environmental dimensions. In addition to these themes—which require students to take a step back and analyze a livestock farming system—we wanted to offer a more technical workshop, focusing on the management of grassland systems. While the two workshops on the economic/social and environmental aspects were common to all three open days events organized, the third workshop was specifically chosen and designed by each host farmer.

Workshop 1

Economic and social performance of grassland-based farming systems

Workshop 2

Environmental performance of grassland-based farming systems

Workshop 3

Benchmarks and tools for pasture management

or

Work organisation in grassland-based systems with grouped spring calving and single milking

or

Pathway to setting up a grassland-based system and year-round work organization

Proposed schedule for Pathways open days events

- **10h00-10h30 – Plenary welcome**
  - Presentation of the project, Idele, and the speakers by the advisor
  - Presentation of the farm and its history by the host farmer
  - Students are divided into three groups based on their level
- **10h30-12h00 - Workshops** : Each group rotates through three different workshops, following the same timing for each:
  - 15 minutes for the presentation
  - 10 minutes for discussion and Q&A
  - 5 minutes to transition to the next workshop
- **12h00-12h20 - Group Feedback Session**
  - Evaluation method using post-it notes
  - A questionnaire created by the farmers to assess students' perceptions of the agricultural world
- **12h20-12h30 - Final Plenary Conclusion**

4. Invite teachers

Farmers generally have a good knowledge of the agricultural training programs in their area, and some even know certain teachers. They therefore serve as key contacts for establishing initial communication with teachers, who can also direct colleagues from other institutions or programs. Official invitations (date, location, theme of the visit) should be sent well in advance, as teachers' schedules are often inflexible. **For organizing open days in the autumn, it is recommended to make contact before the summer holidays to facilitate the inclusion of the day in their back-to-school schedule.**

Invite teachers as early as possible to ensure their availability

It would be useful to create a booklet detailing the main results from the analysis of economic and environmental databases, which will be covered during the workshops on the day. This document can be sent to teachers in advance of the visit, with the aim of providing them with enough material to prepare the day with their students, taking into account their prior knowledge levels. Some teachers have already shared this booklet with classes in advance, to spark questions for the visit, while others have used it as a follow-up support to highlight the day's insights.

To access the booklets prepared for teachers

Ideally, it would be preferable to consult teachers in advance to determine what format for the day and supporting documents they would prefer. While this approach is engaging and participatory, it requires teachers to be involved and demands preparation time from farmers and advisors to meet their requests.During the Pathways events, groups from different educational levels attended simultaneously, using a single support document for discussions. Workshop speakers were informed about the level of each group and adapted their discussions accordingly.

5. Develop workshop materials in collaboration with farmers

Creating an attractive visual support to capture students' attention while helping the farmer structure their speech can take time, but it is essential for the success of the open day.

Methode to co-create visual support

- Call the farmer to discuss the content of their workshop:
  - What is the topic of your workshop?
  - Which messages do you consider the most important to convey?
  - Do you have key figures to illustrate your points (description of the system, environmental or economic evaluation results, working hours)?
  - What is your annual work organization, or the daily tools you use?
  - Do you already have supports I could use to create the panel (supports from previous open days, a brief document describing the farm and its operation, etc.)?
- From the information gathered, prepare a concise, highly visual support that highlights the key figures and aligns with the farmer's speech logic during their workshop.

Themes of the panel created with the farmers

- Year-round work organization in grassland-based systems with grouped spring calving
- Pasture management in relation to grass growth dynamics
- Quality of working life
- Transitioning to single milking: motivations and impacts on work organization
- Setting up a grassland-based system: pathway and farm selection
- Key figures and tools for pasture management
- Economic performance of grassland-based systems compared to dairy farms with more than 30% of maize in the forage area
- Grassland-based systems: producing milk with minimal inputs and maximizing environmental services rendered

Building well-structured supports is the foundation for a successful open day

Creating panels takes time and requires the host farmer to have already thought through the content of their workshop in advance. Developing a dedicated workshop for the host farmer typically takes an average of 2 working days, including the call to gather data, graphic design, and validation.

6- Accompagner l'éleveur dans la construction de sa séquence introductive

Each open day began with a presentation of the Pathways project, the speakers, and the farm as a whole. This plenary introduction allowed each host farmer to tailor their own focus. For example, the farmers at Le Chênot emphasized their work belongs to an ecosystem bigger than the farm itself, those at GAEC Vert de Lait highlighted their farm's history and their transition from a traditional Breton system to a fully grass-based approach, and the team at Ferme du Bois showcased their journey and their decision to set up a grassland-based system. Farmers play a central role in this sequence, setting the tone for the visit; therefore, it is essential to support them in developing this section.

7. Select the workshop locations

In training, young people generally view hands-on farm visits very positively. Even when time on site is limited and the open day focuses more on a specific theme than technical content, the farm visit remains a strong expectation. It is therefore important to define in advance the memorable images students will take away: the animals, buildings, milking parlor, and tractor.

Here are our recommendations on this topic:

- **Workshops should be spread across the farm** so that students visit different locations as they move between sessions.Ideally, workshops are held outdoors to allow for great photos, but a backup plan for rainy weather must be in place.
- Depending on the workshop theme, certain locations can be signposted.

Students should feel like they are touring the farm.

Economic and social performance: in front of the farm machinery to illustrate low mechanization costs or inside the building

Grazing management, grouped spring calving: in the pastures, among the animals

Environmental performance:

- In the meadow, by a watercourse or hedgerow, to discuss biodiversity, health, and pollution impact
- In front of the barn/wood chip drying system, to address energy consumption

8. Prefer pairs for workshop facilitation

Running a workshop alone can feel tedious if there are many repetitions and little interaction from the students. Ideally, having two facilitators per workshop allows for a variety of perspectives and experiences. We tested two types of partnering approaches, both of which proved highly enriching—for the participants as well as the facilitators.

