

Community Programs Handbook

2025 - 2026

This handbook is designed to provide in-depth information about our Community Programs (Community Programs = anything that is not a summer program). Please review this document before your child's first day with us.

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Includes our refund, transfer, and snow day policies. Please review these carefully.

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Welcome to Community Programs 2025-2026 at Natick Community Organic Farm!

Fall Semester, September 2 - December 23, 2025

Spring Semester, January 5 - May 29, 2026

Whether it's your first time here or your fifteenth, thank you for choosing NCOF for educational programs!

We strive to create a safe, inclusive, and fun learning environment where children and young adults can learn and grow through hands-on experiences at our working farm.

This handbook includes important information including packing lists, policies and initial logistics notes.

Here are a few key things we ask you to do right now:

1. **Add communityprograms@natickfarm.org to your email inbox.** Email is the primary way we communicate with you, and adding our address to your contact list helps make sure our emails are delivered.
2. **Make note of our refund and transfer policies** (page 4).
3. **Double-check your selected program's dates and times.** These can be found on your receipt and in your [Sawyer dashboard](#).
4. **Make note our holidays for both the fall and spring semesters**, when there are no programs:
([NCOF follows the Natick Public School Calendar](#))

a. Labor Day: September 1	i. Winter Break: December 24-31
b. Rosh Hashana: September 23	j. New Year's Day: January 1-2
c. Yom Kippur: October 2	k. Martin Luther King Day: January 19
d. Indigenous Peoples' Day: October 13	l. February Vacation: February 16-20
e. Diwali: October 20	m. Eid al-Fitr: March 20
f. Veterans Day: November 11	n. Good Friday: April 3
g. Thanksgiving Break: November 26-28	o. April Vacation: April 20-24
h. NILS: December 1	p. Memorial Day: May 25
5. If your child requires an Epi-Pen or other medication, please complete our allergy form (page 12) and either 1) upload it during your online registration or 2) email it to us.

If you have any questions or concerns that are not answered in this handbook, please feel free to contact us: communityprograms@natickfarm.org or 508.655.2204 option 1.

We'll see you on the Farm!

Kirstie Beaton
Assistant Director, Education

Natick Community Organic Farm
117 Eliot St, Natick MA 01760
communityprograms@natickfarm.org
508.655.2204 option 1

Getting ready

Acclimating to the farm: NCOF is a community farm, open to the public for free from dawn to dusk, 365 days a year. We encourage all families to visit, especially those with children who are young and/or new to our programs. Family visits prior to scheduled programs can ease program day jitters. As our programs run year-round serving thousands of children, we are generally not able to arrange for 1:1 “meet and greets” with your child’s teacher.

Water and Snacks: Please send your child with a water bottle and a snack(s) to ALL programs. (Kids in programs 4+ hours in length should be sent with a meal and snacks.) Due to the prevalence of nut allergies, we request nut-free food. We may sample farm produce during our programs, so please alert us to your child’s allergies.

Dressing for the weather: Kindly review our detailed guide to gear at the end of this handbook, and contact us with any questions after reading. Families with children 7 and under: **please send a full change of clothes in your child’s backpack every day.**

Sunscreen & Bug Spray: Parents supply and apply both as needed. NCOF are not able to provide these products to students.

Program Policies

Refunds: NCOF is a working farm, and our programs run year-round, rain or shine. **Since we hire educators well in advance based on class enrollment, we only issue refunds for cancellation requests received 14 or more calendar days before a session’s first meeting.** Cancellation requests must be sent in writing to communityprograms@natickfarm.org. A \$35 processing fee applies.

NCOF reserves the right to cancel or postpone classes due to low enrollment. If we must cancel a class due for any reason, we will notify you as soon as possible and offer you options for a transfer or full refund.

Prorated refunds will be applied if registering for a program after the program start date. We do not offer refunds if a child is asked to leave a program due to behavior issues.

Transfers: We will do our best to accommodate requests for changes in enrollment, depending on a variety of factors including staff and facility availability. We are generally most able to accommodate transfers *before* a session begins. If you’d like to request a transfer, please email communityprograms@natickfarm.org indicating 1) your current program and 2) your desired program. Transfers will be confirmed in writing by a member of the NCOF Education team.

Weather Delays and Cancellations: NCOF programs follow the weather closures of Natick Public Schools (NPS). **If NPS are closed due to snow or other weather conditions, farm programs are canceled that day as well.** If NPS has a delayed opening, morning programs are canceled, while afternoon programs will run. If NPS has early dismissal, morning programs will run and afternoon programs will be canceled. While we do not issue refunds for NPS closure days, we will make every effort to offer a make-up class - please note that this may not be possible. **Make-up classes are not available for student absences/missed classes.**

Scholarships: Full and partial scholarships are available for programs. [Please click here for more information](#) and/or contact Kirstie, Assistant Director at communityprograms@natickfarm.org.

