

How *Country Life*

Makes Children Strong and Resilient



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There's a movement brewing across America.



Families are opting out of the typical high-stress, cookie-cutter urban or suburban lifestyle, in favor of a simpler, slower-paced life in the country.

While different families have different reasons for going rural, such as greater self-sufficiency, more financial freedom, to reduce stress, etc., a common thread is the desire to raise children in a healthier, safer and more wholesome environment.

A childhood experience similar to generations' past, where children were free to explore, play and experience nature, while learning the value of hard work and respect for the land and community.

These experiences are often hard to come by in highly-populated urban areas, and a growing body of research has confirmed that children benefit—physically, mentally and emotionally—from time spent in the presence of nature and wide open spaces.

How exactly do they benefit?

That's what this Guide is all about: showcasing the incredible research and science behind the power of country living to build strong and resilient children.

And, as we keep hearing through news reports, research and parental observation, today's children need that strength and resiliency more than ever.

For example, rates of depression and anxiety among children and teens have risen dramatically over the last 50 years. With studies reporting a 5-7 times higher rate than 50 years ago¹.

Once uncommon chronic diseases, such as asthma, diabetes, obesity, allergies, vision problems and sleep disorders now afflict a startling number of American children—more than doubling from 12.8% in 1994 to 26.6% (or more) today².

1. <http://www-personal.umich.edu/~daneis/symposium/2012/readings/Twenge2010.pdf>
2. <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/fullarticle/185391>

Then there's the decline in learning ability and behavioral health of today's youth, with a staggering 11% of children suffering from ADHD (that's a 42% increase over 8 years³), for example.

Plus, kids move less than ever, socialize on screens more than ever and spend most of their days indoors—which only fuels the flames surrounding many of these conditions.

It begs a very important question: what exactly is happening to our children? And, more importantly, what can we do to help them?

While these challenges are complex, one thing experts agree upon is today's children need less stress, more playtime, more time outdoors, more time to explore and daydream and less stimuli to thrive.

Throughout this Guide, you will discover compelling scientific evidence and real-life stories that speak to the power of country living for enriching the lives of children.

Everything from the latest research on how farm life, time spent in green space and time spent with animals can reduce their risk of chronic disease; to the unique educational enrichment opportunities available in rural areas, and inspirational success stories from children and families whose lives have improved since going-country.

Yes, the challenges facing today's children and youth can seem overwhelming...but, what if the solution to much of this was relatively simple? And what if you had the power to create the changes you wish to see in your children?

Keep reading to learn more...

...today's children need less stress, more playtime, more time outdoors, more time to explore and daydream and less stimuli to thrive.

3. <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/adhd/data.html>



Part 1: How Country Living Enhances Children's Physical Health



...children are getting less exercise, unstructured play and downtime than ever before, while spending an alarming amount of time rushing from activity to activity or sitting indoors on screens.

Many of us were lucky to grow up in a time when regular fresh air and exercise were a normal (or even mandatory) part of childhood.

We may have walked to school, ran around our neighborhoods without a care in the world, had PE every day, played unorganized sports and spent countless hours wandering around the big open world.

Fast-forward to the 21st century and American childhood has changed dramatically.

No longer do most children walk to school, neighborhoods are quieter than they used to be, physical education is either limited or non-existent in many schools, extra-curricular activities have taken the place of unstructured play and many parents are afraid to let their children wander around outside unattended.

This means children are getting less exercise, unstructured play and downtime than ever before, while

spending an alarming amount of time rushing from activity to activity or sitting indoors on screens.

Aptly coined “the indoor generation,” the average child spends 5-8 hours per day on a screen or device⁴ and the average person up to 90% of their day indoors⁵ a recent report from the EPA estimates.

According to the *Centers for Disease Control*, 1 in 6 of today's children and teens are obese⁶ and nearly 1 in 4 new young military applicants are rejected due to being overweight or obese⁷.

This “new culture” of childhood is beginning to show sobering health consequences for the next generation, including an epidemic of stress-related childhood conditions.

4. <https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-32067158>

5. <https://www.epa.gov/indoor-air-quality-iaq/inside-story-guide-indoor-air-quality>

6. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/21971919>

7. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/21971919>

An Unconventional Solution:

While the health challenges like obesity, asthma, sleep disorders, autoimmune disease, etc. affecting today's youth may seem complex, a growing body of research has shown the remarkable benefits of nature, unstructured play, outdoor exercise and [chores](#), homegrown foods and time spent with animals on children's physical health (and mental and emotional health too, which we'll touch on coming up).

The following are some examples of how country living can create a physically healing and protective lifestyle for children.

Example #1: Farm Life and Outdoor Time Boost Immunity and Lower Rates of Asthma

Most of us grew up in the "germ warfare" era and were taught that germs were bad and to be annihilated at all costs.

