



# School Farms: a vital resource

The School Farms Network offers  
support, networking opportunities and  
advice to existing and new school farms





# School Farms: a vital resource

Everyone is concerned about the diet and health of our children. Levels of obesity are rising whilst exercise rates are dropping: a situation arising from a number of factors, including a lack of knowledge about healthy eating and increasing isolation from where our food comes from.

School farms are one way that we can redress this balance. There are currently 65 school farms across the UK, each providing a range of services that link in to the National Curriculum.

As well as benefiting pupils, the advantages to the neighbouring community can also be substantial - community activity, a characteristic of all schools, is fundamental to the work of school farms.



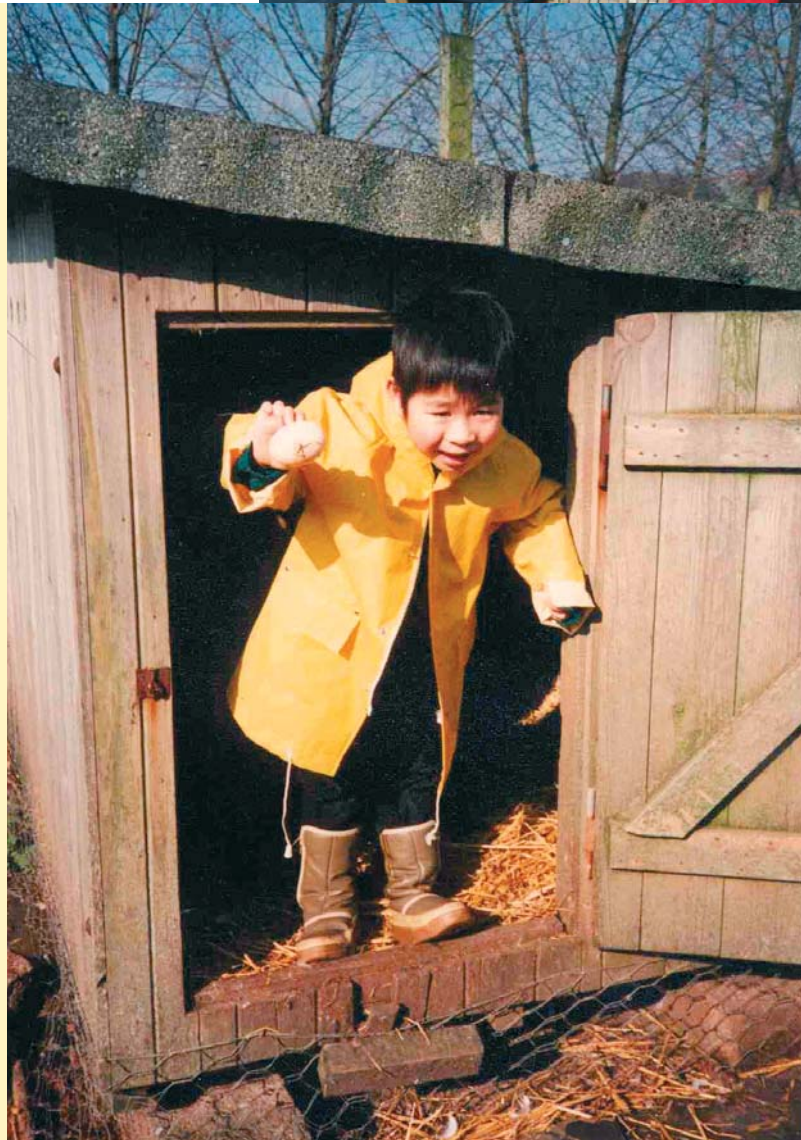
## What are school farms?

A school farm is a teaching facility, often within school grounds, that provides some of the following components:

- Access to farm livestock
- The facilities and land needed for their up-keep, machinery to produce milk or butter, incubators or other farming equipment
- Small scale food growing or horticultural units, greenhouses or polytunnels
- Teaching facilities.