Farmer and advisor

This pairing works very well, especially for workshops with a whole-farm approach. The advisor is familiar with the overall numerical results of the study, while the host farmer illustrates these results with their lived experience. With three simultaneous workshops, it's not necessarily the host farmer who presents the session, but rather another member of the group who steps in to help. The experience is all the richer: students have access to the figures from the visited farm, as well as another farmer who offers a complementary perspective and can speak about their own situation and know-how. This creates some distance and can make it easier for students to ask questions.

Young farmer and experienced farmer

This pairing is especially relevant for technical workshops and is extremely enriching from a human perspective. The experience of the most seasoned farmers provides students with major benchmarks for managing grass and the herd, thereby giving them a framework. Conversely, newly installed or soon-to-be farmers have fewer benchmarks in mind but raise fundamental questions about their installation project, the sizing of their system, and their life goals. These testimonies push students to reflect on their own projects and desires.

Diversifying facilitators to multiply perspectives and experiences while ensuring their comfort

9. Adopt the right approach: advisor facilitates, farmer shares experience

Technical advisors and research engineers are used to presenting trial results in a top-down manner. However, for open days aimed at students, this approach can limit participant engagement, both in terms of listening and involvement. It is therefore crucial—especially for advisors—to move away from this presenter posture and adopt the role of a facilitator. While the facilitator does introduce the workshop to clarify concepts (such as greenhouse gases, economic indicators, etc.), they then guide students to analyze the results presented on the panels independently. To do this, the facilitator must plan several prompts to steer the students' thinking (see the section on presenting the different workshops from page 16).

From the farmers' perspective, their life journey and the motivations behind their system choices are of great interest to students. Young people generally have little trouble questioning them about the farm's operations. Farmers therefore take on a different role than advisors: they share their own story and situation, and this testimony is highly enriching for the students.We recommend dividing classes into groups by level to ensure they share the same understanding of key messages and feel comfortable asking questions and interacting.

Dividing classes into level-based groups to promote understanding and interaction

The farmer shares their experience and expertise

The facilitator clarifies concepts and guides the reflection

10. Encourage student participation and engagement

Even if multiple interactions take place during the workshop, it is important to set aside time afterward to allow students to fully express themselves about the content presented. If interaction and reactions are lacking—which can happen—it is necessary to prepare a few follow-up questions to encourage them to speak up.

There are several ways to engage participants:

- **Show understanding** to build confidence in the shyest students. Reassure them by explaining that there are no bad questions, only those that go unasked.
- **Check audience comprehension** by asking questions or prompting feedback on unclear points.
- **Spark attention** by using quiz-style questions, games, or alternating between theoretical knowledge and real-life experiences.

And how do you do it at home (on your parents' farm, your internship mentor's farm, etc.)?

Do you know what the climate will be like in your region by 2050? Which European or French city do you think will have the climate closest to yours at that time?

What has changed in the past decade regarding how your parents run their farm? Are there climate-related factors that challenge the economic choices made by your grandparents?

What do you think about what your colleague just said? Do you agree?

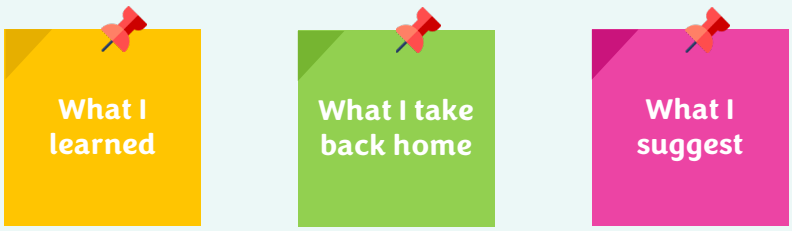
11. Evaluate the open day in two stages

1. Evaluation of the open day using the sticky note method

Conducting a debrief after an open day is not always easy, especially when it involves a large audience—even more so when it's aimed at students. The European Néfertiti project has therefore developed a simple and quick method that, in about ten minutes, allows organizers to gather participant feedback and evaluate the impact of the messages presented.

Post-it method

- Give each participant three sticky notes and five minutes to write down: one thing they learned, one idea they will take home and possibly implement, one suggestion for improving the content or organization of the open day. Have them write only one message per Post-it.
- If you have enough time, ask each person to explain what they wrote and stick their sticky note on a pre-prepared board with the three questions. Otherwise, collect all the sticky notes and analyze them afterward.



2. Perception of grassland systems and agriculture

After the sticky notes activity, each student receives a questionnaire created by the Pathways farmer group to better understand the future generation of farmers' stance on grassland-based livestock farming and the major challenges facing agriculture. This exercise encourages students to reflect on their own vision of farming. It also gives facilitators and farmers insight into the agricultural model the students envision.

12. Provide students with a summary of the day's key messages

Students don't always take notes during open days, so we prepared a **double-sided document summarizing the key messages from each workshop**. This visual, eye-catching handout is built from the panels presented and does require some preparation (about one day). However, it's worth distributing to reinforce the messages and ensure students don't leave the farm empty-handed.

Pour retrouver les recto-verso préparés pour les étudiants

13. Take time to conclude the open day with all participants

We tested different open day formats during the Pathways project and found that a general conclusion session, with all students and speakers present, is the best way to wrap up the day. It allows us to recap the key messages students should remember, address any final questions, and even engage in a broader discussion about their vision of agriculture. This is also an opportunity for teachers and students to thank the host farmer and the speakers. It is recommended that the advisor prepare a small gift to thank the host farmer for their commitment and time.

