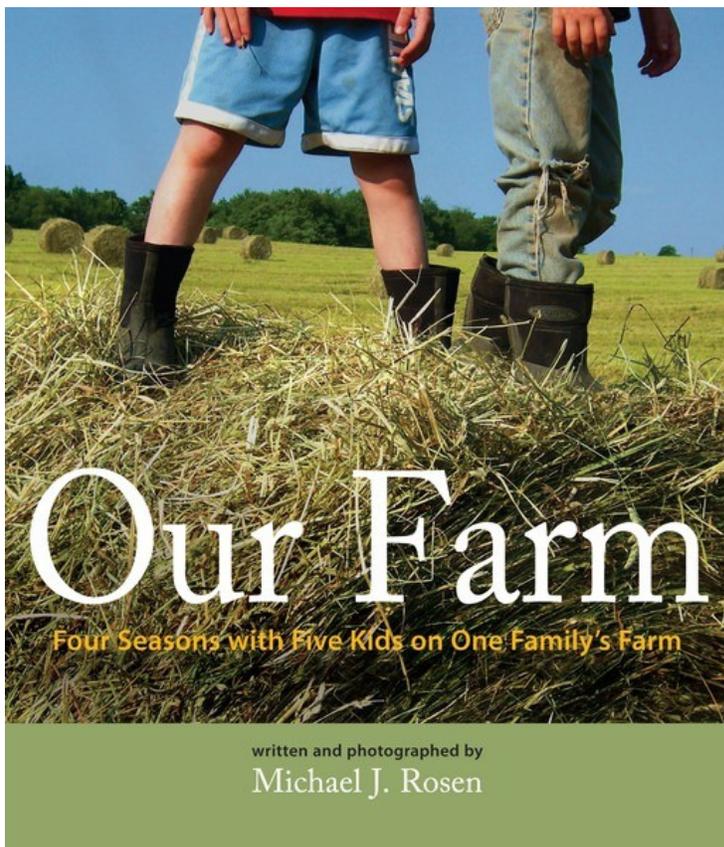


# Our Farm: Four Seasons with Five Kids on One Family's Farm

by Michael J. Rosen  
A Choose to Read Ohio Toolkit



## About the Book

Raising chickens, growing alfalfa, caring for a herd of Angus cattle and calves, the Bennett family is not your "typical" family. But they are an example of how one family, five kids, thirty cows, and a coop of chickens, can create a life and livelihood on 150 acres in the center of Ohio. ***Our Farm: Four Seasons with Five Kids on One Family's Farm*** captures four seasons in the voices of five children, ages four to seventeen, as they live and work on their small farm in Perry County.

To help young readers imagine what life is like on a family farm, Rosen spent two

years with a rural Ohio farm family who live a mile or so from his own 100 acres. The resulting book, ***Our Farm*** is an up-close, informative, personal, humorous, photographic journal of a family farm in the foothills of the Appalachians as told through the voices of the five children.

Hardly a nostalgic story of “the good old days,” ***Our Farm*** is a realistic portrait of a contemporary family. For the two of every ten Americans who live in a rural area (occupying not less than eighty percent of America’s land), they will certainly share much of the Bennett’s farm life, no matter where in the country they live. And for those who have never known rural life or participated dynamically in nature and its cycles, ***Our Farm*** is not only a chance to discover the complex, fascinating, demanding work of a family’s farm, but also to see that so many of the fundamental worries, hopes, challenges, and joys are common to the experience of growing up...anywhere.

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## Book Details

***Our Farm: Four Seasons with Five Kids on One Family’s Farm*** by Michael J. Rosen. Lerner Books, 2008, ISBN 9781581960679. Ages 10 and up. 1010 Lexile.

<https://www.lernerbooks.com/products/t/10081/9781581960679/our-farm>

Also available as a talking book through the Ohio Library for the Blind and Physically Disabled: <http://webopac.klas.com/ohbph>.