However, school farms do not need to be based in school grounds or even be directly controlled by the school – they can be situated off-site and be operated in conjunction with local authorities or farm trusts.

Many school farms also provide services to surrounding schools, to related businesses and to the wider community.





# A background to school farming

The tradition of schools using farming or gardening as a part of their teaching methods, and in some cases to help generate income, dates back to the 19th Century:

- An estimated 2,500 school gardens existed in 1912
- Numbers rose dramatically during the 1940s in response to wartime efforts to boost food production - the Dig for Victory campaigns. Farm animals were introduced to many schools during this time
- By the 1960s school farms with livestock provided a formal part of the curriculum
- Numbers started to decline during the 1980s following changes in the curriculum that saw life sciences such as Environmental Studies increase in popularity
- In 1990, it was estimated that 31 of Cornwall's 33 secondary schools taught Rural Science, and that 29 of these schools had animals or gardens on site.

Can we return to this level of provision across the country and provide all pupils with regular access to such hands-on education?

## National support for school farms

Heightened awareness of the importance of educating people about food and healthier lifestyles has led to school farms - along with allotments, city farms and community gardens - being identified as valuable tools in addressing such issues.

In 2000 the Department for Education and Skills, an active supporter of school farms, launched the Growing Schools Programme in partnership with FCFCG, Learning through Landscapes and the Council for Environmental Education. Growing Schools aims to encourage, support and inspire all schools (nursery, primary, secondary and special) to use the outdoor classroom, both with and beyond the school grounds, as a context for learning across the curriculum. It focuses in particular on food, farming and the countryside, on ensuring pupils are given first hand experience of the natural world around them and that outdoor learning activities are integrated into every day teaching practices.

In 2004 the Department for Education and Skills and FCFCG formed the School Farms Network to support and assist school farms, co-ordinate meetings and facilitate networking. The Federation's Patron, HRH The Prince of Wales, is a keen supporter of both programmes.





# FCFCG and the School Farms Network

**The work of the Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens includes offering advice and support to existing school farms and helping new groups and projects get off the ground.**

FCFCG co-ordinates the School Farms Network. There are currently 65 school farms registered with the Network.

## How can FCFCG help school farms?

- FCFCG arranges networking opportunities for the exchange of information and ideas
- Staff and volunteer advisors are available to assist with specific issues - if we can't help you directly we can signpost you to someone who can
- If you are not already registered with the network please return the coupon overleaf to us.

## What do new school farms need to get off the ground?

- A group's greatest need, especially when starting out, is support from within the school community (pupils, head teachers, teachers, parents and governors) and from local authority councillors and officers
- Clear, agreed support mechanisms will enable the development of a genuine partnership - a clear sign that the project is valued and welcomed
- Needless to say, new school farms and gardens may also need financial assistance, particularly to help with their long-term stability.

## Thinking of taking the next step?

- Please contact FCFCG if you are thinking of setting up a school farm or garden. We would be pleased to discuss how we can support you
- A School Farms Checklist is available, outlining key points that need to be considered when setting up a new project Further details are available from FCFCG
- The Growing Schools Programme can provide you with a free Growing Year Calendar and Teachers Resource Pack for developing your school grounds
- For further information about using the outdoors as a context for learning across the curriculum, visit the Growing Schools website: [www.teachernet.gov.uk/growingschools](http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/growingschools). The site provides access to resource materials, places to visit, training, funding sources, health & safety, research and the many practitioners working in this field.



# Ashford Community Farm, Kent

**Ashford Community Farm began life as a wartime garden in the 1930s. Now it is a thriving school and community farm, with cattle, small animals and a vegetable plot on its one hectare site. Nick Fysh, the Farm Manager, is proud and enthusiastic of the farm's achievements: "We've developed strong links with the National Curriculum, and every Year 7 student now spends at least one lesson period a week on the farm. The lessons address three topics: Life Story, which has a sex education element, Living Things, which addresses life processes, and Plant Power. Each topic is part of the science curriculum, but is taught with a true farm flavour."**

The farm is sited at North School in Ashford, Kent, a state high school bordering a railway line and two large council estates. Pupils are rarely from farming backgrounds, nevertheless there's a thriving Young Farmers' Club with over 50 members. Some pupils even come in to school early to assist Nick with morning duties. They grow crops on their allotment, sell eggs on site and are members of the Dexter Cattle Society and the South Down Sheep Society. "We show animals in the Kent County Show" explains Nick, "and members of the Young Farmers' Club



attend training days on how to care for cattle and small animals."