However, new research on the human microbiome, as documented in the *National Institutes of Health's* "Human Microbiome Project" has turned old-fashioned germ-theory on its ear.

As it turns out, [not all germs are bad](#). And our bodies need the opportunity to fight off harmless bacteria, viruses, fungi, etc. to build strong immunity and defenses...

...and that's where country living comes in.

Farm and country living, with all its fresh air, animals, farm-fresh food and close connection to nature, provides a hefty dose of natural, gut-diversifying, immune-boosting germs to protect your health.

It almost acts like an earth-based probiotic.

And studies have shown that farm kids tend to have stronger immune systems, more resilient gut microbiomes and less chronic conditions, like asthma, than city kids.

For example, a study released last year in the *New England Journal of Medicine* showed Amish children who spent time around farm animals had a significantly lower risk of asthma than children who did not spend time with animals⁸.

Researchers believe this is due to the microbe-rich barnyard dust the children inhale, which challenges and thus strengthens their immunity over time.

Scientists are so convinced by their "barnyard dust hypothesis" that they have proposed a comparable spray be formulated for children who won't have contact with farm animals in their early years.



8. <http://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMoa1508749>

Part 1: How Country Living Enhances Children's Physical Health

Asthma rates among typical school-age children have risen dramatically to more than 10 percent in recent years, while the Amish maintain a low 2-4 percent asthma and allergy rate among childhood populations.

Additionally, studies have shown that children who spend more time outdoors exposed to natural sunlight have a lower risk of asthma. Researchers believe this is due to the natural vitamin D the sun affords, which lowers inflammation and helps boost overall immunity⁹.

Example #2: Country Life Can Help Prevent Obesity and Promote Healthy Weight

If you're over the age of 30, chances are you spent a lot of time running, jumping, climbing, walking, skipping and *moving* as a child. You didn't think of it as "exercise" because you were just having fun.

Unfortunately, research has shown children today are less aerobically fit than children were 30 years ago (maybe because they're spending 90% of their time indoors), and that can set them up for serious future health problems¹⁰.

The good news is, children naturally LOVE to move—they usually just need the opportunity to do so more often.

As you'll hear in the "real life stories" section, and as we've demonstrated in previous articles, rural living affords a wide variety of opportunities for daily physical exercise and movement.

For instance, children on a farmstead get daily exercise doing farm chores such as milking cows or goats, helping in the garden, caring for animals, riding horses, mending fences, splitting wood and mucking out stalls.

In our article: "[Secrets To Making Farm Chores Fun For Children of All Ages](#)", mother-of-five, homesteader and farm-to-fork entrepreneur Amanda Browning recommends children start helping on the farm as young as possible.

For example, toddlers and school-aged children can help with collecting and washing eggs, seeding, extracting honey, weeding, caring for young animals and washing out troughs.

You'll find more helpful information on how farm chores benefit kids in the next section: "How Country Living Fosters Strong Emotional Health, Intelligence, Self-Esteem, Work Ethic and Focus on Children."



9. <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2011/05/110518121028.htm>

10. <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2013/11/20/246316731/kids-are-less-fit-today-than-you-were-back-then>

Part 1: How Country Living Enhances Children's Physical Health

For non-farm kids, life on acreage presents endless options for outdoor exercise and exploration such as building forts, fishing, playing hide and seek, clearing brush, collecting tadpoles, hiking, exploring, mowing, splashing around creeks, skipping rocks, climbing trees, swinging on rope swings, playing in haylofts, riding bikes, setting up camp, collecting bugs, catching butterflies, digging and just running around wild and free.

Plus, research has shown that when we are engaged in outdoor physical activity, it helps lower stress hormones, increase metabolism, diversify the gut microbiome¹¹ and promote good sleep—all of which can influence a child's present and future risk of obesity and weight-gain.

Many families also take advantage of their land to grow and raise their own food, which promotes better nutrition and food choices.

For young children especially, the process of planting, tending and harvesting fruit and vegetables, collecting eggs or milking cows or goats makes eating real, healthy foods irresistible. And better nutrition makes maintaining a healthy weight much easier.

Example #3: Time Spent in Outdoor, Rural Spaces Can Improve Children's Sleep and Peace of Mind


The way people sleep—children and adults—has changed a lot in the last 20 years.

No longer are children and adolescents collapsing into bed early after a long day of school and playing outdoors. Rather, they are getting to bed later and getting up earlier; which often leads to not enough zzzs.

Teens are most at risk, with a recent study showing about 40 percent of adolescents sleep less than 7 hours a night¹²!

And younger children are affected too. For example, a 2018 study from the McGill University's department of psychiatry, estimated that only half of children aged 10-11 get the recommended 9-10 hours of sleep per night¹³.

A lack-of-sleep in childhood can cause serious cognitive, attention, emotional, social and behavioral problems¹⁴. And sleep deprivation in young children has also been associated with a higher risk of obesity and weight-gain later in life¹⁵.



