

Oxon Hill Farm

Oxon Cove Park
Maryland

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Sometimes life on Oxon Hill Farm seems relaxed, as if the world had returned to a simpler time when afternoons are filled with exploring a field, reading under a tree, or sleeping in the tall grass. With city noises in the distance, we often imagine that life on the farm is better than where we live now, with fewer worries and less stress. Why do farms seem so special? Perhaps it is because they are close to nature and provide for our basic needs. Animals born on farms give us milk, eggs, and meat. Grains and vegetables grown on farms supply us with an abundance of other foods. What do you see when you look around? Perhaps you see sheep or horses nibbling at grass, chickens taking a dust bath, or cows chewing and

chewing. It may appear slow-paced but don't be fooled—Oxon Hill Farm is a lively place.

You can watch the activities or, better yet, you can join in. Let the rangers know that you want to help, and—depending on the time of day or the season—you may get a chance to feed chickens, make apple cider, husk and crack corn, work in the garden, gather eggs, or milk a cow. Why not leave city life behind for a day? Try your hand at farming as it has been done at Oxon Hill for centuries.

Since the 1600s the Oxon Hill area has attracted men and women who recognized its agricultural



potential. Estates raised cattle, wheat, corn, tobacco, and fruit as cash crops for nearby developing urban areas. Much of the labor for these early plantations, such as Mount Welby (Oxon Hill's name in the early 1800s), was provided by slaves. Later the area was divided into smaller working farms. In 1891 the U.S. Government acquired the land and established a farm for St. Elizabeths Hospital. Patients worked on the farm for therapy and to grow their own

food. In the mid-1960s the farm was entrusted to the National Park Service, and in 1967 Oxon Hill Farm welcomed its first visitors. The park opened its gates not as a farm museum or a petting zoo but as a working farm that represented the time when horsepower still came directly from horses. The success of Oxon Hill Farm, as with all small farms, reflects an understanding of agriculture and animals, a love of independence, and a willingness to work hard.



Sunlight, Soil, and Seasons

Every season at Oxon Hill Farm demands its own special activities. Animals and plants do not use human clocks, but the length of daylight hours and natural biological processes spur them into action. Spring is the time of birth, when baby lambs, goats, calves, pigs, and

chicks make a noisy entrance into the world. The increased sunlight removes winter's chill from the soil and signals the spring planting season. During this busy time of year farmers have little time to spare. They plow fields, plant crops, and get ready for a long growing season.