Wrap up the day by recapping the key messages, exchanging thoughts, and thanking the host farmer and the speakers

MANAGING COMMUNICATION ABOUT OPEN DAYS

1. Promote the event in advance

Media coverage is important to amplify the messages shared with the dozens of students attending the open day. There are two communication channels to prioritize:

- **Agricultural press**: The communication service sends out a press release one month before the event with key details (content, location, date, times, and the organizer's contact information). Journalists then follow up with any questions and express their intention to attend.
- **Social media**: The communication service publishes a post on major social media platforms to widely promote the event.

The host farmer and other speakers should be informed of any journalists' presence during the open day.

2. Wear distinctive, easily recognizable clothing

The European Pathways project provided all speakers with bright orange T-shirts featuring the project logo on the back. While the color was quite bold, it allowed us to be easily recognized by teachers, students, and journalists alike. The orange became part of our visual identity throughout the three open days. Unlike caps, which are only worn in good weather, or beanies, which are only used in the cold, the T-shirt can be worn in any weather—even over other clothing.

A brightly colored T-shirt: an effective way to be spotted at a glance by students and journalists

3. Take a group photo before the students arrive

Caught up in the whirlwind of logistics and hit by hunger by late morning, it's easy to forget a crucial photo for marking the event: the group photo with all the speakers, as well as the one with the host farmers. To avoid this oversight, it's best to take them at the start of the day, as soon as the whole team arrives, so you can then focus fully on setting up the workshops and approach the rest of the day with a clearer mind.

The group photo: an essential must-have, often neglected due to lack of time or poor anticipation

4. Designate someone to welcome latecomers and take photos

One of the speakers, designated in advance for the day, must be free to handle several tasks:

- **Welcome journalists and latecomers**, who may arrive even while a presentation is underway. This person is essential so that the other speakers can fully focus on their workshops.
- **Take photos throughout the event.** Every successful open day should be documented with high-quality photos that capture the energy and theme of the day. The designated person will need to move around with the students to photograph the speakers in action.

Training in the basics of photography and having good equipment is essential to capture high-quality images that truly convey the energy of the open day.

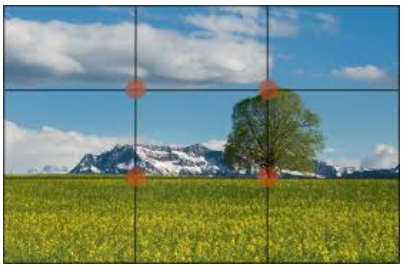
5. Be trained and equipped to take high-quality images

A few tips for taking high-quality photos

- **Ask for participant consent:** Always get permission before photographing anyone at the event. Ideally, have each participant sign an image rights form, but with a large group of students, this isn't practical. Instead, ensure you have their verbal consent and offer those who prefer not to be photographed the option to step out of the frame.
- **Organize workshops outdoors:** Outdoor workshops with natural light are always preferable to indoor ones, where backlighting is common. Weather may not always cooperate, especially in autumn, but that's part of the challenge. To avoid backlighting, position the speaker at a three-quarter angle facing the sun.
- **Use a phone with good photo quality:** Not all phones have the same camera resolution. Use the best-performing phone available among your team of speakers.
- **Avoid zooming in:** Zooming in with a phone significantly reduces photo quality—it's a habit to avoid. If needed, you can always crop the photo afterward to focus on the subject, but don't zoom while taking the shot.
- **Keep the horizon straight and center the subject:** A tilted horizon makes a photo unusable. Try to keep the horizon level and center the subject.
- **Vary your subjects:** During an open day, consider photographing:
    - Students (who haven't signed an image rights form), ideally from behind to avoid showing their faces.
    - Speakers and facilitators in motion as they explain and use body language.
    - Speakers using their panels to deliver a message.
    - Groups of students with the farmer and animals in the background (if nearby).
    - Interactions between students and speakers.
    - The farm setting and animals.

A well-composed photo places the horizon line in the lower third, leaving the upper two-thirds for the sky.

La règle des deux tiers / un tiers



Many free editing software options are available, such as VN (ideal for short social media videos edited on smartphones) or CapCut (for desktop editing and greater comfort).

A few tips for creating a video of the event

If you want to create a video of the day that truly resonates, **plan ahead!** Filming spontaneously won't guarantee good image or content quality, and it may not hold attention. Here are some rules to follow for producing a great video:

- **Prepare the content in advance by drafting a storyboard:** For the video to be engaging, it must first and foremost be informative—not just a visual recap of the day. Beforehand, define:
    - The video's duration (keep it short for social media).
    - The key messages: work with the farmers to decide who says what on the day.
    - Interesting cutaway shots to illustrate the video.
- **Use quality equipment, preferably tested beforehand to avoid surprises:**
    - A stabilizer or tripod for steady shots—otherwise, the video will feel nauseating.
    - A lapel microphone for high-quality audio—otherwise, viewers won't watch. Be mindful of the cable length between the mic and phone and use headphones to ensure good sound quality.
    - A fully charged phone with enough storage for all recordings.
- **Don't assume you can just become a videographer!** Ideally, you should have received basic video production training before tackling such a project.

6. Share updates on social media after the event

Posting on social media after the open day is a great way to share key figures, such as the number of participants and the workshop themes. Photos can showcase the farm setting, the speakers, and the panels used during the workshops. It's also an effective way to highlight the various materials used (booklets, panels, infographics) if they were previously uploaded online.