## About the Author

Michael J. Rosen is the acclaimed author of some four dozen books for children of all ages (and even more for grown-ups!), including ***The Cuckoo’s Haiku and Other Poems for Birders***; ***Our Farm: Four Seasons with Five Kids on One Family’s Farm*** (which he both wrote and illustrated with some 400 photographs); ***A Drive in the Country***; ***Don’t Shoot!***; ***A School for Pompey Walker***; and ***Elijah’s Angel***. For over 40 years, ever since working as a counselor, water-safety instructor, and art teacher at local community centers, Michael has been engaged with young children, their parents, and teachers. As a visiting author, in-service speaker, and workshop leader, he frequently travels to schools and conferences around the nation, sharing his stories, poems, creativity, and humor.



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A talented editor and illustrator, Michael has enlisted hundreds of other authors and artists to create 15 philanthropic books that aid in the fight to end childhood hunger through the national efforts of Share Our Strength, an organization that connects children and families in need with nutritious, affordable food and strives to make ending childhood hunger a national priority. Rosen also founded a granting program, The Company of Animals Fund, which offered support to animal welfare agencies providing emergency or ongoing care to companion animals. It was funded by profits from seven of Rosen's books and two touring illustration exhibits and awarded \$360,000 over eleven years.

For four years, Rosen worked with the Ohio Children's Foundation to create an early literacy activity book designed for parents to use with children at risk of entering kindergarten without knowing the alphabet: ***You, Me, and the ABCs: 100 Ready-for-Reading Activities for Kids and Their Favorite Grown-ups.***

*Biographical information courtesy Lerner Publishing Group and Michael J. Rosen.  
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## **Author Resources:**

### **Michael J. Rosen's official website**

<http://fidosopher.com>

### **Author Page on Lerner Publishing Group website**

<https://www.lernerbooks.com/Pages/Author-Illustrator-Details.aspx?contactid=1474>

### **Ohioana Profile on Michael J. Rosen**

<http://www.ohioana-authors.org/rosen/index.php>

### **One Writer's Process: Michael J. Rosen**

<http://wordswimmer.blogspot.com/2011/03/one-writers-process-michael-j-rosen.html>

### **Columbus Dispatch Interview with Michael J. Rosen**

[http://www.dispatch.com/content/stories/life\\_and\\_entertainment/2011/10/09/a-writers-passion.html](http://www.dispatch.com/content/stories/life_and_entertainment/2011/10/09/a-writers-passion.html)

## **For publicity and speaking engagement inquiries:**

Please contact Michael J. Rosen through his website at <http://www.fidosopher.com/> or by email: [fidosopher@yahoo.com](mailto:fidosopher@yahoo.com).

## Talk About It!

Topics to share when discussing **Our Farm** with young readers. Note: Some of the discussion questions may be more meaningful to children who are familiar with farm life while others may apply more to kids who are not.

- What was your perception of a farm before you read this book? Was it anything like the family farm described in **Our Farm**? If not, how has your understanding of farm life changed?
- **Our Farm** tells us that 92.33% of the farms in Perry County are family-owned. What do you think the advantages are of running a family-owned farm as opposed to a factory farm or collective/communal farm run as a joint enterprise? What are the disadvantages?
- The Bennetts live in Glenford, Ohio – a small town of only 200 residents. What are your thoughts or feelings about living in a small town? Discuss reasons people might prefer to live in a small town or larger city. What type of community do you live in? How does it compare to Glenford?
- The Bennetts raise cows and chickens on their farm and also have dogs and cats. In certain years they tend a vegetable garden, and they will soon have a pond full of fish to provide food for their own meals. What kind of animals or plants would you want to have on your very own farm? Would you choose animals/crops to sell for profit, to provide food for your own family, or to raise and nurture?
- The Bennett children each have different responsibilities on their family's farm. Caleb, the oldest, handles tractors, mowing, cows, and any other job that needs to be done; Chase works with and maintains the livestock; Cayne and Grey are in charge of the dogs and chickens; and Ali, the youngest, helps feed the chickens and make dinners with Mom. What sort of tasks would you like to have on the farm? What jobs would you *not* want?
- Having grown up on a farm, Caleb, Chase, Cayne, Grey, and Ali have an affinity for farm-life and hope to continue a rural lifestyle with their own families. How do you imagine your own future? What would you like to do for a living and where would you like to live? How does it compare to your upbringing and childhood?
- Glenford is a small town and doesn't have the restaurants, movie theaters, and entertainment spots that you would normally find in a city. In their free time, the Bennetts like to swim in their pond, attend school athletic games, and go to the county fair for fun. What sort of recreational or leisure activities do you like to do with your friends and family where you live? How do recreational activities in small, rural areas compare to those in a big city?