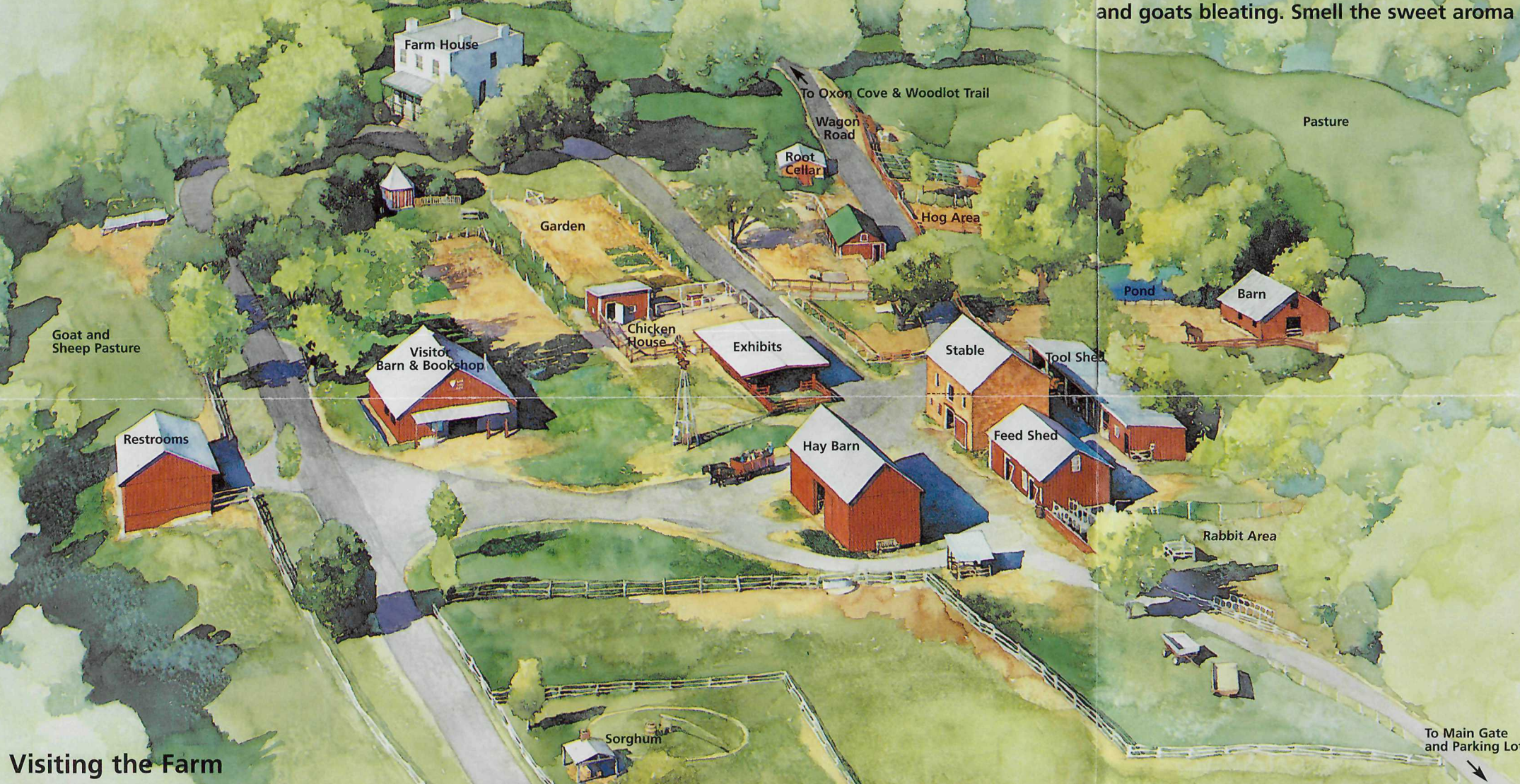
Raising successful crops requires careful attention to timing. The clearly defined seasons offer farmers a narrow period when seeds must be planted and mature plants harvested. Cooperative weather and long hours of hard work ensure a winter's supply of grains and

hay for the animals and vegetables for farmers. You can see real horsepower in action during these busy seasons. In spring horses plow, disc, and harrow the fields for planting. At harvest time they haul crops to storage. These working horses on Oxon Hill

Farm, like all draft horses, are different than horses used for riding. Their wide chests, broad sloping shoulders, slower metabolism, and dense muscle structure give them the power to pull equipment. A two-horse team can plow two acres or disc 10 acres per day.

"Come on down, we'll put you to work"

Why dream about helping on a farm? Come, join the fun. Feel the skin of a cow and the warmth of her fresh milk. Listen to chickens clucking and goats bleating. Smell the sweet aroma of horses and hay.



Visiting the Farm



Oxon Hill Farm is open daily from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. except Thanksgiving Day, December 25, and January 1. Admission and activities are free. Reservations are required for special programs and for popular activities such as milking cows, gathering eggs, and wagon rides. The visitor barn has information about activities.

To make reservations, plan a group visit, or get information about educational and volunteer programs, contact the park: 301-839-1783 TTY;

301-839-1176 voice; or www.nps.gov/oxhi

Daily Activities Here are some of the activities you can enjoy at the farm.

Self-guiding Tour You can explore on your own to see the farm machinery, dairy barn and silo, 19th-century brick stable, feed and tool sheds, and barnyard. *Note:* the animals are not always out-of-doors, and they may be in different locations.

Hiking and Biking Venture beyond the hilltop

and explore part of Oxon Cove Park's 512 acres by strolling along the lower fields or riding the bike path along Oxon Cove.