The agricultural press is an effective channel for promoting this type of event. It's advisable to ask journalists for the opportunity to proofread their article before publication, to ensure the accuracy of the information and the correct mention of partners. Journalists will usually prefer to highlight the host farmers rather than the content of the workshops, which helps embody the message more effectively.

LinkedIn post published by Idele

Institut de l'Elevage (idele)
29 837 abonnés
4 mois •

[Retour en images - Portes ouvertes à la ferme du Bois]
Comment s'installer en #élevage #laitier et trouver un équilibre entre temps de travail, viabilité économique et qualité de vie ?

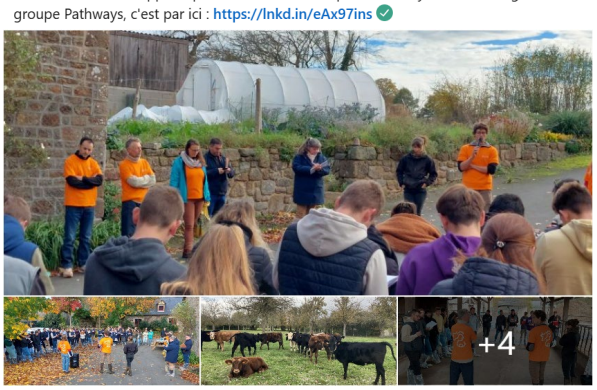
Yoann et Jeanne, jeunes installés hors cadre familial, ont fait le choix :
👉 d'un système herbager
👉 avec vêlages groupés de printemps
👉 monotraite toute l'année

Au programme, échanges autour de trois ateliers :

🔹 Parcours d'installation et organisation du travail en système vêlages groupés de printemps
🔹 Lecture économique des deux premières années d'installation
🔹 Intérêts environnementaux des systèmes herbagers qui cherchent à minimiser les intrants tout en maximisant les services rendus

🗓️ C'était le 4 novembre
✅ 60 étudiants de l'Orne et de la Mayenne.
💡 organisée dans le cadre du projet européen #Pathways.

Pour découvrir les supports présentés et en savoir plus sur les systèmes herbagers du groupe Pathways, c'est par ici : https://lnkd.in/eAx97ins



Article published by L'Agriculteur Normand

22 - 20 NOVEMBRE 2025 REUSSIR - L'AGRICULTEUR NORMAND
SERVICES

L'autonomie pousse dans les prés de Yoann Quiniou

Installé en 2023 à la Ferme du Bois, dans l'Orne, Yoann Quiniou a choisi de miser sur un système herbager, équilibré, performant et durable. Il a témoigné devant une soixantaine d'étudiants, lors d'une porte ouverte mardi 4 novembre par l'Institut de l'élevage et leur groupe d'éleveurs herbagers du Grand Ouest.

« J'ai vu beaucoup de fermes, étudié de nombreux systèmes. J'avais une idée précise de ma future exploitation : herbagers, pâturages, vêlages groupés. C'était la condition sine qua non », partage Yoann Quiniou devant la soixantaine d'étudiants (de la Terminale au BTS) venue visiter sa ferme située à Loré, dans l'Orne.


Yoann Quiniou et Jeanne Hervault, éleveurs laitiers à Loré dans l'Orne, ont ouvert les portes de la Ferme du Bois. © LA


L'Idele a présenté la ferme sur plusieurs aspects à la soixantaine d'étudiants présents (de la Terminale au BTS). © LA

L'HERBE AU CŒUR

Organisée mardi 4 novembre par l'Institut de l'élevage et son groupe d'éleveurs herbagers du Grand Ouest mobilisé dans le cadre du projet Pathways - dont Yoann Quiniou fait partie -, la matinée s'est déroulée en trois temps : l'installation et l'organisation du travail en vêlages groupés de printemps ; performance économique des systèmes herbagers ; intérêt environnemental des systèmes herbagers. Le premier étant présenté par l'éleveur et sa compagne Jeanne Hervault, bientôt associée de l'exploitation.

Ingénieur agronome de formation, ancien salarié agricole, contrôleur laitier dans le Jura puis directeur de l'exploitation agricole du lycée Saint-Lô Thère, Yoann Quiniou a parcouru de nombreuses fermes du Grand Ouest avant de trouver celle qui correspondait à son projet : 68 hectares regroupés, une cinquantaine de laitières de race Normande et un contexte pédoclimatique favorable au pâturage à l'année.

ÉQUILIBRE

« Le montant de reprise est maîtrisé : je loue le bâtiment d'élevage et les terres jusqu'en 2030, ce qui allège les annuités », précise-t-il. Ici, la gestion de l'herbe est le cœur du système. Pas de concentrés : uniquement herbe pâturée, enrubannage et foin. Les prairies naturelles sont progressivement renouvelées en temporaires pour améliorer la valeur alimentaire. *« L'été, j'utilise un peu d'enrubannage pour maintenir la production »*, confie l'éleveur. Avec 3 695 litres de lait par vache, la monotraite et un arrêt en janvier, le système s'équilibre entre autonomie et qualité de vie. Les vêlages groupés au printemps permettent une pause hivernale bienvenue. *« Ces systèmes sont aussi pensés pour satisfaire le bien-être de l'éleveur en prenant des vacances plusieurs fois dans l'année. »*

« J'ai visité des fermes exclusivement situées dans le Grand Ouest, au climat pédoclimatique favorable au pâturage à l'année. »

« Il nous fallait un système cohérent avec nos valeurs, sur lequel nous pourrions mener une vie sereine. »


Le lycée de Sées et deux classes de BTS du CFP de la Futaie-les-Touches étaient présents. © LA

Petit à petit, les Kiwis, Jersiaises et Vikings rods prennent place dans le troupeau, en croisement avec des Normandes. Le taux de renouvellement est de 32 % et l'âge du premier vêlage : 28 mois. *« Nous voulons des vaches plus légères, efficaces et adaptées au pâturage : la salle de traite est à un kilomètre du pré le plus éloigné »*, souligne Yoann Quiniou. Un choix assumé, à l'image d'un système qui conjugue sobriété, autonomie et cohérence.

