

**PRESS RELEASE
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**Year on year increase of farm sign-ups for LEAF Open Farm Sunday**

The number of farmers already committed to hosting LEAF Open Farm Sunday events is up 10% on this time last year. Three hundred farms from Jersey to Shetland are set to open their gates on the 9th June to give the public a first-hand insight into farming. The national organisers, LEAF (Linking Environment And Farming) are encouraging more farmers to seize this opportunity to connect with the consumer and build loyalty and support for the British farming industry.

“*We are calling on more farmers across England, Scotland and Wales, of every size and every sector, to fill the gaps across the country, open their farm and to share their story,*” said LEAF Open Farm Sunday Manager, Annabel Shackleton. “*We need more farms to respond to the public’s compelling appetite to visit a farm and learn more about where their food comes from and how it is produced. It’s the perfect time for farmers to strengthen the connection with their customers when the industry is being challenged by policy changes, dietary trends and, potentially, of cheap foreign imports.*”

Of the 362 farms which hosted a LEAF Open Farm Sunday event last year, 26% did so for the first time - the highest number to date. These farms encompassed all types of farm enterprise - arable, livestock and dairy through to horticulture.

*“Even at this stage there is still time to organise a small event such as a farm walk for a few people”* Mrs Shackleton continued, “*This can be out in the fields where you can keep preparation to a minimum – a great starting point if you are hosting for the first time. You decide what size of event to run, what visitors see, for how long and can manage visitor numbers through our free online ticketing service. Every event matters and every conversation helps bridge that gap between producers and consumers.”*

As well as thanking the farmers taking part this year, Mrs Shackleton praised the commitment of the sponsors of LEAF Open Farm Sunday. The 2019 principal sponsors are Arla Foods, Asda, BASF plc, Co-op, Defra, Farmers Weekly, Frontier Agriculture, John Deere Limited, LEAF Marque, Marks and Spencer, NFU, Sainsbury’s, Tesco, Waitrose and the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board (AHDB).

In addition to financial support, sponsors produce a range of free materials and giveaways to inspire and engage visitors about farming and all it delivers. Many sponsors also have volunteers at the events.

Rob Gladwin, Head of Technical Management, Crop Protection, Northern Europe for BASF, a sponsor for many years, said:

“*Sponsoring LEAF Open Farm Sunday gives us an opportunity to support an initiative we whole-heartedly believe in. For farmers, preserving the land is common sense; for their business, for their communities and for the next generation. We work hand in hand with growers, ensuring we share our knowledge and solutions to help them to continue to farm sustainably and profitably. LEAF Open Farm Sunday is a unique event and opportunity to showcase the efforts of farmers, educating the public on the hard work and passion that goes into putting food on UK tables.”*

The combined positive impact of farms across the UK opening for this annual event is huge. In a visitor survey carried out in 2018, 92% said they had a greater appreciation of the work that farmers do after visiting a farm; 86% said they felt more connected to the farmers who produced their food, and 78% reported they were now more proactively looking to buy British food.

Chris Wiltshire, Marketing Manager of John Deere, a principal sponsor, said:

**“***LEAF Open Farm Sunday provides an ideal opportunity, not only to show a wider public audience how advanced farming technologies are being applied to the benefit of farming, efficient food production and sound environmental management, including the reduction of harmful emissions, but also to encourage young people to consider a challenging and worthwhile career in farming and agricultural engineering.*”

Farmers interested in opening for LEAF Open Farm Sunday on 9th June 2019 can find out more and register at www.farmsunday.org. Once registered, farmers receive a handbook and free resources.

**For further information, please contact Susannah at Jane Craigie Marketing susannah@janecraigie.com or 07841 194 897.**

**Editor’s notes:**

 • LEAF Open Farm Sunday is managed by LEAF (Linking Environment And Farming). LEAF is a leading organisation delivering more sustainable food and farming. It works with farmers, the food industry, scientists and consumers to inspire and enable sustainable farming that is prosperous, enriches the environment and engages local communities. LEAF has organised Open Farm Sunday since it began in 2006. (LEAF is a registered charity no: 1045781)

 • LEAF Open Farm Sunday offers a chance for all farmers to open their gates and welcome people onto their farms to discover the world of farming. Events can be as simple as a farm walk for a small group to larger open days. LOFS offers advice and support for all types of event.

 • LEAF Open Farm Sunday is on 9th June 2019. Farmers need to register, free of charge at www.farmsunday.org

 • Sponsors of LEAF Open Farm Sunday include: Arla Foods, Asda, BASF plc, Co-op, Defra, Farmers Weekly, Frontier Agriculture, John Deere, LEAF Marque, Marks and Spencer, The National Farmers’ Union, Sainsbury’s, Tesco, Waitrose and the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board