

Yamster Visits the Sweet Potato Farm

Sometimes I'm so sleepy in the morning that it's hard to get out of bed. But when mom and dad told me we were going to visit a sweet potato farm, I was up before the sun! I wanted to learn everything about those yummy yams — and hopefully get some to eat!

We left really early in the morning so we could spend as much time as possible at Mr. French's sweet potato farm in South Louisiana. He grows great big sweet potatoes for people to eat in Louisiana ... all over the country ... and even the world. The first thing he did when we got there was to show us some sweet potatoes he just harvested. They are called "Beauregards" and they are big and moist with bright orange flesh. Some of them were even bigger than me!



Next, Mr. French gave us some neat rubber boots, and we all went out into the field. He explained that the process from planting a young sweet potato sprout to putting sweet potatoes on our table takes about 6 months. The first thing he does is to plant sweet potato seed roots in soil beds that have not been used for planting for at least three years. This helps make sure that there are no diseases or bugs left over from the last planting. After the seed roots are planted, Mr. French and his wife find a big field on the farm for growing the actual sweet potatoes.

After the seed roots sprout up in the beds, Mr. French finds plants that are between 8 and 12 inches long and have more than 8 leaves. He makes sure there are no insects on them, and then he cuts them above the soil level. He takes these plants and "transplants" them in the field where the actual sweet potatoes will grow. This usually happens in May and June. I thought that after the sweet potatoes were planted in the big field, the farmer could take it easy for awhile. Boy, was I ever wrong! Mr. French told us about all the things you have to watch out for while the yams are growing — plant diseases, insects, weeds and even frost. He is a really hard-working farmer.

We learned a lot that morning. Then Mr. French invited us inside to have a delicious lunch with his family. Mmmmmm! Everywhere I looked there was food made with yummy yams! There were baked ones, crunchy sweet potato chips, creamy yam pudding, and they even served sweet potato cookies with milk. I made sure to try everything. Then they gave us a sweet potato pie to take home!

After lunch we went back into the field to talk about how the yams are harvested. Mom asked Mr. French how he knows when the sweet potatoes are ready. This is kind of tricky because yams don't get ripe like other crops. They will keep growing as long as the plant has green leaves. Most farmers know that after 120 to 150 days, it is time to pull the yams from the ground before the dangerous winter frosts arrive. Farm machines dig them up, and the workers place them in wooden or plastic crates to be taken to the warehouse.

I really want to tell you about what happens to the yams after they are pulled from the ground, but it has been a long day at the sweet potato farm and I need a great big hamster nap! You can find out what happens by reading my story called "Bringing Sweet Potatoes to Your Table."

And remember, if you want to grow up big and strong, do what I do: Eat your sweet potatoes and have a yam-tastic day!