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- The Bennett boys love to hunt during deer season. Have you ever gone hunting? What did you like or not like about the experience? If you have never gone hunting before, is it something that interests you?

## Learn and have fun!

*Here are some fun ideas for extending the experience of reading **Our Farm**.*

- During certain years, the Bennetts tend a vegetable garden with some combination of cucumbers, zucchini, beans, tomatoes, and peppers. They have also sown sunflowers and planted apple, peach, and nectarine trees. Pick a flower or fruit tree to plant and monitor its growth and development; or grow your own garden with your favorite vegetables and herbs.
- The Bennett boys invented a game called "Knee Football" that they play in their barn's loft among the hay bales. Have kids create their own fun and safe game that can be played outdoors with no fancy equipment or gear required. Pick a name for your game and start playing!
- Visit farms in Ohio for an up-close-and-personal look at farm life. Many farms offer tours and educational activities as well as "pick-your-own" events, hay rides, and corn mazes. To find a farm in your area, visit: <http://ourohio.org/neighbors/farms-to-visit/>.
- Each spring, the Bennett family enjoys hunting for morel mushrooms to eat or sell to neighbors. Ohio is home to thousands of kinds of wild mushrooms and hunting them has become a time-honored tradition. Using Oxford Reference Online, World Book, or other online resources available to students through INFOhio (<http://www.infohio.org/>) and to all Ohioans through Ohio Web Library (<http://www.ohioweblibrary.org/>), research mushroom species like morels, meadow mushrooms, and Lepiotas that may be found in Ohio.



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## Additional Activities and Ohio's New Learning Standards

**Educators:** Every *Choose to Read Ohio* book for children may be used to support Common Core Reading Standards. Here are examples of activities using **Our Farm** that align with additional content standards. These are examples. Other content standards may also apply.

**Librarians, parents, and others:** These activities may also be used in library programs, family activities, and other projects. Academic Content Standards define what students should know and be able to do at each grade. They are included for teachers who want to use this book in school. For more information, see the Ohio Department of Education website, <http://education.ohio.gov>. Click on "Academic Content Standards" in the Educators section.

### Science

- *Life Science – Interconnections within Ecosystems.* All living things require energy. The exchange of energy from organism to organism in an ecosystem can be represented as a food web. Learn more about the Bennetts' farmland by having students research the typical ecosystem of a farm in rural Appalachia or the Midwest. What producers and consumers exist within this environment? What do the animals and organisms eat to survive? Have kids create a food web demonstrating the ecosystem and its needs. (Grade 5).
- *Earth and Space Science – Rocks, Minerals, and Soil.* In order to grow their plants and feed their animals, the Bennetts rely on healthy soil. How soil, rocks, and minerals are used depends on their specific physical properties; some are best for construction (like gravel, sand, lime, and clay) while others are best for agricultural purposes, such as on the Bennetts' farm (minerals for fertilizers, pesticides, lime, and peat). Have students research the different ways that soil, rocks, and minerals can be used and identify examples of such use within their community or the state of Ohio. Findings can be represented graphically and then presented or discussed with the class/group. (Grade 6).

### Social Studies

- *Geography – Human Systems.* Long before the Bennetts were making a life for their family on their Ohio farm, Native Americans were living and surviving on the same land. Encourage students to learn more about the Bennetts' lifestyle by delving into the lifestyle of those who came before them. Break the class up into small groups and assign each an Ohio Indian tribe to research. Have students pay special attention to what the tribes ate, how they hunted and gathered food, and how the geography of their specific region had an impact on their lifestyle and culture. Compare and contrast these findings with the information in **Our Farm** and present findings to the class as a poster board, slide show, etc. (Grade 5).
- *Social Studies – Economics: Financial Literacy.* In order to save money and support their family, the Bennetts grow some of their own food, raise chickens for eggs, and sell hay bales. Develop students' financial literacy by discussing other ways to save or raise money on a family farm and how the Bennetts could use their saved



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income. Third graders may focus on budgeting, fourth graders on saving, and fifth graders on skill-building. Then, have each student select an item he or she would like to own, cut out a picture of the item (from a magazine, catalog, or web page), and glue it to a sheet of paper along with its price. Then each student will list ways they do, or can, earn money (allowance, chores, etc.) as well as ways to reduce their spending. On the sheet of paper, the student will formulate how long it will take to save enough money to buy the item. (Grades 3, 4, 5).

