

# Oxon Hill Farm

Oxon Cove Park  
Maryland

National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior

## Official Map and Guide

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 the 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 blades of 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 farmers know that you want to help, and, depending on the time of day or the season, you may get a chance to feed the chickens, make apple cider, husk and crack corn, work in the garden, gather fresh 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 tobacco, cattle, wheat, corn,



Photo by Dan Beigel

and fruit as cash crops for nearby developing urban areas. Much of the labor for these early plantations 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. Early 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 the winter's chill from the soil and signals the spring planting season. During this busy time of year the farmers have little time to spare. They plow the 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 the mature plants harvested. Cooperative weather and long hours of hard work ensure a winter's supply of grains and hay for the

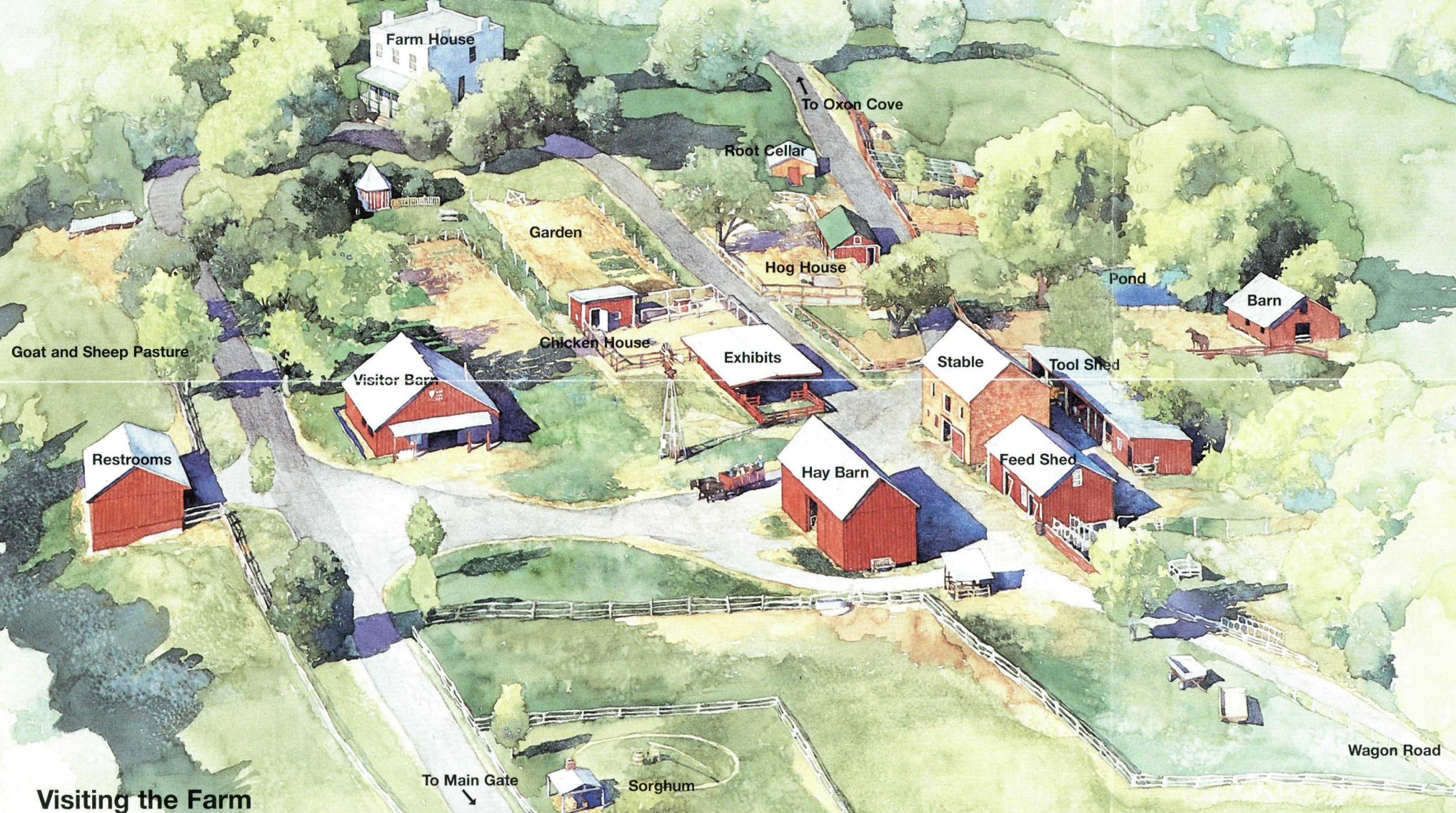
animals and vegetables for the farmers.