Aides: Contact us if your child needs to attend with an aide or other support person. Please note that parents/caregivers are not allowed to participate in programs. All of our programs are drop-off, except those designated as 'with a Caregiver' program.

Communication: For Farm to Families, we will use:

- Email- primary mode of contact. **Please ensure communityprograms@natickfarm.org is added to your safe sender/contact list.**
- Telephone- last minute program changes, issues, child illness etc. In this era of working from home, leaving our phones on vibrate, spam call blocking apps, **please ensure we can reach you when your child is on the farm.** While the most common call home is for a forgotten water bottle or snack, it's imperative that we can reach you when needed.

Toileting: Children must be **fully potty-trained both at and away from home** and require no assistance in toileting to participate in our drop-off programs. We'll do our best to talk a child through changing their own clothes after an accident, but if they struggle with that and/or have an accident with a bowel movement, we will call for an early pick-up. We do not change diapers or pull-ups.

We offer frequent bathroom breaks and reminders to young children.

Late Pick Up: A late fee of \$1 per minute will be charged after a 5 minute grace period.

First Aid & Poison Ivy:

- Scrapes & cuts: We will wash with soap and water and apply a Band-Aid. We do not apply any topical medications (incl. Antibiotic ointment, anti-itch), sunscreen, or bug spray.
- If we think your child has been exposed to poison ivy, we will help them wash the affected area with Tecnu, a mineral-oil based product that removes the irritating oils. We also instruct all children 5+ in identifying the plant.

Photos & Electronics: The Farm often takes pictures to use in its marketing materials. If you would prefer not to have your child's picture taken, please let us know at info@natickfarm.org. Please also mark "no" when completing the photo release section in Sawyer.

Please ensure your child's electronics stay at home, except for essential medical devices. Children with cell phones for pick-up communication may bring those devices, but they must stay in the child's bag.

Program Ratios:

- 6 students : 1 teacher for ages 9 and under
- 7 students : 1 teacher for ages 10 and up

Unknown Intruder (Unrecognized Person) Procedures: All staff members at NCOF carry cell phones and/or radios (walkie talkies) at all times for communication purposes between staff members, as well as in the event of emergencies. If any staff member does not have a working cell phone, a handheld radio will be provided to them for communication. Phone numbers of all NCOF personnel, Assistant Director - Education, and educators will be provided to each other for communication purposes.

In the event that a person or persons who are threatening, unknown, or unwelcome are in the local vicinity of NCOF staff and/or students and the attending supervisor feels the situation unsafe, the following should be initiated:

- **If there is immediate and significant perceived threat, students outdoors or indoors:**
 - If there is a significant and immediate threat, the supervising adult at the scene should immediately call 9-1-1 to initiate a police response, providing the dispatch center with all relevant details, including a description of their location on the farm, as well as the presence of other student groups on site.
 - If due to situational events, it is impossible for the staff member to safely contact 911 directly, they should contact the Assistant Director - Education and/or other NCOF staff members via phone or text or radio to alert them of the situation, allowing NPD to be notified immediately. All staff should stay with their students. If safely possible, move students in a group to the farmhouse and immediately close and lock exterior access doors and windows. Keep all students together, seated, and quiet, away from windows and doors. If it's not possible to reach the farmhouse, safely move students to another protected area such as a building, barn, shed, or other area as quickly as possible. When arriving at a safe location, a head count of all students and staff will be conducted.
 - If it is safely possible, notify the NCOF Education office about the situation via phone or text or radio. Four long blasts of the air horn will be sounded to alert all groups and staff to shelter in place at the nearest protected location and have their phone available to receive further instructions. All staff should report to the farmhouse to receive further instructions. Please note that airhorns do expire - expiration dates will be checked at the beginning of each school year and airhorns will be replaced as needed.
- **If there is no immediate perceived threat, students outdoors:**
 - In a safe and calm manner, the staff member(s) should immediately move their group away from the unknown individual and toward the farmhouse. If the farmhouse is not possible, they will go to the barn or closest building.
 - While walking, the staff member should immediately contact the NCOF Education office, as well as the Assistant Director - Education via phone and/or text or radio and advise them of the individual's location, appearance, and other pertinent situational information. The director(s) will then alert the other educational groups to return to the Farmhouse. When arriving, a head count of all students and staff will be conducted. All doors and windows should be shut.
 - Local police departments should be contacted as situation warrants.
- **If there is no immediate perceived threat, students indoors:**
 - If students are already inside a secure building when an unrecognized/ unwanted person approaches, the facility should be shut down (all lights turned off, doors shut and locked, windows closed and locked) and all students kept together in a quiet, calm fashion with staff. A head count of all staff and students should be conducted. The Assistant Director - Education should be immediately notified via phone and/or text or radio of the situation, and advise the individual(s) location, appearance, and other pertinent details.
 - The local police department should be contacted as the situation warrants. In any unique situation that may arise, NCOF staff members are expected to use the best means necessary for the protection of themselves and their students as the specific situation dictates and as instructed by law enforcement, if required.