The farm is open to the general public most mornings

and has a healthy involvement with the local community. "One parent assists at the Young Farmers' Club, where her son is the Chair" Nick says, "and we have ex-Young Farmers and parents on our Farm Advisory Group as well"

The continual search for funding can be difficult, and Nick is extremely grateful for the support the farm receives from the school's Head Teacher, Deputy Head and governors, which means that he can confidently plan long-term. "We may have to move to a different part of the school grounds in the future, but we are definitely staying!" He's also proud of the way the farm got through the Foot and Mouth Crisis: "We had to close down and follow all the restrictions, including having footbaths and disinfectant mats at the school gates" he remembers. "None of our animals contracted it, and we managed to survive the aftermath – we've taken the farm right from the 1930s through to a new century."

# Oathall Community College Farm, West Sussex

**Oathall's school farm was opened under the government's Dig for Victory campaign in 1941. Boys were released from their afternoon lessons provided that they brought their spade and helped dig the one acre plot, where they farmed arable crops, poultry and rabbits for food. Children attended by rota during weekends and holidays to look after the livestock (as still happens today) and produce was sold on to the school canteen.**

"The farm has had its ups and downs and has fought off the removal of its core funding on several occasions. Since then it has developed into a

resource that links in to most mainstream areas of the curriculum – from Maths to Business Studies," says Howard Wood, Head of the Farm Unit.

The site now covers two hectares, with a further 10 hectares off-site that are used for grazing and hay production. Livestock includes pedigree Suffolk sheep, Ayrshire cattle and both Large White and British Saddleback pigs. There are also bees and small breeding groups of bantams. Over 100 students join the Young Farmers' Club each year, and over 60 students work on the farm on a regular basis. Livestock is often shown at agricultural shows with great success.





"The farm has changed a lot since its wartime beginnings, but it is encouraging to think that it still follows its original aim of giving young people a feel for animals and the countryside rather than just turning out farmers" says Howard. "In addition, the college became one of the first schools in England to be granted Specialist Schools Status with a Rural Dimension"

The farm has its own trail, and its website provides associated teaching resources as well as having online web-cams in the lambing sheds and pig farrowing house. Local primary school

children are frequent visitors.

Students can study for vocational qualifications in agriculture and horticulture, and the farm regularly runs courses as part of the West Sussex County Council able student enrichment programme, supporting high achievers in subjects such as Mathematics, English and ITC. Courses have even been provided for trainee Maths teachers from the local university. The college also works closely with the local community, offering placements for work experience and for a small number of adults with learning difficulties.

## Chapman's Hill School Farm, West Midlands

**Chapman's Hill School Farm, along with neighbouring Money Lane School Farm, is an off-site facility dedicated for use by school groups.**

Set up by the Worgan Trust (a Cadbury family trust) in 1972, the farm offers city children a chance to learn about farming and to experience the countryside. Over 12,000 children from the Birmingham area visit the 150 acre site each year.

"The process is quite different from how more traditional school farms might operate," says Nina Hatch, Head of Centre at Chapman's Hill. "School groups book in for a full day at the farm up to a year in advance. Teachers outline what subjects they wish to study and we develop a teaching plan to tie in with the curriculum – whether they are studying land use and geography, science, maths,



literacy or cross curricular themes such as healthy eating or environmental education."

The Chapman's Hill site focuses on teaching children aged 7 to 11 (Key Stage 2) and

groups from special schools, whilst Money Lane teaches younger school children. The farm provides classrooms, teaching resources and IT resources, plus the requisite wellies and waterproofs!

