Founded fifty years ago, Living History Farms is proud to be one of Iowa's premier cultural organizations and a nationally-recognized outdoor history museum.

Our mission to educate, entertain, and connect people of all ages to Midwestern agricultural and rural life experiences is more relevant today than ever before.

As each generation becomes further removed from the land, there is a greater need for an understanding of how food gets from field to fork, to understand where it comes from and how it is produced, prepared, and preserved.

In 2020, the American Alliance of Museums (AAM) awarded museum accreditation to Living History Farms. Through a rigorous process of self-assessment and review by their peers, Living History Farms has demonstrated it meets museum standards and best practices.

AAM's review also affirmed Living History Farms as an educational entity that is an appropriate steward of the collections and resources we hold in the public trust.

Interpretive Themes

The Changing Farm:
Technology's Impact on Farm Life

Field to Fork:
Food Production and Consumption

People of the Prairies:
Rural People and Their Culture/Character

Farm to Town:
Rural Consumer Culture

Stewards of the Land:
The Responsibilities of Rural Life

Movers and Shakers:
Rural Community Engagement

Living History Farms Day Camp program is accredited by the American Camp Association, the only nationwide organization that accredits all types of organized camps.
Dr. Murray’s Dream

Dr. William Murray (1903-1991) was an agricultural economist, a two-time gubernatorial candidate, and professor. But perhaps most important, he was a dreamer. Starting in 1967, he devoted much of his time to fulfilling his dream, an open-air museum dedicated to recreating Iowa’s farming traditions, then and now.

After seeing guests at other traditional museums walk past displays of historic farm machinery with little to no interest, Dr. Murray envisioned a place where visitors could see farming techniques from the past in actual operation.

1876 Town of Walnut Hill

The 1876 town of Walnut Hill recreates a bustling frontier community with craftsmen and merchants in several shops, businesses, and homes along the town’s main street. The artisans include a blacksmith and a broommaker. The merchants include a newspaper publisher, an agricultural implement dealer, a druggist, a milliner, and a general store owner. The professionals in town are a doctor, a lawyer, a veterinarian, and a banker. There is also a middle-class family home, a rural church, a country cemetery, and a nearby one-room schoolhouse.

Flynn Mansion & Barn

Near Walnut Hill, guests discover the Italianate Victorian Flynn Mansion and adjoining Flynn Barn. This elegant home and barn were built in 1870 by Martin and Ellen Flynn as the cornerstone of a large and prosperous farming operation. Both structures are listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

1700 Ioway Farm

At the 1700 Ioway Farm, museum staff grow blue flour corn, squash and pumpkins, and varieties of beans. Bark and mat lodges showcase the seasonal homes of the Ioway, along with a Chibóthraje, or traveling house for the annual bison hunt. Throughout the season, staff tan animal hides, demonstrate native crafts and tool making, and prepare food over an open fire.

1850 Pioneer Farm

The split rail fence, wheat field, rooting pigs, and log house represent a four-year-old farm, established when Iowa became a state in 1846. Corn, wheat, and potatoes were the three major field crops in 1850. Wheat and hogs were cash crops for farmers, and potatoes were a staple with nearly every meal and lasted throughout the winter.

1900 Horse-Powered Farm

In fields at the 1900 Horse-Powered Farm, Percheron draft horses pull a variety of machinery to plant, cultivate, and harvest the farm’s main crops of corn, oats, and hay. There are also vegetable gardens to be tended and household chores to be done. Inside the farmhouse the garden’s produce is used to prepare dinner, the large midday meal, and is preserved using a variety of methods, including hot water bath canning.