Dressing for the weather

There's nothing more invigorating than a four-season, outdoor experience at the Natick Community Organic Farm! Proper dressing techniques, base layers, and outerwear are essential for your child's safety and fun. Remember: *"there's no such thing as bad weather, only bad clothes."*

While some of these guidelines are geared to younger children, parents of older youth should adapt this information accordingly.

Spare clothing: Please pack a full change of clothes (top(s), bottom(s), socks, underwear) in your child's backpack for children 7 and under. You may give the farm educators another full change of clothes to be kept at the farm. These must be in a labeled zip-top bag or pouch. We cannot accept clothes in tote bags, shopping bags etc. as these are very unwieldy in our limited storage space.

Labels: Please label all of your children's belongings, especially outerwear, backpacks and water bottles.

Getting dirty: We can and we will get dirty at the farm! That's part of the fun here. Please send clothes that can get dirty.

Gear notes continue on the next page...

Gear Recommendations - clothing

Cooler Weather	Warmer Weather
<p>Best materials/fabrics all year round: synthetics (e.g. polypropylene), fleece, wool, silk. No cotton, as it does not insulate when wet.</p> <p>Two lighter layers are better than one heavy layer, as it allows children to more easily adjust for body temperature with changing weather and levels of activity.</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Base layer: This is your wicking layer, designed to pull chilling moisture away from the body. We recommend a synthetic long sleeve and long pants, e.g. long underwear, athletic fabrics.● Second layer: This is your warming layer. Something “fuzzy” is generally the right thing, e.g. a fleece, wool sweater or long underwear, down jacket, fleece joggers.● Third layer: This is your waterproof layer. E.g. winter coat, rain jacket, snow pants, puddle pants.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Base layer: We still recommend synthetic fabrics. On a dry day in late spring, a synthetic top and heavier-weight pants might be just enough.● Second layer: a warming layer may or may not be needed on warmer days. It never hurts to pack one, just in case. New England weather is fickle.● Third layer: This is your waterproof layer. E.g. rain pants, puddle pants.

Required Footwear: Footwear protects the foundation of our bodies - our feet. **Children must wear sturdy, closed toe sneakers or boots at all times during programs.** Rain boots are OK.

No sandals or flip-flops (this includes Crocs, Keens, Natives and Tevas). **Kids without proper footwear may be sent home.**



Snow boots are recommended for all winter programs.

Winter-specific notes: Even on the coldest days, there are farm chores to do and nature to explore! This can be a challenging season for kids who aren’t used to the cold and/or aren’t warm enough.

Upper body: warm, waterproof layers. Two or three thin layers are always better than one thick layer, as they allow children to layer/de-layer as activity levels change.

Hands: gloves AND mittens are a must. This is usually the first part of a child’s body that gets chilled. Please pack:

- two pairs of knit stretchy gloves, as many kids like to keep their “stretchies” on during snack time AND
- at least 1 pair of **waterproof** mittens- roomy enough to fit “stretchies” underneath. A Velcro or elastic wrist is most manageable for small kids.

Feet: waterproof boots are a must.

Head: full coverage wool or fleece hat, balaclava or ski mask

Staff favorites for used outdoor gear include: Facebook marketplace, Framingham Savers, Geartrade.com, REI, Craigslist, local children's resale stores.

