

These spherical rollers are easy and satisfying to use, and great for exploring different patterns and textures. Farm animals are a popular theme and well-loved by many young children, and the rollers feature patterns from familiar animals: cow (spots), sheep (fleece), chicken (feathers), fish (scales) and goat (hair). The stamper also allows children to match the patterns to the animal shapes. As they roll animal patterns in dough, they will be developing important coordination and fine motor skills.



Start the ball rolling



As well as allowing children to explore using the rollers independently, you can extend their learning in various ways:

- Admire the pattern that the child makes in the play dough and ask them what they can see. What words could they use to describe the pattern? Does it show fur, wool, feathers or scales?
- Children might choose to roll round and round, up and down, or in any direction – use directional language as you talk about their movements.

- Younger children may simply enjoy using the roller as a stamp – or stamping with the animal stamper.
- Encourage them to press harder or more gently and see how this changes the appearance of the pattern.
- Talk about how the play dough feels as they squish it under the roller. Is it smooth or rough, hard or soft?
- The patterns in the dough are inviting to touch – what do they feel like?
- Encourage children to create a pattern and find which animal it belongs to on the stamper. Alternatively, they could roll the stamper like a die, then find the roller that will make the corresponding pattern. You could also match the rolled patterns and the stamped animal shapes to farm animal figures.
- Offer play dough in several colours for children to explore mixing and rolling together.
- Use the rollers with a variety of substrates, each with a different feel to it – such as kinetic sand, cloud dough, clay or a thick slime.



Farmyard friends

- If available, offer some real unspun wool or hen's feathers for the children to feel. Compare them to the patterns the children have rolled with the sheep and chicken rollers.



- Offer the rollers and dough on an animal-themed discovery table, alongside animal figures, pictures and books. You could also include Let's Investigate Farmyard Footprints or Little Lands Farmyard.
- If you have the opportunity to visit a real farm there will be even more to talk about. If children have the opportunity to touch real farm animals, what do they feel like? Do the children have a favourite farm animal?

- Create pictures or other artwork using cotton wool, feathers and shiny paper cut into the shape of fish scales. These could be animal pictures, or simply based on the patterns the children have made with the rollers.
- Put together your own farmyard by creating homes for the various animals using junk modelling materials. These could include a henhouse, a fenced field, a barn or a pond.

Down on the farm

As children create different patterns with the rollers, talk about real farm animals:

Cow

- Have you seen any real cows? What colour were they?
- What sound does a cow make?
- What would it feel like to stroke a real cow? Why might you need to be careful near cows?
- What do cows eat? What else do they need? Where do they live?
- What do cows give us?



Sheep

- Have you seen any real sheep? What colour were they?
- What sound does a sheep make?
- What would it feel like to stroke a real sheep?
- What do sheep eat? What else do they need? Where do they live?
- What do sheep give us? Why do farmers need to shear their sheep in summer? What do we use wool for?

Chicken

- Have you seen a real chicken? What colour was it?
- What sound does a chicken make?
- What would it feel like to stroke a real chicken?
- What do hens eat? What else do they need? Where do they live?
- What do hens give us? What hatches out of a hen's egg?

Fish

- Have you seen a real fish? What colour was it?
- Where might you find a fish on a farm (in a river or pond)?
- What do you think a fish's scales would feel like?
- What do fish eat? Where do they live? Why do they need to stay in water?

Goat

- Have you seen a real goat? What colour was it?
- What sound does a goat make?
- What would it feel like to stroke a real goat?
- What do goats eat? What else do they need? Where do they live?
- What do goats give us? Have you ever tried goat's milk or cheese?



Get talking – useful words

Fur, wool, feathers, scales, rough, smooth, soft, woolly, slimy, calf, lamb, chick, fry, kid.

Rolling action: roll, push, stamp, away, towards, across, round, roll gently, press harder

Books about farm animals

Who's Hiding on the Farm? by Axel Sheffler

Farmyard Hullabaloo by Giles Andreae

My First Book of Farm Animals by Zoe Ingram