LUDIVINE ANGÉ


L'élevage est croisé Normandes, Kiwis, Jersiaises et Vikings rods. © LA


Sur la ferme de Yoann. © LA

Le projet européen Pathways (2021-2026)

« Le projet européen Pathways étudie les chemins possibles pour assurer la transition des filières animales européennes et renforcer d'ici 2050 la cohérence entre production, durabilité, qualité des produits et attentes sociétales nouvelles. Dans ce cadre, trois groupes d'agriculteurs français se sont portés volontaires pour participer aux réflexions en porcs, volailles, bovins, explique l'Idele. À l'Ouest, principal bassin laitier français, les fermes ayant plus d'un tiers de maïs fourrage dans leurs surfaces fourragères sont prédominantes. Il y a vingt ans déjà, 44 % du lait français produit en plaine l'était dans des fermes avec ce profil. Cependant les prairies jouent un rôle crucial pour la qualité de l'eau, des sols et la biodiversité. Afin de faire connaître les atouts d'une production laitière valorisant l'herbe aux jeunes, le groupe d'éleveurs laitier volontaires Pathways souhaite échanger lors de journées à la ferme et montrer leurs bons résultats économiques et environnementaux. L'Idele les accompagne dans leur démarche. »

TO-DO LIST FOR ORGANIZING AN OPEN DAY

5 months before

1. Define key messages and select the volunteer farmer to host the event. – 1.5 days for the meeting with the group of farmers and the meeting preparation / 3 facilitators → 4.5 days total
2. Plan the program and schedule of the open day: duration, number of workshops, location, and date. – 0.3 day
3. Invite local teachers: ask farmers for contacts and reach out to colleagues in the area. – 0.2 day
4. Prepare clear materials:
   - Panels – 5 days
   - Booklets – 10 days (data processing and booklets writing)
   - Infographics – 1 days

TOTAL = 21 days for data processing and content development

1 month before

1. Reserve a sound system for the introductory plenary session of the open day.
2. Select workshop locations with the farmer and plan backup options in case of rain. Ensure animals are near buildings or in the pasture for the grazing workshop—this adds visual appeal, sparks discussion, and gives students the impression they've toured the farm.
3. Form pairs for workshop facilitation: This makes the sessions livelier, especially when farmers are involved as facilitators (e.g., varied experiences like a retired farmer/future farmer, engineer/farmer, or two farmers in conversation to support the host farmer).
4. Compile a list of technical documents on grassland and grazing management to deepen the subject.
5. Send a press release to journalists to inform them of the event.
6. Post on social media to announce the open day.
7. Prepare a storyboard if a video is to be filmed during the open day.

TOTAL = 2 days for logistics

1 week before

1. Send the panels to the printer (plexiglass panels are ideal—they're rigid, weatherproof, and can be reused by farmers for several years).
2. Email the teachers with:
   - The schedule: times and venue address (include a map if the farmer doesn't already have one).
   - The program and timing: plenary welcome session followed by student rotations through workshops.
   - Group assignments by class level and rotation schedule.
   - Reminders: punctuality and overshoes for students.
   - Ask if they're arriving by bus or car to organize parking.
   - The booklet (if a detailed document is prepared to help teachers prepare for the open day).
3. Purchase a gift to thank the host farmer.
4. Book a restaurant for lunch with all speakers.

TOTAL = 1 day for communication activities

The day before

1. Prepare the equipment:
   - Sound system with microphone (ensure you have spare batteries and a power source to plug in the system).
   - Presentation materials: panels, infographics.
   - End-of-visit questionnaires.
   - Pink/green/yellow sticky notes (one set per student) and pens.
   - Attendance sheet (to be signed by teachers and journalists) + a separate sheet for farmers if invited to the restaurant.
   - Overshoes (in case teachers forgot to bring theirs).
   - Documentation on the open day's topic, useful for students.
   - Gift for the host farmer.

TOTAL = 0.5 day to prepare the materials

Le jour J

Before the students arrive

1. Set up signage to direct buses and cars to the parking area.
2. Take the group photo.

Welcome

1. Introduce the organizing body and the project it is part of.
2. Introduce the speakers.
3. Host farmer's welcome speech.
4. Remind participants of the group compositions and the order of rotations through the workshops.

Workshops rotation

1. Attitude to adopt during workshops:
   - For advisors: assume the role of a facilitator rather than a presenter—don't hesitate to engage students and encourage their participation.
   - For farmers: share their story and be open to feedback and criticism.
2. Reinforce basic concepts to avoid losing students early in the day (e.g., greenhouse effect, greenhouse gases, economic indicators).Allow time for exchanges with students.

Open day evaluation

1. At the end of the last workshop:

- Evaluate the day using the sticky note method with each group: what I learned / what I'll remember / what I suggest improving →Distribute the sticky notes.
- Have students complete a survey on their vision of agriculture.
- Collect all sticky notes and questionnaires before students leave the workshop.

Conclusion

1. Hold a wrap-up session for the half-day with all students and open day organizers. This provides an opportunity to revisit the key takeaways and for teachers and students to thank the host farmer for their welcome and the speakers.

With the farmers

1. Debrief the open day with the participating farmers

Communication management

1. Take photos of the host farmers.
2. Take photos of the workshops for social media.
3. Ask to proofread journalists' articles.

