



FarmChat® FAQ

Question: What is FarmChat®?

Answer: FarmChat® is a unique program that utilizes technology (Skype, FaceTime and other software platforms) to bring the farm experience directly into school classrooms. Using a lap top at the school and a mobile device at the farm, students connect with and directly speak with the farmer. Students can see the farm and ask the farmer questions. They can even virtually ride along in the combine or tour a livestock barn all from the safety and security of their classroom. Think of it as a virtual farm fieldtrip or modern pen pal.

Question: Why FarmChat®?

Answer:

- No transportation needed = Cost savings
- Most working farms are not set up for fieldtrips (safety issues and other logistical issues like bathrooms create obstacles).
- Less time away from school.
- It is very easy to reschedule if for any reason there is a problem.
- Allows you to focus the experience and the student learning.
- There are fewer distractions for students and learning time is maximized.
- Students can see and experience things that they could not during a class fieldtrip to a farm.
- Provides real-world connections to the Iowa Core.

Question: Who can do FarmChat®?

Answer: Anyone! The beauty of the program is that it is simple, easy, and only relies on connectivity of a cellular network. FarmChat® programs can be initiated by farmers interested in sharing what they do. They can be initiated by teachers wanting to teach their students about crops and livestock. Or they can be initiated by community groups or volunteers.

Question: What video conferencing program is best?

Answer: Programs commonly used include Skype, Google Hangouts, Facetime and Zoom. While their features vary slightly, it is most important to pick a program that those involved are familiar with and comfortable using.

Below is a brief comparison of program features. Technology is always changing, so check company websites for current features.

- Skype
 - 2-25 users
 - Everyone must have a Skype account
 - Easy to use – Most teachers have used it before
 - Can record from laptop using Evaer
- Google Hangouts
 - 2-10 users
 - Person organizing must have a Google Plus account
 - Anyone else can join with a link sent by the session host.
 - Does not currently work in Firefox web browser
 - Can livestream using Hangouts On Air with [YouTube Live](#)
- FaceTime
 - All participants must have apple devices (ipad, iphone, mac computer)
 - Very easy – direct call, no web interface
- Zoom
 - 2-100 users
 - Only the organizer needs an account
 - Easy for teacher to join call by following link from email invite
 - Free version limited to 40 minutes
- Facebook Live
 - Live video streamed from a Facebook post
 - Viewers type in questions or comments
 - Unlimited reach
 - Video can be viewed later on the host's FaceBook page
 - Some schools block Facebook
 - Good platform for reaching adults.
 - Not compatible with Bluetooth speakers/microphones.

Question: What are some tips for success?

Answer:

- Be sure to have a structured outline of the program. Work with the teacher to develop it. Ask yourself these questions:
 - What do students want to know?
 - What topics and skills are the students learning in school? (consider math, science, and social studies connections)
 - What will the farmer talk about and when?
 - How can I minimize down time during transitions (i.e. moving from the hog barn to the machine shed)?
 - How much time should we leave for questions?

- Have your software of choice downloaded on the mobile device at the farm as well as on the computer in the classroom. We recommend Skype, but there are several others that can work too.
- A cellular connection on farm end is better than hotspot or Wi-Fi
- A hardwired connection at the school ensures the best quality connection as opposed to a wireless connection
- Test the connection prior to class participation
 - Test while on location if you are at all worried about the cellular connection. Metal barns and background noise from animals or equipment affect the quality of the connection,
 - Do a dry run with the teacher, especially if they are not familiar with the program you are using. Be sure they know how to adjust the camera,
- Decide on who calls who and at what time
- It is best to have a camera person holding the phone or iPad at the farm, so that the farmer can focus on the presentation and talking with the students
- The person filming should get comfortable with iPad or Phone
 - Know microphone and camera locations (make sure you don't cover them up with a finger)
 - Keep the mic away from wind
 - When filming, keep your back to sun
 - Hold the device landscape for wider view
 - Move the device slowly
- Position the school computer at the students' height so they can speak and look directly into the camera.
- Use external speakers on school-end so you can better control the volume in the classroom
- Have younger students prepare questions in advance or whisper questions to the teacher before asking their question.
- Keep the program to 20 minutes for grades K-2. Keep the program between 20 and 35 minutes for grades 3 and up.

Question: How do I follow FarmChat® trademark guidelines?

Answer: IALF holds the trademark for FarmChat®. However, anyone interested in using a FarmChat® program for educational purposes is welcome to use the trademark. Please be sure to use the correct symbol (®) and spell FarmChat® as one word with a capital F and capital C. FarmChat® should be used as an adjective for the program and not as a verb or noun. Therefore, "FarmChatting®" or "FarmChats®" are incorrect. Instead, language like "Hosting a FarmChat® program" or "FarmChat® programs" is preferred.

Question: Do you have sample outlines or videos from FarmChat® programs?

Answer:

- Sample outlines are available at: <http://www.iowaagliteracy.org/resources/other-resources.aspx>

- Visit the Iowa Agriculture Literacy Foundation YouTube Channel to see video clips of FarmChat® programs. <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL6fqYHxgQAn1tohm6nIKuE6g6173TPywO>

Question: Is there a way to record FarmChat® programs?

Answer: Livestreaming FarmChat® programs is one option. Facebook Live or YouTube Live enable users to upload the finished video so anyone can view it later from your Facebook Wall or YouTube Channel.

Currently, there are not recording features built into the free versions of Skype, Google Hangouts or Zoom. However, there are a few ways to record them using separate programs. They fall into three categories:

- Screen Recording Software (Camtasia, Snagit, Bandicam Movavi, etc.): These programs are designed to record anything on your screen; therefore, they will work to record any video conferencing program (Skype, Google Hangouts, etc.). Most recording programs require a paid licensing agreement, and need to be installed on a laptop or desktop computer.
- Third-Party Skype Recording Software (Evaer, Callnote, etc.): These programs are specifically designed to work with Skype. Like screen capture programs, most require a paid licensing agreement and cannot be installed on mobile devices. A complete list of programs is available on the [Skype support center](#).
- Recording features within Windows & Microsoft Office products: There are two relatively new screen & app recording features built into programs you may already have.
 - *Xbox Game Bar DVR:* Designed to record gaming activity, the Xbox app included with Windows 10 enables user to record any app including Skype. It is simple to use and automatically saves an MP4 video file to your computer. To open the Game Bar after you've started a Skype call, press the Windows Logo Key + G. Detailed instructions are found in the [Xbox support center](#).
 - *PowerPoint Screen Recording:* The latest versions of PowerPoint include the capability to record your screen. It is designed capture video and insert it into a power point, but you can also save the file to your computer. Although a little more cumbersome to operate, it works well. Instructions are found on the [Microsoft Office support center](#).

Whichever option you choose, be sure to ask the teacher and farmer for permission before recording a FarmChat® program.

For more information and questions contact:

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