



Country Trust

Where children learn and grow

Farm Discovery Visits Evaluation Report

Prepared by Kay Whitfield
Farm Discovery Manager, The Country Trust

August 2016



Background

The Country Trust is a small national educational charity dedicated to bringing alive the working countryside for children least able to access it, whether through disadvantage or disability. We aim to foster an understanding of farming, food and the countryside through hands-on experiences on real working farms and estates. We help children to learn and grow through day visits to real working farms, residential visits to the countryside and yearlong programmes exploring every aspect of growing, cooking and even selling food. Our carefully planned range of activities are structured to underpin the knowledge, skills and values of classroom based learning, but also inspire, empower and broaden the horizons of children with very limited opportunities.

We aim to work with children who have the least opportunity to visit the working countryside, and target schools with a

higher than average percentage of children eligible for free school meals (Ever6 national average 26.4%), as well as schools with children with Special Educational Needs.

Context

Hands on visits to real working farms and estates are at the heart of our work, and every year, we make it possible for hundreds of volunteer farmers and landowners to welcome thousands of disadvantaged children from all backgrounds and faiths onto their farms to share their passion for food, farming and the countryside. With our farmer hosts, we are able to provide hands on learning, answer questions and give unique access to crops and livestock. Farm Discovery visits are also a key part of our other two key strands of work: immersive Countryside Discovery residential visits and yearlong Food Discovery programmes exploring every aspect of growing, cooking and even selling food.

Background detail

This evaluation covers farm visits that took place between January and August 2016. During this time 346 visits took place with 12,640 mostly primary aged children visiting real working farms and estates for day visits.

These visits are offered without cost to schools, in most cases schools have paid for and provided their own transport apart from a few grants and donations that have provided a small number of schools with a bursary towards coach costs, making visits possible that might otherwise not have gone ahead.

The majority of visits are co-ordinated and delivered by a Farm Discovery Co-ordinator in conjunction with a farmer or landowner. However, in some cases visits are delivered by an experienced farmer or are supported by an experienced volunteer. Farm Discovery

Coordinators have also delivered visits to estates and the countryside without the support of a farmer or landowner on some occasions.

Methodology

We updated our evaluation forms at the beginning of 2016 to enable us to gather some more targeted information to monitor the quality of our delivery and the impact it is having on the children who come on our farm visits. These were shared with Farm Discovery Co-ordinators at the staff conference at the end of February and we agreed that a key member of staff on every visit would be given an evaluation form with a target of a 60% return rate. This report is based on feedback from 224 teachers.

Farm Discovery Co-ordinators handed out evaluation forms at the end of the visit and where this hasn't been possible followed up by e-mailing the form after the visit.

Farm Discovery Co-ordinators returned forms at the end of the summer term and in some cases schools sent forms back directly to head office.

This is the first time we have used these new forms and drawn out key information in an evaluation report and there have inevitably been some teething problems. However, the 65% average return rate exceeds our target (60%). More forms have been completed but did not arrive in time for this report to be compiled.

The quality of the visits was measured on a scale of 1 - 6 with 1 being poor and 6 being excellent.

The impact the visit had on children was measured on a scale of 1 - 4 with 1 being strongly disagree and 4 being strongly agree.

Outcomes

The difference the Country Trust is trying to make - our outcomes:

- Children, their parent helpers and teachers are more knowledgeable and more aware of food, farming and the countryside
- More farmers are able to share their love and passion for what they do
- Children are more engaged with formal education as a result of increased 'real world' and interactive learning experiences
- Children are better able to make informed decisions about the food that they eat.
- Children feel more responsible for their own and the wider environment
- Children have more opportunities to develop and display non-cognitive skills, to experience patience, wonder and success.
- Children feel more at home in the countryside and greenspace.
- More teachers see the potential of countryside as a learning resource and feel more confident to use it to enhance their teaching

