

idea corner

Scandinavian 4-H Farms Teach Urban Youth About Farming

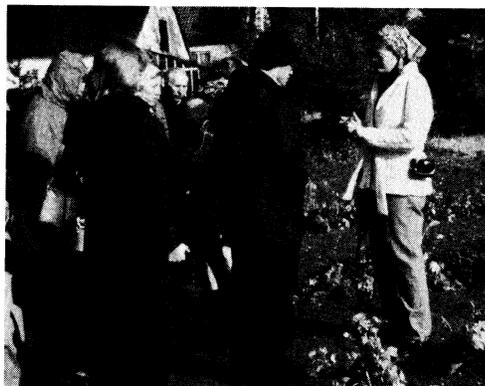
On the outskirts of Oslo, Norway, an ancient farm is coming alive! Children and young people roam the fields, wander through the huge barn, ride the horses, pet and care for the animals, and help gather the grain from small fields surrounded by grown-up fence rows and scrub forests. It is a State Farm Center for youth. I found this exciting idea on a recent 4-H Travel Seminar to Scandinavia.

In Scandinavia, most farms are picture-book farms with red-roofed houses, red farm buildings, neat well-kept fences, and not a weed in sight. And I'm sure this farm will soon look the same because youth workers feel this is a good way to encourage urban youth to learn about agriculture.

Our bus pulled up to the ancient barn just as a group of children rode up on horses. They dismounted and another group took their places and rode off with their young instructors for a riding lesson. The children who had completed their lesson followed along as we toured the barn to see the rabbits, chickens, pigs, and cows and listen to the youth leaders talk about the Farm Project.

The old farm house is being used by young people who have no other place to live. They take care of the house and farm when 4-H leaders and children cannot be there. A smaller house

is occupied by the retired farmer and his wife who once owned the farm. The farm belongs to the state, but the community operates it through the Youth Council as a Farm Center for Youth.



A construction company put up one of their temporary buildings for use as a 4-H Club room. It is well equipped for meetings and project group work. The company cooperated with this program because it gives the young people in that area learning opportunities.

At other 4-H farms in Scandinavia, we saw children leading, grooming, and feeding farm animals. They were enjoying learning to care for the animals. We were told they spend many after-school hours at the farm center each week. On weekends the children take turns caring for the animals, enlisting the aid of their families to help get the job done.

Children sign up to learn about the care of the animal they are most interested in. They receive instructions on proper



care and are very conscientious about doing their job.

During the day, the farms are open to visits by community members living nearby. We saw many young women pushing baby carriages around the farms. No doubt these children will soon be taking their turn in learning to care for animals.

One farm is located in the midst of tall apartment buildings and condominiums. A block or so from the farm is a large shopping center, and a train station is within easy walking distance.

This farm has a recreation center, a place to buy homemade snacks and beverages, and places to do various crafts. The weaving house is also a popular place.

Gardening is another part of the farm center idea. The children are permitted to grow whatever they want on a small plot assigned to them. Many chose flowers, but most grew vegetables. Nature trails and environmental projects are also popular.

Some states in the U.S. may have 4-H Farms for urban youth, but I'm not aware of any. It's an idea worth exploring. Some of our camps located near experiment stations could develop a small farm. Or, some retired couple might enjoy seeing young people use their barns and fields to learn.

Urban youth may not become farmers, but with the right instruction they can learn to appreciate farming. They can become aware of the skills and knowledge needed and understand the importance of agriculture to our nation. Why not teach urban youth what we in Extension know best!

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