TOTAL = 1 day per facilitator present → 3 days total.

Days after

1. Prepare a social media post using the day's photos.
2. Create a web article to gather all documents in one place.
3. Collect and analyze the sticky notes and questionnaires.
4. Proofread the journalists' articles.

} 2 days

5. Provide feedback on the day's flow and student feedback to the participating farmers and the whole team. – 1 day for the meeting with the group of farmers / 3 facilitators → 3 days total

TOTAL = 5 days

TOTAL = 32.5 days to organize an open farm event with 3 facilitators, including 2 days involving all 3 facilitators (excluding working meetings).

FEEDBACK ON THE EVALUATION OF THE PATHWAYS OPEN DAYS

By the students

1. Day evaluation using the sticky note method

After the discussions, the students were invited to share their thoughts on the format and content of the open day through the animation method proposed by the European Nefertiti project. Overall, the students enjoyed these open days and discovered new practices or concepts, such as group calving, single milking, crossbreeding, and carbon storage. Logistical constraints—such as the size of the groups and the cold November weather—may have contributed to reduced engagement from some students, who were not placed in ideal conditions to interact with the farmers. The students also repeatedly expressed their regret at not being able to see the entire farm (buildings, herd, equipment), as a complete tour was difficult to organize within the framework of a themed open day like this one.

What I learned

At the Chênot farm (Pays de la Loire)

- We concluded that grazing-based farms have a lower environmental impact, with lower stocking rates and a stronger connection to nature.
- I learned that a maize-based system produces more than a grazing-based system, but it also consumes more.
- I remember that grazing systems with extensive grasslands store more carbon.
- Grazing-based systems help reduce nitrates in water.
- Grazing-based systems are economically viable and low-cost. They require little labor time.
- I discovered the CAP'2ER tool to calculate the carbon footprint of farms.
- You don't need many cows to make a living.

At the GAEC Vert de Lait (Brittany)

- I learned that operating costs are low compared to maize-based farms, with less labor time.
- I learned you can take vacations in this profession.
- You can produce milk just by grazing.
- I didn't know you could reduce operating costs so much.
- With spring block calving, you can go two and a half months without milking.

At the farm du Bois (Normandy)

- I learned a new way of working.
- I learned a lot about grazing management.
- I discovered the Kiwi breed.
- I did not know you could use foster cows to raise calves.
- I disovered bale grazing.
- Spring block calving is way to free some time.
- What I learned : stay open-minded.

What I take back home

At the Chênot farm (Pays de la Loire)

- Incorporate more grazing into our livestock system.
- I don't want to implement anything and keep our current maize-based system.
- Plant hedgerows
- Improve workload
- More grass-focused ration, not necessarily only grazing.
- If I set up my farm tomorrow, a grazing system seems to align with my values and goals.
- It's important to inform yourself about different practices.

At the GAEC Vert de Lait (Brittany)

- Single milking can reduce work load.
- Group calving and first calving at 24 months
- Cross-breeding for better milk solids production.
- Increase grazing to try to maximize cost reduction.
- Minimize labor time to spend more time with family.

At the farm du Bois (Normandy)

- Implement grazing.
- Block calving and reduce the age at first calving
- This visit confirms my plan to set up a conventional suckler system.

Ce que je suggère

At the Chênot farm (Pays de la Loire)

- Visit the farm.
- Don't just show the positive, but also the negative aspects of grazing systems.
- More interaction during workshops.
- Make smaller groups (30 students per group).

At the GAEC Vert de Lait (Brittany)

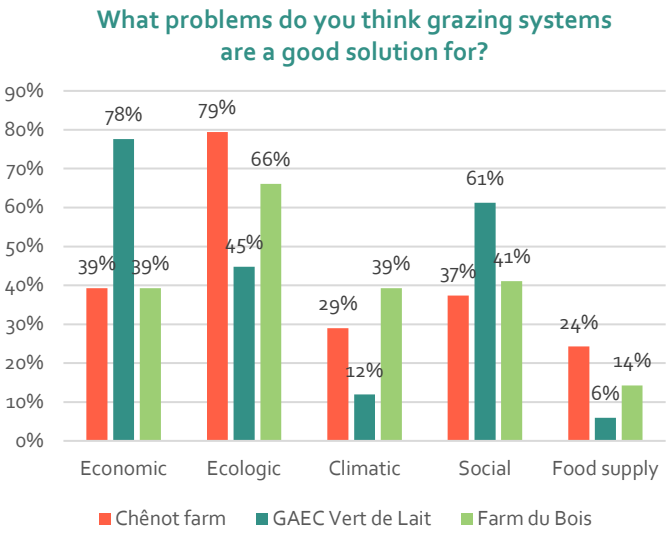
- Visit the farm (milking parlor, barn, grasslands).
- Make workshops more interactive/fun.
- Organise the event indoors or in summer, but not outdoors in November (the students were cold).

At the farm du Bois (Normandy)

- Visit the farm (herd, equipment, cider-making workshop).
- I would have liked to see and explore the dairy herd and its management.
- Improve the parking lot signage for cars.