Places to buy new gear include: REI, Natick Outdoor Store, Biddle and Bop, LL Bean, Polarn O. Pyret*, Bog Boots (farm favorite, and a combined rain and snow boot)

*Polarn O. Pyret Gear Discount (15% on full-price items)

https://www.polarnopyretusa.com/outdoor_schools Click "Program Application"

Enter your information and provide the name and address of the Forest Gnome program Forest Gnomes , 117 Eliot Street , Natick, MA 01760

Behavioral Guidelines

We invite our guests to be happy, curious, engaged, and respectful when visiting the farm. NCOF is a working farm and we want you to be part of the process. We ask that all visitors help us care for the farm and animals by respecting the:

Animals	Farm and Environment	Group
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Quiet voices• Walking feet• Gentle hands• Respect the animal's home	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Move carefully around plants and fields• Clean up your space at the end of an activity• Respect the farmers' work	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Listen to educators and peers• Show kindness towards others• Share with others

Appropriate behavior is expected at all times. Inappropriate behavior will be addressed. Unacceptable behavior will generally be addressed along the following steps:

1. At the first instance of unacceptable behavior, NCOF staff will discuss it with the child's caregiver. The Assistant Director of Education will email a follow up.
2. The second instance will result in the child being asked to leave for the day. The Assistant Director of Education will also follow up.
3. On the third event the child will be uninvited from participating in future Farm programming.

This communication will come from the Assistant Director of Education. Unacceptable behaviors include: cruelty to the animals, violence towards others, gross disrespect, bullying, swearing and foul language, blatant disregard towards educators, and willful destruction of crops, structures, or produce.

No refunds will be issued if a child is asked to leave a program due to poor behavior. Please note that the three steps above are subjective and will scale up if the first instance of behavior is severe.

Behavioral Meeting: The Assistant Director and educators will call a behavioral meeting at either the second or third step, depending on the severity of the behavior. This meeting will determine if the child can return to the program.

All students must follow stated behavior expectations and safety rules. Please discuss any pertinent information regarding your child with us prior to enrolling. We strive to make the Farm's programs as accessible and welcoming as possible, and accommodate students' varying needs to the best of our ability, resources and expertise. We reserve the right to dismiss a student if, in our judgment, the student's behavior violates the Farm's safety and behavior policies and/or compromises the learning or safety of other students. In such cases, no refunds will be provided. If you have any questions regarding your child's ability to participate in our program, please contact us prior to enrolling.

Health Policies and Guidelines

Please keep our community's health in mind by keeping your child home if they are ill. We make this request all year round, and certainly in our COVID era.

If your child is placed on an antibiotic, they must remain home until they have been on medication for 24 hours.

Children who have a fever must stay home until they have been fever-free for 24 hours *without* the use of fever-reducing medication.

We ask and expect that children will stay home if they have:

- a fever
- vomited within the last 12 hours
- a persistent and/or productive cough
- a sore throat
- a runny nose that has just begun (in these cases, please keep your kiddo home for 2 program days, as this is likely when they are most contagious)
- new loss of taste or smell
- chills, muscle aches
- had 2+ cases of diarrhea in the last 24 hours

Any child who vomits during the program day will be removed from their group and sent home.

Allergies

Please discuss your child's allergies with us in advance, especially if they require, or may require, any medication while on-Farm (e.g. inhaler, EpiPen, antihistamine). As a working farm that is outdoors and open to the public, we cannot guarantee an allergen-free environment.

We strive to accommodate students' allergies to the best of our ability and resources within our program format.

Given the hands-on nature of our programming where students are interacting with a host of potential allergens including crops, livestock, and animal feeds, we may not be a suitable environment for all students with allergies. Please give us a call to discuss your child's needs.

Respiratory Virus Infections

[Guidance and protocols are from the Commonwealth of MA and Town of Natick. Last updated September 2025.](#)

While masks are not required, any individual who wishes to continue to mask, including those who face higher risk from COVID-19 and other respiratory viruses/infections, will be supported in that choice.

If your child has either tested positive for a respiratory viral pathogen (i.e., SARS-CoV2, Influenza, Respiratory Syncytial Virus, etc) or is exhibiting two or more symptoms of a respiratory viral illness (e.g., cough, shortness of breath, sore throat, runny nose, headache, myalgia, chills, fatigue, fever), even in the absence of a test, should remain home.

- A student **who has had respiratory viral symptoms** may return to programs:
 - After 3 days have passed since symptom onset; (Day 0 represents symptom onset, with return on Day 4) **AND**
 - If symptoms are improving, including being fever-free without the use of fever-reducing medication for 24 hours; **AND**
 - If they feel well enough to return.
- A student **who has been asymptomatic but tested positive for a viral respiratory pathogen** may return after 3 days; (Day 0 represents positive test date, with return on Day 4).
- Any student who returns to programs prior to 7 days since their symptom onset or first positive test was taken **must wear a facemask (if able to** until after 7 days have passed** (Day 8 represents the first day masks may be removed).

If your child is exposed to someone who has a respiratory viral illness but are not themselves exhibiting any symptoms and have not tested positive for a respiratory viral pathogen, do not need to be restricted from programs, provided they remain asymptomatic.

* "Able to" = whether the individual is unable to consistently wear a mask due to young age (2 or under) or medical or behavioral condition