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

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 with ease. The 2-horse team can plow 2 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 every day from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. except on January 1, Thanksgiving, and December 25. Admission and all activities are free. Reservations are required for special programs and for popular activities such as milking cows, gathering eggs, and the wagon rides. At the white farmhouse you will find exhibits and information about activities. The visitor barn, restrooms, and some buildings are accessible for visitors with disabilities. To make reserva-

tions, plan a group visit, or obtain information about educational and volunteer programs, call 301-839-1783 TDD; or 301-839-1176. For a recorded message with daily and monthly events and directions to the farm, call 301-839-1177.

**Daily Activities** Here are just some of the activities at the farm.

**Self-guiding tour** You can explore on your own to see the antique farm machinery, the dairy barn

and silo, the 19th-century brick stable, the feed and tool sheds, and the barnyard. The animals are not always out of doors, or they may be in different locations.

**Hiking and biking** Venture beyond the hilltop and explore part of Oxon Cove Park's 485 acres by strolling along the lower fields or riding the bike path along Oxon Cove.

**The Woodlot Trail** Take this steep 1/2-mile trail, marked with yellow blazes

on trees, to the parking lot and find out how this wooded ravine benefited early farmers.

**Picnicking** You may picnic at designated areas. There is no food sold in the park.

**Special events** Each month offers a variety of programs, such as crafts, walks to observe 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 the 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 highlights

"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, a fiddlers' contest, and Family Fun Day.

**Autumn** Join us in harvesting corn and other crops, pressing apple

cider, and boiling sorghum canes to make a sweet syrup. For extra fun in October, don't miss the popular Fall Festival, featuring agricultural demonstrations, workshops, music, and clogging. Come to the evening Halloween costume party for games and a campfire.

**Winter** The farm may seem quieter now, but many seasonal activities abound. In December you are invited to a Christmas party to sing carols and to make ornaments from

corn husks and wheat. In January and February you can watch birds, identify animal tracks, learn about farm traditions, and take a hayride. Soon spring and new animal babies arrive, and green sprouts push through the warming soil. The busy time begins anew.

**More Information** Write: Oxon Hill Farm, NCP-East, 1900 Anacostia Drive, S.E., Washington, DC 20020-6722; or call: 202-690-5185.

## 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 help 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. Always move slowly with no loud noises. Stay out of the animals' stalls and pens. Never walk behind or under a hoofed animal.

☞ Do not feed the animals. Keep your hands away from their mouths; they may bite.

☞ Do not touch any animal unless one of the farmers is with you. When petting an animal, keep your fingers together and out

stretched, and hold the palm of your hand flat.

☞ Farms are dusty and contain sloppy things to step in. Wear old clothes and sturdy shoes. Bring work gloves if you plan to help in the garden or barnyard.

☞ 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.

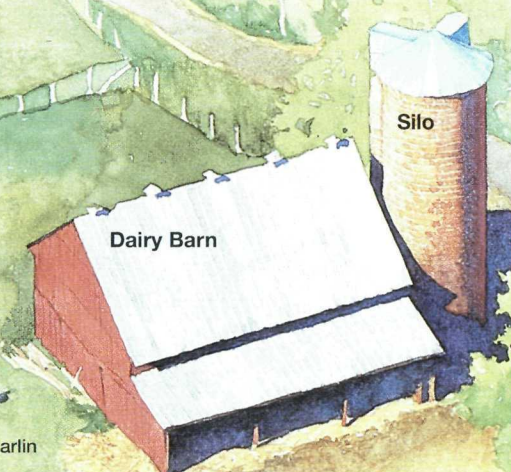
☞ To avoid cuts and splinters, do not touch barbed wire or wooden structures. Please do not climb on fences.

☞ Please supervise your children at all times. Pets are not allowed. Because the risk of fire on a farm is high, smoking is prohibited.

☞ Vehicles are not allowed beyond the main gate or in the pasture or cove.

☞ Ask permission before picking any fruits, flowers, or vegetables. All the 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.

Illustration by Greg Harlin



**Getting Here** From the outer loop of I-95/495 Capital Beltway; take exit 3-A (Md. 210 Indian Head Hwy); bear right onto Oxon Hill Road and follow signs to the park. From the inner loop, take exit 3-A; turn right onto Oxon Hill Road. From Washington, DC; travel 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 lots and walk into the farm area.