2. Analysis of student perceptions of the agricultural world

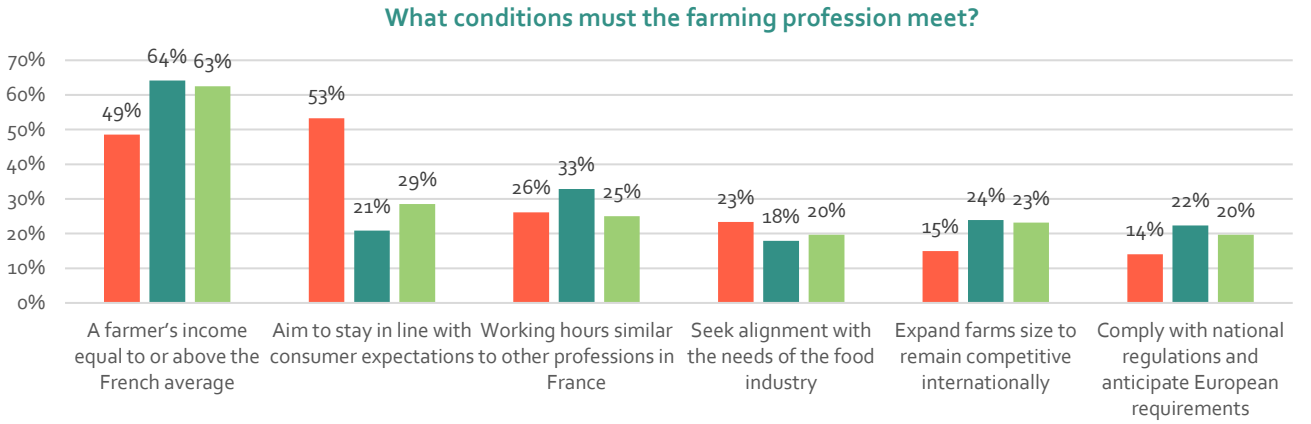
During the three open days, 228 students—from first-year to BPREA level—responded to a questionnaire created by farmers to gather their perceptions of agriculture and grazing systems. **For 71% of them, the visit revealed a type of farm they were not previously familiar with, highlighting the lack of visibility of grazing farms in agricultural education**. The students were then asked to freely describe the farm they visited. After grouping the responses, the farms were predominantly described as thoughtful and well-organized (30%), environmentally respectful (24%), economical (12%), low-intensive (9%), and self-sufficient (8%).The students particularly noted the ecological strengths of the Chênot farm, the economic performance of the GAEC Vert de Lait, and the reflection on farm establishment at the farm du Bois—all in line with the messages shared by the farmers during the open days.



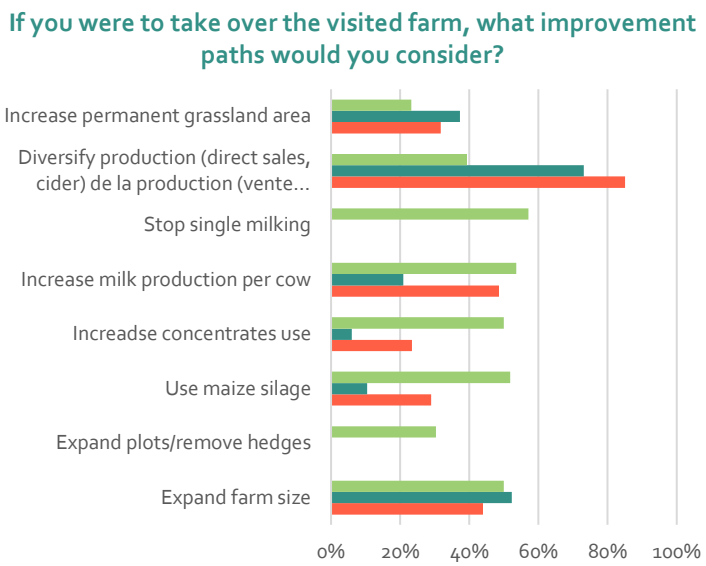
For most students, the primary purpose of agriculture is not to remunerate farmers (9%), but rather to feed the population (67%). However, 57% believe that farming must ensure a income at least equivalent to the national average. They also feel that agriculture should remain aligned with consumer expectations.
In contrast, only 28% consider it important to have a workload comparable to that of other professions. As the sticky notes confirm, this issue remains secondary for them: they do not yet fully grasp its implications for their personal and family life, their ability to take vacations, or their health.

"What's the point of vacations? When I'm away for more than two days, I miss my cows."

"My parents never took vacations, so I don't see why I should."



For 66% of students, this grazing farm model helps preserve a livable world, 80% believe it reduces farmers' dependence on outside services, and **91% feel it allows for reduced working hours**. The GAEC Vert de Lait demonstrated that it is possible to balance professional and personal life in farming, encouraging 75% of young people to rethink the conditions of practicing the profession (55% at the Chênot farm and 45% at the farm du Bois). However, the improvement levers proposed by the students for the visited farms combine diversification levers (38%) and **intensification levers (62%)**, indicating that changing the mindset of future farmers will require multiple meetings and inputs to support a transition.



By the farmers

1. What they liked

The host farmers and facilitators appreciated various aspects.

About the workshops

- Host workshops in complementary pairs (bringing experience, perspective, and discovery)
- Engage while on-site (in the fields, near the animals, observing grazing)
- Work collectively to prepare workshop content and materials
- Use high-quality visuals to illustrate points
- Ask questions to spark interest among learners
- Give significant space to farmer testimonials (explaining motivations, career paths, challenges, and rewards)
- Be transparent and clearly explain economic results

About the organisation

- Assign someone to liaise with education, ensure everyone arrives on time, prepare groups in advance, and send documents beforehand
- Contact the press to promote the event
- Divide student groups by their level

About the impact

- Design a final questionnaire to assess the impact of the day
- Build a connection with teachers who can reconnect with farmers and repeat the experience with another class

"As a retired farmer, it's ideal to work as a duo on the workshop with an enthusiastic young farmer, who brings a fresh perspective on pasture management."

"Being in the paddock encourages interaction. The contact with the animals gets people talking to each other—it's alive."