...when we are engaged in outdoor physical activity, it helps lower stress hormones, increase metabolism, diversify the gut microbiome and promote good sleep...

11. <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2015/12/151229204232.htm>
12. <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2017/10/171019100416.htm>
13. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/29793184>

14. <https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2017/03/study-flags-later-risks-for-sleep-deprived-kids/>
15. <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapediatrics/fullarticle/383686>

Part 1: How Country Living Enhances Children's Physical Health

Further, not enough sleep weakens a child's immune system, making them more susceptible to illness and infection¹⁶.

While there is plenty parents can do to help their children sleep better (regardless of where they live), rural life does lend itself to better sleep outcomes.

For example, plenty of studies have shown the negative effects of light and noise pollution on our sleep cycle—both of which you can avoid in the country.

Further, as discussed in our previous example, the more time children spend outdoors, the better they will sleep (hence, your mother or grandmother's motivation to kick you outside as much as possible).

But the connection between outdoor time and better sleep isn't just due to more physical activity, though that certainly plays a key role. There are other factors at play.

For instance, research has proven time spent in green space—be it a pasture, the woods or even a park—positively affects sleep patterns, focus and mental well-being¹⁷.

What's more, a growing body of evidence has shown that the simple act of touching the earth daily (also known as "earthing" or "grounding") through gardening, playing in

the dirt or just running around barefoot can do wonders for resetting our circadian rhythm by balancing nighttime stress hormones¹⁸.

And exposure to natural sunlight plays a critical role in resetting and maintaining the body's sleep cycle¹⁹.

These are just a few examples of how country life promotes healthier sleep in children (and adults).

Example #4: More Time Spent in Nature Means Better Vision

Children today have a much tougher time with eyesight than they did a generation ago.

For example, it was once uncommon for children under the age of 13 to develop myopia (nearsightedness). But according to a new Canadian study, it is now common in children as young as 6 years old²⁰.

And myopia isn't the only vision issue on-the-rise. According to the *American Academy of Ophthalmology*, Ophthalmologists have seen a sharp increase in children with dry eye and eye strain.

...research has proven time spent in green space—be it a pasture, the woods or even a park—positively affects sleep patterns, focus and mental well-being.



16. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3256323/>
17. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5663018/>
18. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/15650465>

19. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2290997/>
20. <https://www.sciencenewsforstudents.org/article/outdoor-time-good-your-eyes>

Part 1: How Country Living Enhances Children's Physical Health

So, what is causing these early vision ailments...and what does this have to do with country living?

Let's look at the common causes first: ophthalmologists believe that dry eye and eye strain comes from too much screen time. And one well-known cause of myopia in children is too much time spent on fine detail work, such as reading and writing.

But there is a lesser-known cause of both: not enough time spent outdoors.

The vision-outdoor connection has to do with how our eyes are forced to adjust to natural light and objects in the distance.

When we go outdoors, the bright sunlight forces our eyes to "flex their muscles" as we work to focus on objects off in the distance. By contrast, the low, unnatural-lighting, blue light from screens and closeness of indoor objects doesn't afford our eyes the workout they need to stay healthy.

In children, a lack of natural sunlight actually slows the growth of the eye. So, just like plants our bodies need ample natural sunshine for proper growth.

Case in point, in one Chinese study more than 1800 6-year-olds participated in 40 minutes of daily outdoor activity at school, and by doing so notably reduced their incidence of myopia over a 3-year period²².

The takeaway: more time spent outdoors equals less vision problems in children.

Example #5: Country Life Reduces Stress and Stress-Related Ailments

We've left stress for last because it is the common factor that ties nearly every previous example together.

As you now know, many of the chronic conditions afflicting children and adults today are either caused by or exacerbated by stress.

For children, life in the country can dramatically reduce their stress levels for several reasons. Here are three key examples:

#1: There's less noise pollution—which reduces anxiety and depression while promoting better sleep, focus and healthier mood.

#2: They spend more time outdoors in nature—which helps lower stress hormones, boosts immunity through diversifying their gut microbiome (which directly impacts the brain via the vagus nerve), promotes healthier weight, reduces inflammation (a key factor in many chronic conditions, like asthma), increases concentration and focus and promotes a healthy sleep cycle.

#3: They have more opportunity for unstructured play—when it comes to reducing stress, promoting healthy attention and improving emotional intelligence in children, nothing beats the power of unstructured play or free play. For more information on the benefits of unstructured play, check out the next section (Part 2).

These are three examples of many, but they tie all our previous points together and prove that more time spent in the quiet of the natural world can do wonders for a child's stress levels.



21. <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2018/08/180806162718.htm>
22. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/26372583>

23. <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2015/12/151229204252.htm>

Part 2: How Country Living Fosters Strong Emotional Health, Intelligence, Self-Esteem, Work Ethic and Focus in Children



By now, you've seen how country living, farm life and time spent in nature can improve your child's physical health.