The site is farmed by a tenant farmer and his wife, who keep Friesian and Dairy Shorthorn cattle, sheep, poultry and a range of other tame animals.

Nina, who has worked at the farm for 17 years, has seen a lot of changes take place: "The farm is still developing - the Trust plans to increase the size of the dairy herd from 65 to 100 cattle and to build a new cow shed, milking parlour and viewing gallery from where the children can watch the milking."

She adds "visiting the farm is, for many children, the first real experience of where their food comes from - it provides a concept of farming and the food chain that they might otherwise never have"



# The benefits of a school farm

## Raising standards

Ofsted highlights their contribution, for example: "The school farm has a very positive impact on learning and the links with other schools."



## Every Child Matters

- **Be healthy:** Participation in farm activities contributes to physical fitness, sound mental health and emotional stability, in particular for those not engaged by team sports
- **Stay Safe:** Working with farm equipment and lively animals enables pupils to think about safety issues and practice risk management skills in a controlled, supervised environment
- **Enjoy and Achieve:** Pupils who find the classroom environment difficult can flourish in the hand-ons approach of a farm. Science and maths questions can become appealing when framed by the practical nature of animal husbandry or stock-taking
- **Make a positive contribution:** Coming up with enterprising solutions to farm problems, such as improving efficiency of routine tasks encourages positive, enterprising thinking. Many pupils, including victims of bullying, gain confidence and self-esteem through

responsibility for farm tasks, such as caring for sick animals

- **Achieve economic well-being:** A keen interest in using the school farm may lead to vocational training for some pupils. The highly-structured nature of farm work, from animal welfare to growing food, provides varied experience in a genuine working environment.

## Specialist Schools

Add the Rural Dimension to your schools' specialist status, with integrated on-site learning facilities.

## Healthy Schools

Whole school approach: from curriculum-based activities on the farm and exercise, through growing and producing food to cooking the produce in school.

## Use of Multiple Intelligences

The direct, hands-on nature of farm work can help learners develop their less-preferred skills and intelligences. The farm environment stretches the gifted and extends the learning styles of others.

## Extended Schools

School farms offer volunteer opportunities, the chance to display livestock and produce at local events, after-school clubs, holiday play-schemes and youth provision. They are a safe, stimulating environment for children and young people as well as their families in the community.





# School Farms Network

## Please complete and return to:

Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens,  
The GreenHouse, Hereford  
Street, Bristol BS3 4NA

.....  
Name of school/college:

.....  
Full name of 1st contact:

.....  
Full name of 2nd contact:

.....  
Mail Address:

.....  
Postcode:

.....  
Email:

.....  
Tel:

.....  
Fax:

Would you like to be on the School Farms' Network mailing list for details of news, meetings and events?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Would you like to be on the Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens mailing list?

☐ Yes

☐ No

## Further information

Produced by the Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens and the Department for Education and Skills, Growing Schools Programme, March 2006

*Further information sheets describing how to set up and how to maintain a school farm are also planned.*



department for  
**education and skills**  
creating opportunity, releasing potential, achieving excellence



For general enquiries please contact:  
Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens  
The GreenHouse, Hereford Street, Bristol BS3 4NA

Tel: 0117 923 1800 Fax: 0117 923 1900  
Email: [schoolfarms@farmgarden.org.uk](mailto:schoolfarms@farmgarden.org.uk)  
**[www.farmgarden.org.uk/schoolfarms](http://www.farmgarden.org.uk/schoolfarms)**

For further information on outdoor learning visit the Growing Schools website:  
**[www.teachernet.gov.uk/growingschools](http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/growingschools)**  
or email [growing.schools@dfes.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:growing.schools@dfes.gsi.gov.uk)

**Front cover picture credit:** Girls with daffodills  
– Learning through Landscapes

**Page 4 picture credit:** Pond-dipping – FACE

**Back cover picture credit:** Children picking apples – Learning through Landscapes

This briefing sheet is available in larger print, Braille or on audio tape. Please contact us for details.

