



Since the 1970s, generations of Connecticut residents have been visiting Auerfarm to learn, explore, and connect with nature, one another, and themselves.

Learn. Explore. Connect. Transforming Auerfarm for the Future

It's a summer day in the Connecticut River Valley. As you drive down Route 185, the winding road carries you over Talcott Mountain into Bloomfield. A sign catches your eye: "Auerfarm: Learn. Explore. Connect." Just below reads, "Open Daily - Public Welcome." Curiosity takes hold, and you turn onto the road, eager for the promised adventure.

The dirt path forces a slow journey and a calm mind. To your left an orchard boasts its fruit as hay dances in the field to the left. Green banners flutter overhead, reminding you of Auerfarm's core values; community & connection, outdoor recreation, lifelong learning. As you approach, you see a massive willow tree shading a stream and goats running through a nearby pasture.

You arrive at the welcome center, a red structure with open bays, where photos line the walls showcasing farm life. A kiosk displays a map outlining various ways to learn, explore, and connect at Auerfarm. Seven color-coded trails invite exploration, including the green Learn, Explore, Connect, Tour for an immersive educational experience.

As you begin your journey, you enter the main lobby, transformed into a mini-museum dedicated to the farm's history. You learn about Beatrice Fox Auerbach, the vast farm she operated, and her close friendship with Eleanor Roosevelt. Maple, honey, and eggs are available for purchase.

Following the Learn, Explore, Connect Tour, you stroll up to the gardens. On your way, you pass a school group learning about ice cream making under a maple tree. "Welcome to the Nourishing Garden." The wooden sign marks your arrival. Vibrant beds overflow with vegetables, herbs, and flowers. Benches invite you to sit, stay, and be still.

Next, you visit the Barnyard. Goats, sheep, horses, and a friendly pig play together. You learn about the importance and role of each animal on the farm.

You make your way down by the pavilion where families are enjoying picnic lunches. Through the main archway, you make your way past the blueberry patch, making a mental note to come back and pick your own, past the sounds of children playing in the Play Forest, and up to the apiary. The sound of bees at work drone behind you. The view of the farm from the top of the apiary takes your breath away. A green canvas brushed by flowers, animals, and people.

You make your way back down and notice signs identifying native plants, birds, and wildlife along the way. As you stroll down towards the stream, summer camp groups compete in fort-building competitions by the edge of the woods.

The stream feels cold beneath your feet but the movement of water over your skin soothes you. Tadpoles scurry around you, frogs hop on the banks, and birds fly overhead.

You dry off on the bench under the tree, touched by the leaves as they sway in the wind. The sign next to you talks about the life cycle of frogs and the stream's ecosystem.

Finally, you reach the apple orchard, where rows of dwarf trees laden with fruit stretch as far as the eye can see.

As you stand in the orchard, surrounded by the fruits of nature's labor, you feel your heart beat in your chest. You feel the air flow through your lungs as the wind blows through the leaves. You realize that Auerfarm's Learn. Explore. Connect. initiative is more than just a tour—it's a journey of transformation, both for the land and its visitors.

The orchard provides a perfect ending to your exploration, showcasing the farm's bountiful harvest and the cycle of seasons. Throughout your journey, hand-carved signs, informational kiosks, and signs for reflection invite you to learn, explore, and connect with nature and yourself.

This transformation extends beyond the physical landscape. As you've walked the color-coded trails, you've noticed how the farm has been designed to be accessible to people of all abilities. Wide, smooth paths accommodate wheelchairs and strollers, while tactile exhibits and audio descriptions ensure everyone can engage with Auerfarm.

As you prepare to leave, you realize that you're taking more than just memories with you. You're leaving with a deeper understanding of agriculture, a renewed appreciation for the natural world, and a sense of connection to something greater than yourself.

A smile grows across your face as you leave the farm behind, excited for your next visit.

The Learn. Explore. Connect. initiative at Auerfarm is not just about preserving a piece of Connecticut's agricultural heritage—it's about cultivating a sustainable future. By transforming the landscape and providing immersive experiences for visitors of all abilities, Auerfarm is sowing seeds of community connection that will bear fruit for generations to come. Be a part of this change by donating today.

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Hello!