But emotional health, intelligence and strong character/work ethic are just as important for their success.

Rural/farm life has a rich history of helping promote responsibility, empathy and focus in children.

How exactly does this work? Let's look at some examples that explain why country kids tend to display these attributes.

Farm Chores Promote Greater Responsibility, Self-Esteem, Emotional Intelligence (EQ) and Work Ethic

There's no doubt that all types of chores help teach children responsibility and work ethic.

However, as many parents, educators and experts have discovered, farm chores specifically provide a special opportunity to foster these attributes in young minds.

Through our blog, RethinkRural.com, we have been

fortunate to interview several educators pioneering a "new" model of education: the farm school.

Daily chores including gardening, time spent with animals and care of the land, are a central part of their farm or nature-based curriculum. And the children within them are thriving on all levels.

Here's a quote from our recent article: "Free-range day-care: Preschool on a farm":

The farm-based daycare's program is a refreshing change from the all-too-standard daycare model that involves mostly indoor time, often a lot of television and electronics, and not much exposure to nature. Researchers believe today's children are indoors too much, missing vital lessons that will shape their thinking and understanding of the world into adulthood. In addition, outdoor time is shown to build stronger immune systems. And playing freely outdoors is believed to nurture a child's brain development, socialization and problem solving skills. So by doing something as simple as keeping the children outside more, Veronica is arguably giving them a leg up on their future.

Part 2: How Country Living Fosters Strong Emotional Health, Intelligence, Self-Esteem, Work Ethic and Focus in Children

But do the experts back the idea that farm chores help develop responsibility and work ethic?

According to Psychologist Marie Hartwell-Walker, the answer is yes!

Harwell-Walker recently wrote an article titled “Teaching a Work Ethic?”²⁴, in which she remarked the difference she’s observed in the work ethic of city kids vs. country kids. She found that farm kids “work (and work hard)”, while the city kids “complain about routine chores, such as clearing the table.”

She attributes this to the difference in lifestyle: farm work is valued because everyone participates, and if it’s not done the consequences are obvious. Whereas, “In other households, kids experience work as capriciously imposed by the big people and whether they do it or not has little observable consequence,” she writes.

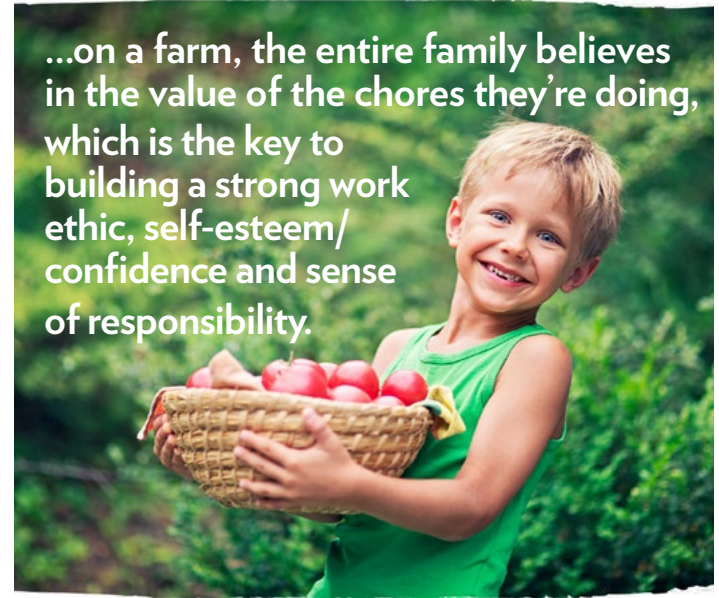
In other words: on a farm, the entire family believes in the value of the chores they’re doing, which is the key to building a strong work ethic, self-esteem/confidence and sense of responsibility.

Country Life Provides Rich Opportunities to Build Emotional and Social Intelligence and Better Cognitive Health

Emotional intelligence (also known as “EQ”) is a person’s ability to empathize and connect with other living things. And it’s now considered even more important to a child’s future success than their IQ.

The leaders-of-tomorrow must develop a keen sense of empathy if they are to inspire and motivate people to do great things.

Just like work ethic and a sense of responsibility, emotional intelligence is not set-at-birth and can be developed during childhood.



...on a farm, the entire family believes in the value of the chores they’re doing, which is the key to building a strong work ethic, self-esteem/confidence and sense of responsibility.

Farm life, whether it’s a minifarm, hobby farm, homestead or large-scale operation, provides an ideal setting for fostering strong emotional intelligence through the care of living things.

These living things could be farm animals, pets, fish in a pond, plants, seedlings, wildlife, etc.

For example, research has shown that attachment to a pet increases a child’s emotional intelligence scores, along with their social skills and mental well-being²⁵. And the natural cause- and-effect they observe by caring for plants can also help boost their emotional capacities.

