

Pull on your wellies and prepare to get muddy down on the farm. Featuring well-loved animals that many children will be familiar with, these rollers will open up discussions about caring for animals, food production and the natural environment. Rolling and creating the tactile farm scenes will help develop the fine motor skills that are vital for early mark making and writing.

On a roll at the farm



Children will enjoy trying out the rollers independently, but guiding them through the early stages will help them get to grips with them:

- The easiest way to use a roller is to roll it away from you – creating a long scene or pattern in the dough. Afterwards, if the design is facing the wrong way, simply turn the piece of dough round so the scene faces the child. They can then use the stamp at the end of the roller to complete the picture.
- The next step is learning to roll across the body. As well as encouraging children to apply equal pressure laterally, this action will challenge them to cross the midline and develop motor skills important for learning to write.

- Talk about how hard you need to press with the roller to make the design come out well in the dough. What happens to the picture when you press harder or more gently?
- What does the picture feel like when you run your finger over it?
- Explore using the rollers with different substrates, such as clay, kinetic sand, sand dough, or cloud dough. This will encourage children to adapt their rolling technique, pressing harder when necessary, and developing their motor skills.
- Provide the rollers and dough on a suitable surface for children to explore independently. Outdoors is ideal!

Farmyard friends

As children use the rollers, take the opportunity to talk about the farm animals and life on a farm:

- What can the children see on the rollers? Do they recognise any of the animals? Have they ever seen any of them in real life? Have they ever visited a farm – what did they see? What noises might the animals or the tractor make?
- What food do we get from the farm? What lays eggs? Which vegetables and plants grow out in the fields? What gives us milk? What do we make from the wheat and other crops grown on the farm?



- The rollers are ideal for complementing harvest celebrations as you talk about where our food comes from.
- What jobs do farmers need to do on the farm? Use the rollers to tell the story of their day by putting the rolled pictures in order. Maybe they milk the cows first, collect the eggs, use their tractor to pick up hay bales, then check on their carrot field – before milking the cows again.
- The rollers could lead to talking about life cycles. What might hatch out of the eggs? Who might the cow feed her milk to? What happens when seeds are planted in the ground? The farmer cuts grass or other plants to make hay, which is often rolled into bales for storage – which animals might eat the hay?
- When the children have stamped the end of the stamper onto their design, encourage them to count how many carrots, hay bales, cows, crows, hens or mice there are.
- Encourage the children to make up simple stories about the farm scenes they roll. What are the mice doing while the cat is asleep? Are the crows scared of the scarecrow? What will happen to the eggs the hens are sitting on?



Explore more

- Children can build on their rolled designs and create a sensory picture by adding natural materials, such as pieces of wheat, straw, flowers and seeds. They might like to combine designs from several rollers to put together a whole farm picture. You could use these designs as inspiration for other farm-themed art, such as paintings, printing or collages made from cut-out paper shapes.
- Use the rollers and dough as part of a farm discovery table, alongside animal figures, notebooks, images of farm animals and vehicles, books, and natural materials.
- Create a small-world farm with plenty of storytelling potential. You might like to use a sensory base, or even several different bases in small compartments, such as artificial grass, brown playdough for mud, compost, straw, sand, oats, fabric or felt. For some messy mud, you could mix cornflour and water with a small amount of cocoa powder. Complete your farm with animal figures, trees, fences, feeding troughs, and any farm buildings you have. You might like to offer the rollers and playdough alongside.



- Make simple scarecrows by sticking two lollypops together to form a cross shape, then adding straw and cut out paper shapes for clothes, heads and hats. Draw on your scarecrow's face.

Books about farms

Farmyard Hullabaloo by Giles Andreae

Farm Boots by Lisl H. Detlefsen

What the Ladybird Heard by Julia Donaldson

A Year on Adam's Farm by Adam Henson

Songs about farms

Old MacDonald had a Farm

Dingle Dangle Scarecrow

Little Boy Blue

One Man Went to Mow

Little Bo Peep

Mary had a Little Lamb

Five Little Ducks



Get talking – useful words

Tractor, trailer, hay bale, mice, cat, scuttle, field, plant, sow, plough, seed, crops, wheat, barley, oats, scarecrow, harvest, hen, cow, crow, henhouse, straw, nest, lay eggs, hatch, meadow, graze.