It’s Saturday morning and I am attending the Auerfarm 4-H club meeting. I watch the young club members run a business meeting. They run it like they are in a Fortune 500 boardroom—agenda, motions, discussion, votes, and engagement from all the members. The 4-H’ers lack the reserve of most adults and speak freely. They are planning their fundraising bake sale and planning a trip to the Connecticut Fiber Fest. Then, on time, per the schedule, the business meeting ends with a motion to adjourn.

Today a neighbor and Auerfarm volunteer is sharing a Connecticut wildlife presentation. As an adult, the presenter, Julie, is sharing her knowledge as a CT DEEP Master Wildlife Conservationist. The kids are enthralled. They are asking questions, and seem fascinated by rabies.

Learn.Explore.Connect. It is what Auerfarm is all about.

The Dalio Education Foundation released a report in 2024 sharing “Connecticut’s Unspoken Crisis”. The report shared disheartening data: 22% of Connecticut youth are at risk or disconnected. One in five youth! Auerfarm provides programs that address many of the issues leading youth to be at risk or disconnected. At Auerfarm our programs build on connections. We build confidence. We instill a love of learning. And provide opportunities to explore the farm, explore their inner selves and grow a better understanding of the world around them.

Join us as we Learn.Explore.Connect. at Auerfarm.

Erica
Executive Director, Lifelong 4-Her.
4-H Education Center at Auerfarm



Learn. Explore. Connect.

The Learn. Explore. Connect. initiative seeks to bridge educational gaps and foster a deeper connection within the community to nature, and one another.

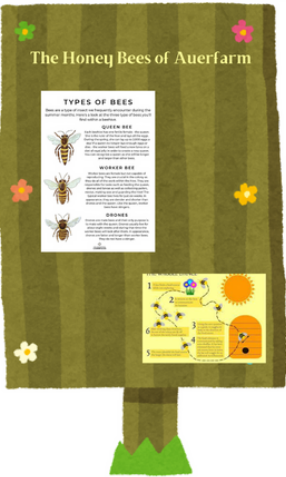


Welcoming signage at the entrance and along the road will create a sense of community and belonging from the moment a visitor turns on to Auerfarm.

Comprehensive educational signage will stimulate self-led tours, informal education, and environmental connection.



Implementing signage along the road will create a sense of community & belonging. By including Auerfarm /4-H values we set the tone for each guest’s visit. Signs can be changed seasonally for events & programs.



Signs like these in areas such as the Honey Bees, Maple Trees, Animal Barns, Gardens, Sugar Shack, and the Orchard will aid in informal education. Having pertinent information about specific areas that coincide with Auerfarm seasonal programs and products will engage visitors outside of formal programming.



Tahlia Watson’s, 17, journey at Auerfarm began with preschool field trips to the farm. Now she leads 4-H clubs across Connecticut as President of the Hartford County 4-H Fair Association.

The Unexpected Journey From Barn Chores to Boardroom Confidence

How Auerfarm and 4-H Prepare Youth for Life Beyond the Barnyard

At the Eastern States Exposition last fall, 17-year-old Tahlia Watson stood beside her dairy heifer, guiding the animal through the showmanship class with subtle hand movements. This scene at "The Big E" represented the culmination of months of hard work and dedication for the 4-H member from Bloomfield, Connecticut.

"I was definitely nervous before my showmanship class," Tahlia recalls. "It can either go really well or really bad and you never really know what's going to happen in there." Despite her nerves, Tahlia's efforts paid off, earning her third place in a competitive class of 11 participants.

“I was very proud of both of us, because it took a lot of time for us to get there. She hated walking at first, she had a really big attitude. Eventually, she turned into this really nice show heifer.”

Tahlia's journey with 4-H began at age nine, sparked by childhood visits to Auerfarm through Wintonbury Early Childhood Magnet School and her mother's involvement with the organization. "I've always really liked being outdoors," she explains. "Science is so important, and 4-H let me explore that interest."

Over the years, Tahlia has progressed through various leadership roles, from Junior Leader to her current positions as president of the Hartford County 4-H Fair Association and secretary for livestock. These roles have honed her public speaking and leadership skills, transforming her from a shy child into a confident young adult.

"The biggest skill I've learned is public speaking," Tahlia says. "Being able to talk about something that I liked, and being good at it, definitely helped me a lot."

4-H's "learn by doing" philosophy has been crucial to Tahlia's development. Working with her dairy heifer taught her patience and perspective-taking. "I can take a step back and see things from their perspective," she explains. "I've learned that I'm not always going to be right, and there's more than one solution to every problem."