Further, as we’ve discussed in previous examples, rural or country life typically provides children with ample time and space for unstructured or free play.

When children are allowed to explore, day dream and be creative without limitations, it puts them into a natural state of mindfulness, which helps to build gray matter in the brain,²⁶ and promotes healthy social behavior and emotional development²⁷.

Free play also helps further cultivate a child’s sense of self-esteem, which is crucial to their future success in school, career, family and life in general.

24. <https://psychcentral.com/lib/teaching-a-work-ethic/>
25. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5451941/>
26. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3004979/>

27. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/freedom-learn/201206/free-play-is-essential-normal-emotional-development>

Part 2: How Country Living Fosters Strong Emotional Health, Intelligence, Self-Esteem, Work Ethic and Focus in Children

All of this contributes to creating greater focus, attention and learning ability in children of all ages.

For instance, time spent in greenspace, sunshine and the great outdoors has proven numerous times to greatly enhance focus, reduce attention deficits and quell anxiety²⁸.

One notable study conducted over one year on 21,000 American elementary school students found that kids who were exposed to more natural sunlight during their school day displayed 26 percent higher reading outcomes and 20 percent higher math outcomes.

And another study of over 10,000 fifth-graders in 71 Georgia schools showed that kids in schools with unrestricted views of nature tested higher in reading, math, and language arts than those in schools with urban or no views²⁹.

These are just a few examples of how farm life, nature and country living can help cultivate intelligence, responsibility, empathy, self-esteem, work ethic and focus.

To learn more, check out the following articles:

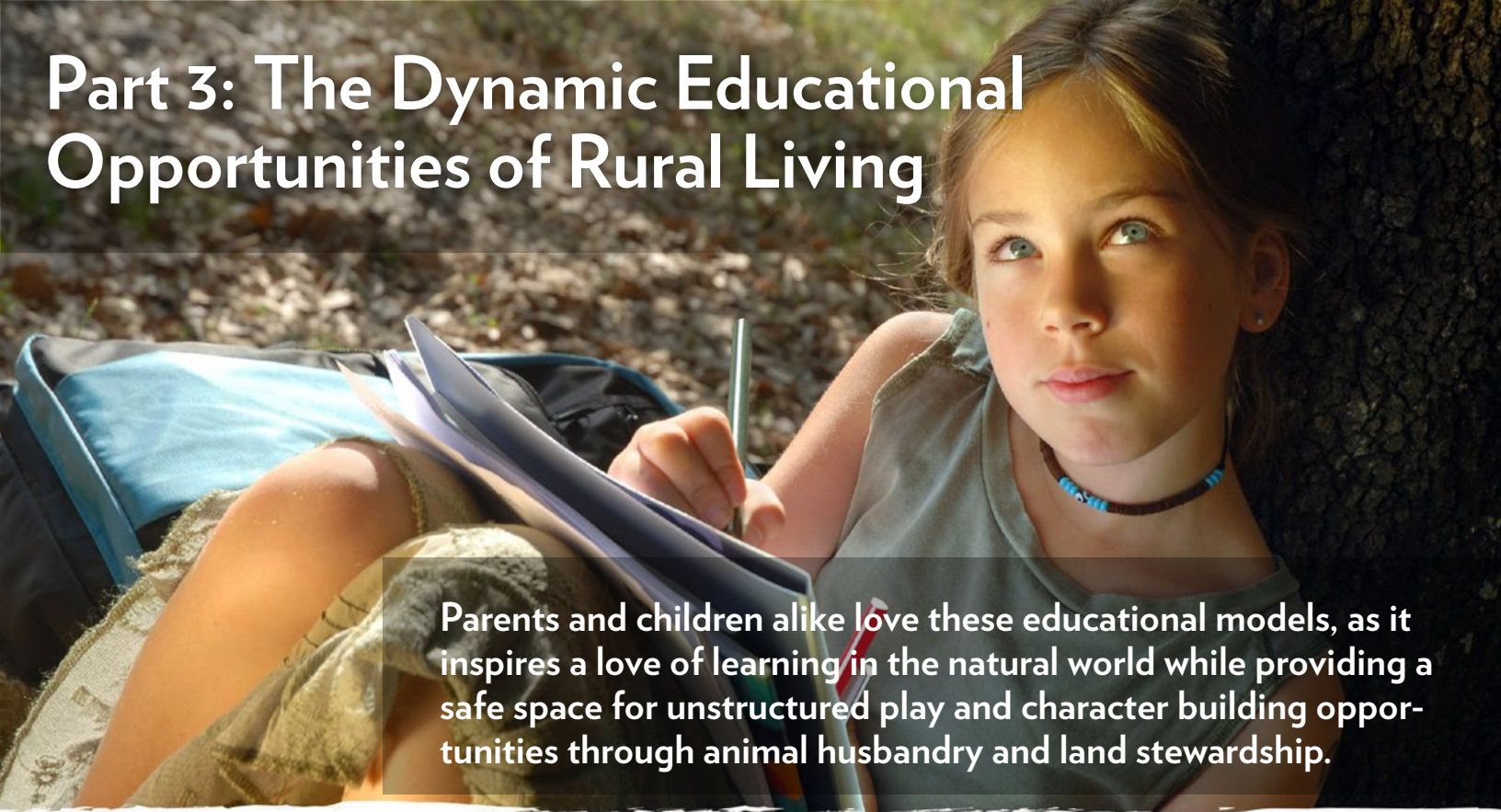
- [Why Kids Need Nature More Than Ever](#)
- [“Free-range” daycare: Preschool on a farm](#)
- [13 Unstructured Play Ideas to Get the Kids Outside](#)
- [Keeping Chickens---a taste of country life for a suburban family](#)
- [Secrets to Making Farm Chores Fun for Children of All Ages](#)
- [How a Digital Detox Could Change Your Life](#)

