**The Amazing Chicken!**

**Goal:** Learn about chickens and how they are very useful animals to have on a farm.

**Anticipatory Questions:** What do you know about chickens? What kinds of food come from chickens? Did you know that some animals have a job on the farm? What kind of work does a chicken do?

**Introduction:** Animals are a source of meat, a food that is a big part of the diet of most cultures. The farmer provides the animal with food, water, shelter and health care. In exchange, the animal provides us with food—such as meat and eggs, manure that adds important nutrients for a healthy soil, and by-products such as fiber, feathers, leather, pet food, etc. Animals also work on the farm (although on a small scale compared to the last century) to pull farm equipment, browse down invasive plants, eat pests, move or guard other animals, and pollinate plants. Chickens are especially useful because they provide us with meat and eggs, plus they have jobs on the farm.

**Lesson Preparation:** Poster of the interior of chicken, scratch or garden waste to feed the chickens, sample of chicken feed and individual components (corn, soy, oats) plus grit & shells, eggs in a carton.

**Lessons:**

1. Interact with the chickens and observe their actions. Hold a chicken and let the visitors feel a chicken’s feathers, comb and scaly legs. Watch the way chickens search the ground for bugs, seeds and plants.
2. Talk about the way chickens digest their food and what they eat. Chickens have no teeth, so how do they chew their food? Explain the function of the crop and gizzard. What is the difference between egg- and meat- producing chickens?
3. Chickens provide food and other products (meat, eggs, feathers, pet food, cartilage for knee repair, etc.) Chickens also create manure, which farmers use to build a healthy soil (nitrogen, etc) Our chickens are called free-range chickens because they live outside and can run around in the sunshine and live the way normal birds live. They don’t live inside in little cages like a lot of commercial chickens do. We think our chickens are happier and healthier because they can be outside. They also provide us with healthier eggs and meat because they get extra vitamins and minerals from eating seeds, bugs, plants and other things in the soil.
4. What kind of work do chickens do that helps the farmer? Chickens eat bugs that damage food plants, and eat parasites that can make animals sick. They clean up gardens and fields after harvest, loosen the soil with their scratching and pecking so that water and air can more easily be absorbed in the soil. Some chickens even catch and eat mice and snakes! Chickens can warn you if something unusual is happening in the area or a big bird is flying overhead. They have a special squawk they make when they see raptors.