The program has also exposed Tahlia to broader horizons. At the National 4-H Dairy Conference in Madison, Wisconsin, she connected with peers from across North America and gained insight into the dairy industry's global importance.

"It definitely made me more appreciative of the farmers that I get to work with," Tahlia reflects. "And it's shown me how important this industry is on a global scale."

Tahlia's leadership roles in 4-H have given her unique experiences in decision-making and governance. As president of the Hartford County 4-H Fair Association, she oversees a diverse group of young leaders, ranging from 10 to 17 years old. They use official parliamentary procedure in their meetings, making important decisions about fair logistics, rule changes, and more.

"It's really nice being able to work with other 4-H'ers in a professional setting," Tahlia explains. "We use official parliamentary procedure, make important decisions about our fair, and even vote on things like tent rentals and rule changes."

This hands-on approach to leadership sets 4-H apart from traditional educational experiences. Tahlia and her peers are entrusted with real responsibilities, preparing them for future roles in their communities and careers.

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Tahlia's experience at The Big E showcased the culmination of her 4-H journey. "She hated walking at first, had a really big attitude," Tahlia says of her heifer. "But eventually she turned into this really nice show heifer." This process of patience and perseverance echoes throughout Tahlia's 4-H experience.

As Tahlia looks toward her future, the skills and connections she's built through 4-H are proving invaluable. Her experiences have solidified her plans to study animal science in college, with a particular interest in animal nutrition and genetics.

While Tahlia's 4-H journey has taken her far from home, it all began at Auerfarm. The 120-acre educational farm in Bloomfield continues to serve as a living classroom for young people like Tahlia, offering hands-on experiences in agriculture, environmental science, and leadership.

At Auerfarm, the themes of learning, exploring, and connecting come to life. Young people learn through hands-on experiences, explore diverse areas of agriculture and science, and connect with peers, mentors, and their community.

Tahlia's story exemplifies the transformative power of 4-H and Auer Farm's programs. Through these experiences, young people not only gain practical skills but also develop the confidence, leadership abilities, and community awareness that will serve them well into adulthood.

Learn

Auerfarm will become a center for self-guided and hands-on learning, empowering guests to develop a deeper understanding of agriculture, science, and the environment. Educational signage will be installed throughout the farm, incorporating elements like braille and audio to ensure accessibility for all visitors. These improvements will provide opportunities for learning about soil health, the life cycle of plants, the role of pollinators, and the importance of sustainable agriculture. By expanding access to educational resources, Auerfarm will strengthen STEM and 21st-century learning skills, encouraging visitors to engage with environmental education in meaningful ways.

Explore

The initiative will upgrade and expand Auerfarm’s trail system, enhancing navigability and improving surface quality for strollers, wheelchairs, and mobility devices. These enhancements will make the farm more accessible to guests of all ages and abilities. Visitors will be able to explore diverse ecosystems, including gardens, pastures, and wooded areas, fostering curiosity and a sense of adventure. The improved infrastructure will also create opportunities for recreational activities like nature walks and family outings, encouraging visitors to engage more deeply with the natural world.

Connect

Learn. Explore. Connect. will strengthen Auerfarm’s role as a gathering place for the community. By enhancing physical and informational access, Auerfarm will become a more welcoming and inclusive space where people can connect with nature, themselves, and each other. Sensory-friendly areas and inclusive signage will create a comfortable environment for visitors with sensory sensitivities and language barriers. The initiative will foster multi-generational engagement, encouraging families, schools, and community groups to gather, learn, and build meaningful connections in a shared natural setting.



Children at Auercamp learn about nature, agriculture, and science, explore the farm and their curiosities, and connect with the environment, themselves, and each other. As Auercamp celebrates its fifth summer at Auerfarm, many campers who have grown up through the program are emerging as leaders and new staff members.

Auercamp: Connecting Through Learning and Exploration

At Auerfarm's 120-acre property, the early morning quiet is broken by the arrival of 100 children, aged 3 to 15, eager to begin another day at Auercamp. This summer program is more than just a seasonal diversion—it's a carefully crafted journey designed to transform young minds into future leaders and environmental stewards.

Auercamp's curriculum, deeply rooted in S.T.E.A.M. (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics) principles, offers age-appropriate programs that build upon each other. "Sprouts" (ages 3-5) engage in basic nature exploration, while "Young Farmers" (grades K-5) delve into agricultural practices. "Explorers" (grades 6-8) tackle more complex ecological projects, and "Leadership" participants (grades 9-10) prepare for potential staff roles.