...kids who were exposed to more natural sunlight during their school day displayed 26 percent higher reading outcomes and 20 percent higher math outcomes.



28. <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/magazine/2016/01/call-to-wild/>
29. <https://www.nature.com/scientificamericanmind/journal/v20/n2/full/scientificamerican-mind0409-52.html>

Part 3: The Dynamic Educational Opportunities of Rural Living



Parents and children alike love these educational models, as it inspires a love of learning in the natural world while providing a safe space for unstructured play and character building opportunities through animal husbandry and land stewardship.

Walker County, Texas, conveniently located between Dallas and Houston, is home to excellent public schools, several religious and non-religious-based private schools, Sam Houston University and has a thriving homeschooling community.

Baker County, Florida, boasts a small, close-knit community with excellent public schools and easy access to greater educational opportunities in nearby Jacksonville, FL.

And Hall County, GA, located less than one-hour from Atlanta, is home to a variety of excellent public schools, Montessori schools, a nature-based preschool, a top-rated K-12 public school and religious-based schools.

Plus, rural areas are often hotbeds for nature-based and other outside-the-box schools.

We featured two of these schools recently on [rethinkrural.com](https://www.rethinkrural.com).

One is a nature-based preschool, [Celestial Farms in Jacksonville, FL](#), and another is the [Asheville Farmstead School](#), a farm-based natural science school for preschoolers and homeschoolers near Asheville in rural Canton, North Carolina.

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Now that you know a bit more about the types of educational opportunities available in rural areas, it's time to do some research.

Here Are Some Tips on How to Research Public and Private Schools in Rural Areas

1. **Contact us to request County eGuides** for Nassau County, FL; Bradford County, FL; Baker County, FL; Polk County, TX; and Walker County, TX. Each guide contains helpful information on the area's public and private schools, along with tips on homeschooling.
2. **Check out school ratings by using online resources** like [US News](#) and [SchoolDigger.com](#). Different sites will provide information on student-to-teacher ratio, test scores, rankings, student diversity and other demographics.

Part 3: The Dynamic Educational Opportunities of Rural Living

3. **Talk to your Realtor or land agent.** If you're ready to start looking, qualified agents can provide a wealth of insider information on what to look for (and look out for) within the local school district.
4. **Talk to other parents in the area.** Thanks to social media, it's never been easier to connect with local groups about local issues—like schools. Do a search to find mom's or dad's groups in your area of interest, ask to join and inquire away.
5. **Visit the schools of interest before you buy your home/land.** There's no better way to get a feel for a school and the surrounding community than by setting up an in-person visit. Be sure to come armed with a list of questions.

Considering Homeschooling? Here Are Some Helpful Tips

Just a few short years ago, homeschooling was considered an occupation of either the very religious OR the very unconventional family.

But times have changed. Today an estimated 2 million American children are homeschooled³⁰, making up 3 percent of the U.S. population. And that number is only expected to grow in the coming years.

For many families considering a full lifestyle change by moving to the country, homeschooling represents the ultimate freedom: freedom of education, freedom of

time and freedom to shape their children's minds and values.

Rural homeschooling also provides a creative way to use your dream property as a practical-learning and/or outdoor-educational mecca.

But, unless you have a degree in education, or home-school presently, setting up a successful homeschool program can sound intimidating.

Here Are Some Tips We've Collected From Real Rural Homeschoolers on What It Takes to Get Started:

1: Before you get too excited, determine whether your family is a fit for homeschooling by asking yourself the following questions:

- Can we afford for one parent to stay home and teach while the other works?
- Do I enjoy teaching?
- Would I be happy spending all day teaching my children?
- Are I willing to go the extra mile to plan social events, build community, etc.?
- Does my family jive with the homeschooling culture, i.e. are we willing to be a bit "different" than the average family?
- WHY do I want to homeschool in the first place?