Woodlot Trail Take this steep ¼-mile trail, marked with yellow blazes on trees, to the parking lot. Exhibits along the way explain how this wooded ravine benefitted early farmers.

Picnicking Picnicking is welcome in designated areas. Food is not sold in the park.

Accessibility The visitor barn, farm house, restrooms, and some buildings are accessible for visitors in wheelchairs.

Special Events and Educational Activities The farm offers a variety of programs each month, such as demonstrations, walks to see plants and wildlife, wagon rides, and talks about farm life and the animals. Call ahead for reservations.

Seasonal Activities Farming is a year-round business directed by seasons.

Spring This is the time of year to see how plowing and planting were done before tractors became common. You can watch the horses help prepare the fields as they pull old-fashioned plows and discs. In May the horse team is hitched to corn-planting machinery that deposits corn kernels in rows at just the right soil depth. May also features "wool days" with demonstrations of sheep shearing, wool spinning, and natural dyeing.

Summer In June we celebrate dairy month with a day of dairy activities such as milking cows, churning butter, and making ice cream. In July the farm features steampowered wheat threshing, Junior Ranger Farm Safety Program, and Family Fun Day.

Autumn Join us in harvesting corn and other crops, boiling sorghum cobs to make a sweet syrup, and pressing apple cider.

Winter The farm may seem quieter now, but seasonal activities abound. In December you are invited to a cultural holiday to learn about life on a farm in the early 1800s. In January and February you can watch birds, identify animal tracks, and learn about different farm cultural traditions. Soon, spring and new animal babies arrive, and green sprouts push through the warming soil. The busy time begins anew.

More Information Oxon Cove Park and Oxon Hill Farm
NCP East
1900 Anacostia Drive S.E.
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www.nps.gov/oxhi

Oxon Hill Farm is one of more than 380 parks in the National Park System. The National Park Service cares for these special places saved by the American people so that all may experience our heritage. To learn more about national parks visit www.nps.gov.

A Safe Farm Visit

"Horseshoes are not hats" is a strange expression but think about it. A horseshoe is as large as a toddler's head, and a kicking horse can hit with a force hard enough to break ribs or crack a child's skull. Always supervise your children and be cautious around farm animals. Hazards on a farm are different from those in a city, but they can be just as painful and dangerous. To protect the farm and to make your visit safe, please observe these regulations.

- Animals can be frightened if someone yells or pokes at them. They may defend themselves by kicking, biting, shoving with their heads, or stepping on you. Move slowly and don't make loud noises. Stay out of animal stalls and pens. Never walk behind or under a hoofed animal.
- Do not feed the animals. Always keep your hands away from their mouths; they may bite. Do not touch any animal unless one of the rangers is with you.
- Farms are dusty and contain sloppy things to step in. Remember when volunteering to wear old clothes and sturdy shoes. Bring work gloves if you plan to help in the garden or barnyard. Volunteers are always welcome to help. Contact the park for information.
- Do not climb on any machinery. Stay back from moving wagons and tractors. They are heavy, cannot stop quickly, and may have sharp, moving parts.
- To avoid cuts and splinters, do not touch barbed wire or wooden structures. Please do not climb on fences.
- Please supervise your children at all times.
- The risk of fire on a farm is high—smoking is prohibited.
- Dogs are not allowed.
- Unauthorized vehicles and bicycles are not allowed beyond the main gate or in the farm area.
- Ask permission before picking any fruits, flowers, or vegetables. All plants and wildlife are protected by federal law, and they are an important part of the farm's ecological balance. Please do not disturb or harm them.



Getting Here From the outer loop of I-95/495 Capitol Beltway: take exit 3-A (Md. 210 Indian Head Hwy), bear right onto Oxon Hill Road, follow signs to the park.

From inner loop: take exit 3-A, turn right onto Oxon Hill Road, follow signs.

From Washington D.C.: go south on I-295, take exit 1-A onto I-95/495 Capital Beltway, take exit 3-A, bear right onto Oxon Hill Road.

Park only in designated lot and walk to farm area.