



PLANET STEWARDSHIP

*National Farmers Union
Youth Education Curriculum*





Greetings!

Through guidance from its national board of directors and state education directors, National Farmers Union has chosen “Planet Stewardship” as its 2009 youth education curriculum theme.

The family farmers, ranchers and fishermen National Farmers Union represents embrace the responsibilities that are part of every acre of ground, drop of water, animal, plant or any of the multitude of resources entrusted to their care. Farmers Union members are also very cognizant of the need to extend beyond their fence rows and townships to ensure these gifts are shared and not exploited or wasted.

The future of the Earth’s natural resources depends heavily upon the stewardship of this generation and the next. National Farmers Union believes young people should learn and practice good stewardship today, and encourages this through training and opportunities for young people as early as first grade.

Through the following lesson plans, students will explore our natural resources and the challenges and opportunities to preserve and conserve them. They will also learn how Farmers Union and its farmer-members and member-owned cooperatives practice good stewardship and lead as local, state, national and global citizens.

On the following pages you will find background information on these topics and lesson plans for grades 1-12. These lesson plans may be used in a series or as stand-alone activities to supplement your teachings.

Thank you for the time and energy you devote to educating young people.

Sincerely,

Tom Buis, President
National Farmers Union

“Planet Stewardship”

Youth Leader Overview

Did You Know?

- It is projected that by the year 2025, one-fourth of the world’s population will be in need of more water.
- In the U.S., soil is eroding at 17 times the rate at which it forms.
- More than 120 million Americans breathe dirty, unhealthy air.

What is Stewardship?

Stewardship is taking personal responsibility for something, even if one does not own it. It embodies cooperative management of this planet’s natural resources to prevent the degradation of the environment and to facilitate its recovery in the interest of long-term sustainability.

It may seem that one individual’s actions, especially those of a child, may be insignificant in comparison to global issues such as climate change and natural resource conservation. However, action on an individual level is the only way big changes are made. Without individual sustainability, there’s no community sustainability. Without community sustainability, there cannot be global sustainability. Earth-wide change is absolutely impossible without individual activism.

Americans spend almost 90 percent of our time indoors. Due to a variety of reasons, many children today rarely come in contact with nature. Yet, society continues to demand more natural resources for the products and services it depends on.

Few children connect their resource consumption to what must be done elsewhere on the land to make it possible. Fewer yet have a direct role in protecting or producing our food, water, air and other natural resources. Therefore, it may be difficult for many to care about something they know little about. By learning more about natural resources, children can reconnect to the earth and learn that their actions can make a difference.



“There would be very little point in my exhausting myself, and other conservationists themselves, in trying to protect animals and habitats if we weren’t at the same time raising young people to be better stewards.” -- *Dr. Jane Goodall*

Farmers Union’s Role:

Family farmers and ranchers have historically been the best conservationists of natural resources when given the economic incentives and flexibility necessary to do so. Farmers Union advocates for the proper creation and implementation of laws that benefit the environment, reward stewardship and balance environmental needs with the socioeconomic goals of farming communities.

Society benefits from farmers who adopt practices that enhance water quality, wildlife habitats, energy conservation, biodiversity and carbon sequestration. Therefore, NFU believes rewarding family farmers for making good environmental choices should be a top priority in farm policy.

In its policy manual, National Farmers Union devotes numerous pages to water quality, soil and wetland conservation, air quality and climate change. Through these “Planet Stewardship” curriculum activities, Farmers Union strives to introduce these topics to young people and challenge them to do their part to preserve and conserve the Earth’s natural resources.

Tips for Using NFU's Lesson Plans

1. Do your homework. Make sure you have read through the entire lesson plan before attempting to share the information with children.
2. If working with several age groups, try to present background information and any joint activities to the junior groups as a whole and the senior groups as a whole. Break the age levels up into groups for age-specific activities led simultaneously by additional volunteers. Bring the age groups back together when possible to reinforce the lesson. Younger children can “show and tell” to older students and older students can lead younger children in another activity related to the lesson.
3. Mix it up. Studies have shown that high school and junior high students need a change of activity every 15 minutes in order to remain interested and focused. This time frame drops lower for younger children.
4. Use your imagination. The following pages are a starting point for teaching children about stewardship of natural resources. Your creativity is encouraged as you expand on these lesson plans in your area.

Additional Resources

National Farmers Union (www.nfu.org) Check with the National Farmers Union or with your own state Farmers Union to learn more about how Farmers Union advocates for conservation programs that are good for the environment, reward resource stewardship, discourage speculative development of fragile land resources, strengthen family farming and enhance rural communities.

Facing the Future (www.facingthefuture.org) provides downloadable curriculum for all age groups on a variety of environmental and social issues.

Natural Resources Conservation Service (www.nrcs.usda.gov) offers information about conserving soil, water and other natural resources.

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (www.epa.gov) features information on resource conservation, reducing, reusing, recycling and composting.



“When one tugs at a single thing in nature, he finds it attached to the world.”
-- *John Muir*

“Treat the earth well: it was not given to you by your parents, it was loaned to you by your children.”

-- *Native American Proverb*

“Nobody made a greater mistake than he who did nothing because he could do only a little.”

-- *Edmund Burke*