Part 3: The Dynamic Educational Opportunities of Rural Living

2: Research the legal requirements for homeschooling in your state. Every state has different rules and requirements when it comes to homeschooling.

In Texas, for example, parents or guardians have near-free reign to educate their children as they see fit with very little state oversight.

Conversely, Florida has stricter requirements. Parents must send a written notice of intent to the school district superintendent within 30 days of beginning the home education program, maintain a portfolio of educational records, make the portfolio available for inspection by the superintendent upon 15-day written notice and provide an annual educational evaluation of the student's educational progress to the superintendent.

To learn the legal requirements for your state, visit the State's Department of Education website or consult a local homeschooling advocacy group.

3. Research the curriculum option available. These days, there are hundreds of homeschooler curricula available for purchase, and some for free, online.

In our recent article: "[Homeschooling on the Florida Homestead](#)", homeschool veteran and mother of 5 Nicole Andrews offered this advice on researching and choosing a curriculum:

The easiest way for new families to familiarize themselves with curriculum options is to check out local homeschool conferences and expos. There, you can explore the vendors, physically leaf through material and connect with other families and professionals.

Nicole's family uses a Christian-based curriculum called "[Classical Conversations](#)." In addition to supplying a full curriculum for all ages, they also offer local co-ops, events and support.

To find a local expo in your area, visit these sites:

- southeasthomeschoolexpo.com
- greathomeschoolconventions.com

As you research, keep in mind that nearly all school districts now offer virtual learning options—where your children can get a quality public school education at home.

There are also hybrid homeschooling programs—a combination of private or public school and homeschool classes, available through local public schools, co-ops, universities and private schools.

Some benefits of hybrid learning include study time with peers, official transcripts, tutoring and assistance with the college application process.

Additionally, homeschoolers may be eligible to dual-enroll in local colleges for college credit. To learn more, check with your local community college.

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Part 3: The Dynamic Educational Opportunities of Rural Living

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4. Find Your Tribe. All the homeschoolers we've talked with have emphasized the necessity of either joining or creating a homeschooling community.

How do you find them? Through...

- Homeschooling conferences/expos
- Local co-ops
- State and national homeschooling associations
- Public schools offering free tutoring, electives, sports or "hybrid" educational programs (more on this below)
- Local churches
- Your parks and rec department (for organized sports, dance, camps and other extracurricular activities)
- Local homeschooling associations
- Online resources like [Meetup.com](https://www.meetup.com)
- Volunteer organizations, to help teach stewardship and philanthropy
- Nature centers, arboretums, zoos, etc. may have "young explorer" programs or other natural educational classes, camps and volunteer opportunities for children
- Local private or nature-based schools may offer supplemental homeschooling classes.

For more information and tips on rural homeschooling, check out:

- [Homeschooling On the Florida Homestead](#)
- [How to Homeschool and Stay Sane in the Country](#)

Other Hidden Benefits of a Country-Education

- **Private school typically costs less in rural areas.** For many families, that means a savings of thousands of dollars per-year.

