

# GET TO THE FARM!

By Natasha Thomsen



This summer, Something Good in the World has found more ways to do what it does best—helping children from all walks of life get their hands in the garden and participate in every step of bringing food from the farm yard to the kitchen table. "In essence, this is a close encounter with life on a farm," says program director Barbara Sarbin. For many, it was also a first-time immersion in nature.

In what has evolved into a full day of playing, picnicking, hiking, and harvesting, children from diverse populations are gyrating with meaningful and memorable experiences on Westchester County's Hilltop Hanover Farm.




The programs are proof that synergy between corporations, government, and charities not only can bring children to the farm, but need each other to deal with the challenges. After months of planning between SGITW and the Bronx Charter School, the children's trip was at risk of being cancelled due to a last-minute glitch with transportation restrictions outside the Bronx school district. The Dannon Institute stepped in and funded the travel, enabling three groups of first-graders from a high needs school district to make it to their destination.

Accompanied by teachers and parent chaperones, each group of children spent a day at Hilltop Hanover, for nothing short of a "farm adventure." They fed chickens, collected eggs, and harvested vegetables.

Children, ages 5 to 10 year old, from Camp Gan Israel in Riverdale, New York, also visited the farm in July. Although they are treated to once-a-week field trips, many had never been this close to nature before. "We gave them the opportunity to taste things, touch things, and smell things that they might not ordinarily do," said Sarbin, highly aware of the children's strict kosher, dietary restrictions. The 50 children, accompanied by teen counselors, worked hard, and played a lot—on the seesaw pump and tire swing, honking the horn and ringing the chimes in The Children's Peaceful Garden, learning about bees and tasting honey, seeing where eggs come from, smelling herbs, digging for potatoes in the farm fields, and learning a thing or two about cooking them—some even finding out that French fries *are* potatoes. While hiking in the surrounding woods, they were fascinated to observe the wildlife, to identify frogs and bird calls, and to discover the smell of skunk cabbage.

"This is reconnecting them to nature, and helping some children overcome basic fears, and develop appreciation for insects and animals," said Sarbin. A practical session was spent showing children how to separate trash and understanding that nothing on Earth is ever thrown "away," but much can be reused, recycled or composted.

This type of farm-based education program with a strong hand-on approach that is customized to children's cultural and social needs is what sets SGITW apart from many other programs in the New York area. Sarbin is actively seeking to build alliances with individual and corporate sponsors that are just as enthusiastic to see children from all socio-economic strata "learn about nutrition, healthy living, sustainability, and stewardship, from the ground up, in an experiential way."

Meanwhile, the children from the Bronx are hoping to come back to the farm in a different season, when nature naturally takes on new meaning and offers a fresh view of life...

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