Will Porter, 18, a senior counselor who started as a camper at age 8, leads a group of Young Farmers in a stream study. "We're not just catching frogs," Porter explains. "We're learning about ecosystems and food chains. It's hands-on science."

This approach to education is at the heart of Auercamp's mission. Chiki Santillan, 23, a former leadership teen now an assistant camp director, emphasizes the program's holistic nature. "Whether it's building forts to learn about physics or caring for animals to understand biology, we're constantly connecting fun with learning," Santillan says.

Beyond academic enrichment, Auercamp focuses on character development. Hayley Yaros, 23, another assistant camp director, points out the core values instilled in campers: community, resilience, respect, and responsibility. "These values are woven into every activity," Yaros notes. "When children work together to plant seedlings, they learn about teamwork. When they face challenges on hikes, they're developing resilience."

The program's cyclical nature is perhaps its most distinctive feature. Many counselors and staff, like Porter, Santillan, and Yaros, were once campers themselves. This cycle of mentorship creates a strong sense of community and continuity.

Jaelyn Affsa, 19, and her sister Maya, 16, exemplify this progression. Once campers led by Santillan and Yaros, they now guide their own groups of younger children. Their sister younger Hannah was in Santillan's first camp group at just 5 years old. Now she is in her final year as a camper, poised to enter the Leadership program next summer.

"Seeing former campers become mentors is incredibly rewarding," Santillan reflects. "We've watched them grow up through the years from shy campers to seasoned counselors and form connections with each other. It goes to show that we're not just teaching about nature and agriculture; we're inspiring the next generation of leaders at camp and in their communities."

This progression reinforces that sense of community and belonging that is so central to Auercamp. Beginning at the Sprout level, campers look up to the older campers and learn the skills necessary to progress forward. Young Farmers look up to the Explorers and are eager to advance to the next level. Explorers enjoy building outdoor skills and mentoring the Sprouts before progressing to be Leaders in Training. The Leadership Teens, often campers who have grown up through Auercamp, prepare to become counselors by shadowing staff and helping out with the young farmers. Every group and age level has an important role at Auercamp and each group informs the next.

Hayley Yaros, a former leadership camper and now an assistant camp director, observes the impact of this cycle.

"Watching campers grow from young farmers and explorers to potential staff members is incredible," Yaros notes. "It reinforces the lasting influence of our program. By freely exploring the farm and different interests, campers can grow and connect with nature, each other, and themselves."

At Auercamp, campers don't just spend a summer outdoors—they embark on a journey of discovery, growth, and leadership that lasts a lifetime. From their first days as Sprouts to their roles as mentors and staff, each child becomes part of a cycle that nurtures curiosity, confidence, and a deep connection to nature. This transformative experience is made possible by supporters like you. Help us continue shaping future environmental leaders by donating today.

Support Our Work

Your support makes a difference. We rely on your generosity and that of the “Auer” community to protect the magical resource Auerfarm provides. Here are a few ways you can help...

1 **Donate Online.** It is easier than ever to support Auerfarm. Visit auercamp.org/donate to make a gift using your credit card. It is quick, secure, and hassle-free!

2 **Participate in workplace giving and double your donation.** Many local businesses will match your donation. Check with your human resource department.

3 **Giving Through Your IRA.** Qualified Charitable Distributions (QCDs), also known as IRA Charitable Rollovers, are an easy and savvy way for individuals age 70½ or older to use their IRAs to maximize their charitable impact. When you make a QCD from your IRA, you can support your favorite charity without paying income taxes on the contributed funds.

5 **Planned giving.** A planned gift is one of the most meaningful ways you can show appreciation for Auerfarm and support our mission. You may be able to save on taxes, receive income for life, or enjoy other financial benefits - all while creating a lasting legacy that helps Auerfarm thrive for generations to come.

4 **Giving Stocks, Bonds, Mutual Funds** Donating appreciated stocks, mutual funds, or bonds to charity is an efficient way to contribute that can provide you with significant tax benefits. You gift appreciated securities to Auerfarm while avoiding capital gains tax.

6 **Give through your donor-advised fund.** It is easy to make a gift to Auerfarm through your Donor Advised Fund (DAF). An increasingly popular charitable vehicle, DAF's are an excellent way to both simplify your charitable giving and facilitate your strategic philanthropy goals.