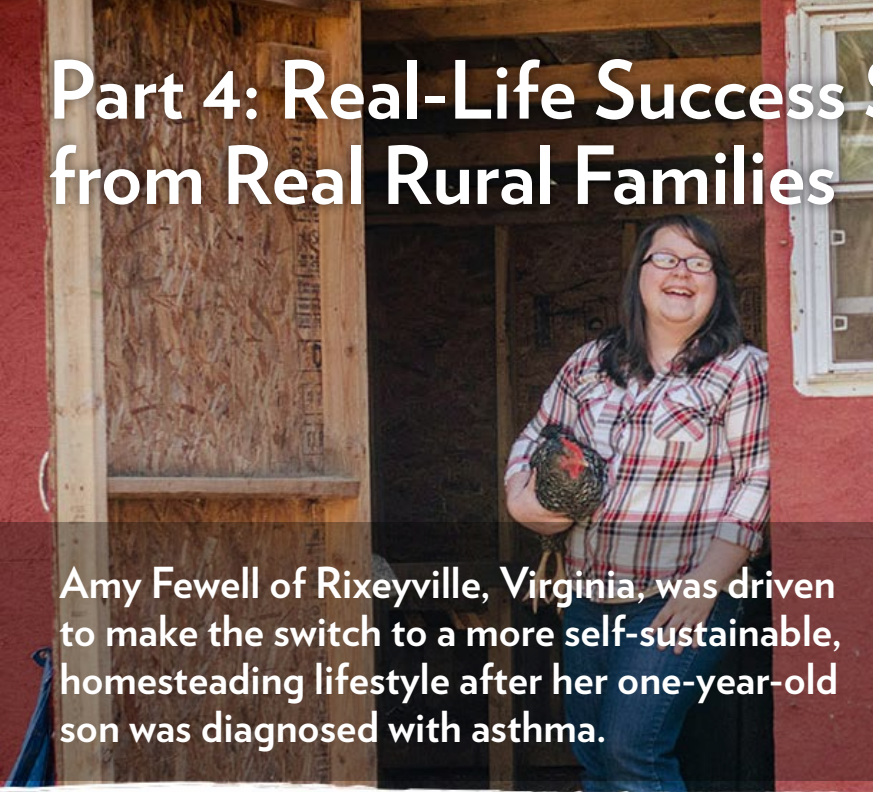


- **Rural schools often have a better student-to-teacher ratio.** This isn't always the case, but many small-town schools have smaller student populations, which means more one-on-one time with the teacher and less crowded schools.
- **Strong community involvement.** Rural communities tend to have strong school spirit and really get behind their local schools' sports teams, drama productions and other educational endeavors.
- **People watch out for each others' kids.** Many of the city-gone-country families we've spoken to on our blog truly appreciate the way small communities/neighbors watch out for each others' children.
- **Closer connections to children's teachers and administrators.** In small towns, everybody tends to know everybody, which means easier access to – and greater transparency with – school staff.
- **More space to run and play.** Rural schools usually have larger playgrounds and access to great outdoor facilities, which means more exercise and greenspace for kids.
- **Close-knit communities and easy access to nature make for perfect homeschooling conditions.**

As you can see, a move to the country no longer means sacrificing quality education. In fact, it could greatly enhance your children's social and educational opportunities while saving you money.

To learn more, check out the resources listed above.

Part 4: Real-Life Success Stories from Real Rural Families



Amy Fewell of Rixeyville, Virginia, was driven to make the switch to a more self-sustainable, homesteading lifestyle after her one-year-old son was diagnosed with asthma.

By now, you've learned the science behind how and why country living can greatly enrich the physical, mental and emotional well-being of children and families.

And the science is very convincing.

However, nothing speaks louder than hearing a real-life testimony.

We featured one such family in a recent article titled: ["Homesteading for Health: How Country Life Can Heal"](#).

Amy Fewell of Rixeyville, Virginia, was driven to make the switch to a more self-sustainable, homesteading lifestyle after her one-year-old son was diagnosed with asthma.

Desperate for solutions beyond medication, she started researching holistic medicine and herbal remedies, which grew into a desire to eat more intentionally and live a simpler kind of life.

They now raise most of their own meats, eggs and vegetables on their half-acre homestead and eat as close to nature as possible.



The lifestyle change has paid off. Fewell's son, Junior, hasn't suffered from asthma for more than a year-and-a-half. In addition the whole family has fewer health issues and rarely has cause to go to the doctor.

We've heard other incredible success stories through our [Facebook community](#).

One was the remarkable story of an autistic child, who has experienced notable improvement through equine therapy, which morphed into farm animal therapy.

Here's their story, as told in their own words:

"My son is high functioning autistic. He also had 2 TBIs within 2 weeks of each other. He has had several episodes of trying to harm himself. We started out with therapeutic horseback riding which morphed into us owning 5 horses, which morphed into 30 chickens and him caring for them and collecting the eggs, which morphed into 2 pigs, which morphed into 5 goats that he milks morning and night. Now we have the benefits of the raw goat milk. It's been the best medicine ever for him. He LOVES his animals." - Michelle O.

Part 4: Real-Life Success Stories from Real Rural Families

A grandmother also shared how she attributes country living to the resolution of her grandson's childhood RA.

“Raw milk got my grandson through childhood RA without going through the horrible treatments that he was put on when diagnosed.” - Brenda L.

Raw milk, also known as “farm milk,” is a staple in many country households due to its purported health benefits for allergies, immunity and more.

Some hobby farmers or homesteaders even make a business of selling it to local patrons for their families and/or pets.

You can learn more about raw milk and the business of raw dairy in our previous articles:

- [Would You Give Your Child Raw Milk?](#)
- [How Many Acres Do You Need to Start a Hobby Farm or Homestead?](#)

These are just a few examples of how country living has enriched the lives and health of children and families.

We have much more information, real life stories, tips, tools and resources in the [health](#), [family](#) and [research](#) sections of our blog at: rethinkrural.com.

Conclusion:

Despite the complex challenges facing today's children and youth, there is great hope for the next generation.

We hope this guide has inspired you to dig a little deeper into all the benefits time spent in the fresh country air and culture can offer your family.

If we can draw one common conclusion from all this data and research, it's this: children need more time in nature to explore, to play, to take risks, to get dirty and to appreciate the quiet beauty that only rural spaces can afford.

Whether that means you may consider a full lifestyle change and move to the country, or a small change like committing to more family time spent outdoors, we hope this guide has given you the tools and inspiration you need to get started.

To your children's best health!

...children need more time in nature to explore, to play, to take risks, to get dirty and to appreciate the quiet beauty that only rural spaces can afford.



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