### English Language Arts

- *Reading: Informational Text – Integration of Knowledge and Ideas (RI.5.7, RI.6.7).* Develop students' successful reading skills by encouraging them to become critical thinkers who deepen their understanding of content by integrating information from multiple sources. After reading **Our Farm**, have students watch the 30-minute documentary film about **Our Farm** that aired on an episode of *Our Ohio* (find it on YouTube here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xar5PGV4hOQ>). Have fifth graders answer factual questions using information from the documentary film and the book. Have sixth graders report on their observations of similarities and differences in point of view, presentation, tone, and theme of the book and the documentary film. As a class, create a Venn diagram, T-chart, or other graphic representation of observations and comments. (Grades 5 and 6).
- *Writing – Text Types and Purposes (W.5.3, W.6.3).* Develop students' writing skills by having them write a narrative in which they put themselves in the Bennetts' shoes. Students will choose a scene or story from **Our Farm** and imagine themselves in it, such as swimming at the pond, deer hunting, planting a garden, playing in the barn, gathering eggs, exploring the property, etc. They will write a narrative describing the memory, story, or event from their own perspective using information from the book and their own imagination to create organized sequences of events, descriptive language, and dialogue. (Grades 5 and 6)

### Explore More!

*Additional ideas and resources to use with **Our Farm**.*

#### **Our Farm Documentary**

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xar5PGV4hOQ>

Follow the link to watch a 30-minute documentary about **Our Farm** that originally aired as a special *Our Ohio* television episode.

#### **Ohio Farm Bureau: For Teachers**

<http://ofbf.org/education-and-reference/for-teachers/>

The OFB's Agriculture in the Classroom program offers activities, workshops, tours, and curricular materials.



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## Sci4Kids

<http://www.ars.usda.gov/is/kids/>

Explore science, agriculture, nature, and more at Sci4Kids, an interactive website for young learners from the USDA Agriculture Research Service. Learn more about the science and agriculture behind the Bennett family's farm and lifestyle by exploring research, diagrams, and fun links; playing games; and taking quizzes.

## The GLOBE Program

<http://www.globe.gov/>

Jump into The Global Learning and Observations to Benefit the Environment (GLOBE) program for a hands-on, school-based science and education program for students, teachers, and parents. GLOBE's mission is to promote the teaching and learning of science, scientific discovery, and environmental literacy and stewardship.

## Check It Out!

Discover how the food we eat – from meats and grains to fruits and vegetables – goes from farms to our plates with the book ***How Did That Get In My Lunchbox?: The Story of Food*** by author Chris Butterworth and illustrator Lucia Gaggiotti (2011). Retrieve a copy from your local library: <http://www.oplin.org/content/find-a-library>.

## Author's Research

Explore some of the resources Michael Rosen used while researching ***Our Farm***.

- Ohio Ecological Food and Farm Association: [www.oeffa.org](http://www.oeffa.org)
- Ohio Appalachian Center for Higher Education: [www.oache.org](http://www.oache.org)
- Coalition of Rural and Appalachian Schools: <http://www.coras.org>
- The Foundation for Appalachian Ohio: <http://www.appalachianohio.org>
- United Agribusiness League: <http://ual.org>
- Ohio 4-H Youth Development: <http://www.ohio4h.org>

## About Choose to Read Ohio

Choose to Read Ohio, a project of the State Library of Ohio and the Ohioana Library Association, encourages public libraries, schools, families, and others to build a community of readers and an appreciation of Ohio authors and literature. CTRO is adaptable for use in classrooms, libraries, bookstores, by book discussion groups, families, and other community groups.

Explore Choose to Read Ohio resources & toolkits: <http://library.ohio.gov/ctro>.

This toolkit created October 2012.