"You can see that what we told them during the day really stuck—that's satisfying."

"The farmers enjoyed the experience and would like to continue. As an advisor, I find it very rewarding."

"It's important to show our grazing farms to this audience."

"The open days were intense but interesting."

2. Adaptations made after the first open day

The first open day brought together 120 students over two half-days. In hindsight, the host farmer felt this number exceeded the farm's capacity, making it difficult to maintain everyone's attention during the plenary introduction.
For the last two open days, adjustments were made: signs were placed at eye level rather than on the ground to improve readability without disrupting exchanges. Additionally, a table was set up with technical documents and information sheets for the learners.

3. Key considerations

The students' receptiveness varies by their level, so it is important to prioritize exchanges over a top-down approach. The facilitation must adapt to the group's dynamics, even if this remains challenging. Highlighting the farm also depends on a coherent organization of the workshops (location, route) to structure the visit.
The host farmer must be prepared to engage with audiences that may be critical or even hostile to the model presented. Using concrete data (water, soil, milk analyses, biodiversity indicators) strengthens understanding and credibility. A personalized introduction, integrating the farmer's career path and motivations within the industry context, also encourages learner engagement.
For the presentation to be effective, it must follow a clear and understandable logic for both the farmer and the students. You can start with the results to explain the practices, or vice versa. In small groups, it may be relevant to present the results indoors and then illustrate them interactively in the field.
For open days with large groups, special attention should be paid to transitions between workshops to maintain the narrative thread. For example: *"You just attended the workshop on the environmental impact of the farm. Here, you'll discover grazing practices that benefit both animal welfare and the environment. In the next workshop, you'll see how these choices benefit the farmer economically."*

CONCLUSION

Open farm days: A tool for knowledge sharing and reflection for young people and farmers

Open farm days are privileged moments for exchange, requiring meticulous preparation from host farmers. These farmers must anticipate how to convey their core messages through the concrete management choices they make every day. The collective approach proposed here provides mutual support among peers and with facilitators, both for preparation and for running these days. This organization requires anticipation in several areas: preparing educational materials, informing schools, communicating with the press and social media, and managing the logistics of moving groups between workshops—especially when multiple classes are welcomed simultaneously.

For teachers, these visits reinforce the credibility of the technical content covered in class and concretely illustrate the sustainability challenges of farming systems, under weather conditions similar to those the students will face in their future careers. The students, aged 15 to 30, particularly value the hands-on approach of the field visit: exploring plots, buildings, equipment, and herds. The testimonies of farmers thriving in their management choices and lifestyle prove decisive for those considering future installation.

The impact of these days, though brief (just 2.5 hours of visits), is significant: they challenge the values transmitted by the family environment, thanks to a holistic approach. Discussions cover a range of topics, such as quality of life and peace of mind at work, income generated, the techniques implemented to achieve farmer-defined goals, ongoing adaptations throughout a career, and pride in practicing a profession that generates positive social and environmental amenities.

Young participants confirm the usefulness of these days: 57% of them discover new techniques or ways of envisioning the profession. The key messages, initially defined by the project's steering group, are well conveyed, as the visited farms are perceived as ecologically beneficial (67% of 228 respondents), but also as economically (51%), socially (46%), and climatically (27%) advantageous.

However, while these days plant the seeds of reflection, extended or repeated exchanges seem necessary to anchor this new knowledge in concrete farm takeover projects. Indeed, the models presented often differ from traditional family frameworks, and some young people suggest re-intensifying certain productive parameters if they were to take over such a farm.

Ultimately, the major asset of these days lies in their ability to spark deep reflection, paving the way for future changes. Their multiplication would be beneficial to address the transition challenges needed for a more sustainable world.

A big thank you to Mickaël Lepage, Franck Le Breton, Yoann Quiniou, and all the farmers involved in the Pathways group for their commitment, availability, and the time they dedicated to this collaborative work.

How to organize an open day for agricultural students to explore and better understand pasture-based farming systems?

Guidelines for advisors and livestock farmers

Grass-based dairy farming systems, which rely mainly on grazing to feed herds at low cost, offer many advantages. Economically, they help reduce operating expenses and lower the financial barriers to taking over a farm, while also supporting high product quality and good herd health. They also address key social challenges by strengthening farmers' autonomy in decision-making, improving quality of life at work, enhancing the attractiveness of the profession, and increasing public acceptance of livestock farming. In addition, these systems are widely recognized for their environmental benefits, including lower energy use, positive impacts on water quality, biodiversity preservation, and carbon storage.

With this shared vision in mind, a group of around fifteen grass-based dairy farmers from western France decided to pass on their experience to the next generation of agricultural students. Their initiative forms part of the European Pathways project, which aims to explore healthy and sustainable food system scenarios for Europe by 2050.Nearly 300 young people aged between 15 and 25 took part in open farm events organized on the participating farms. These half-day visits provided an opportunity to discuss how grass-based dairy farms operate and the many benefits they offer.

The French Livestock Institute (Idele) supported the group throughout the preparation and organization of these outreach activities. This guide was developed to outline the key steps involved in organizing an open day for agricultural learners. Its purpose is to give readers a clear and practical understanding of what such an event involves, and ultimately to encourage others to turn ideas into action.

The final editing and design of this guide also received additional support through the Synergie Bio Non Bio programme.

May 2026
www.idele.f
Ref Idele : 0026 413 041

Writing: Soline Schetelat, Hélène Chambaut, Amandine Menet (Idele), farmers from the Pathways group
Photo credits: Hélène Chambaut, Soline Schetelat (Idele), Elisabeth Penn

This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 101000395.