Summary of results

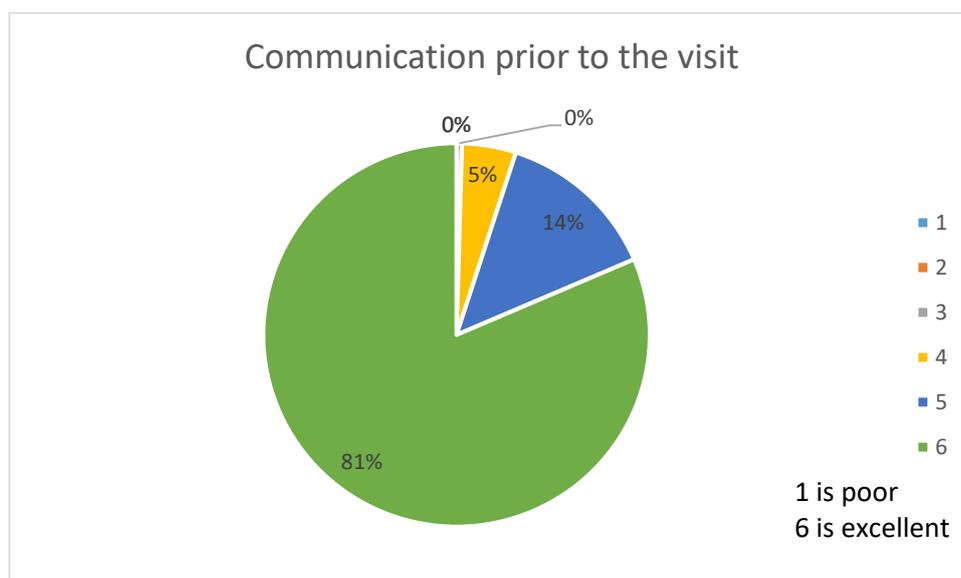
We are organising and delivering high quality, safe farm discovery visits with good communication prior to the visits. 81% of teachers rated the quality of their visit as excellent.

Our evidence suggests that we are achieving our outcomes - children are really benefiting from their visits in the way that we are intending. **All** teachers felt that children had enjoyed their experience and **all** felt that their children had gained in confidence in the outdoors and in the countryside. In addition, **all** teachers felt that their farm visit brought real opportunities for their reluctant learners to engage with the visit and the learning opportunities and experiences it offered. **96%** of teachers agreed that the visit had given children a better understanding of where their food comes from.

Detail

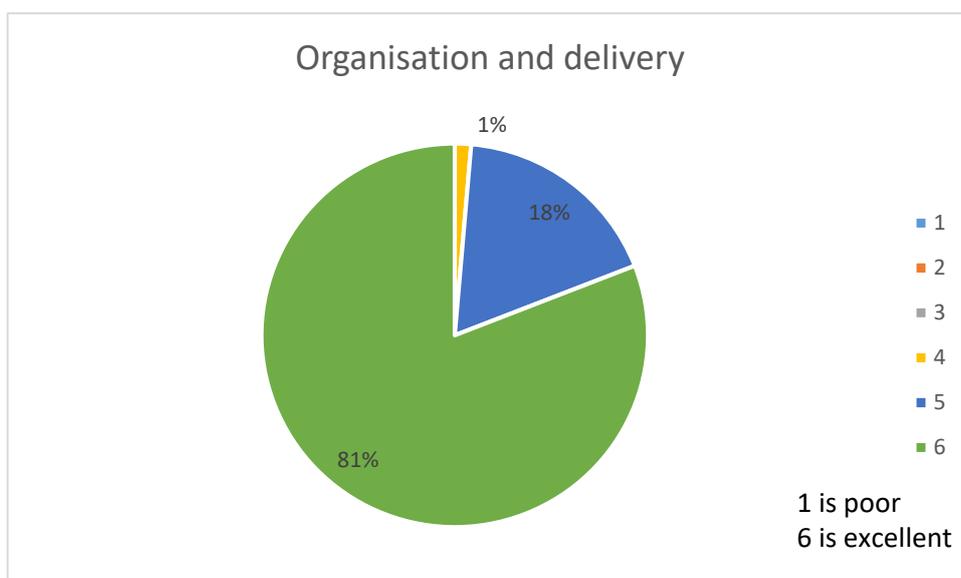
Quality of Farm Visits

Farm Discovery Co-ordinators make contact with teachers before the visit to let them know what opportunities are available, arrange dates, offer pre-visits and then e-mail confirmation details including Health and Safety guidance. Teachers were very satisfied with the communication and information received prior to the visit with **95%** of teachers rating this as good or excellent and **81%** as excellent. Although these figures are very positive, concerns have been raised by some co-ordinators that schools don't always seem to have read the information that is sent into school and we are looking to improve the visual appeal of this to see if this improves the situation.



We strongly recommend that schools attend a pre-visit especially if they have not visited the farm before. Pre-visits help to ensure that schools get the most from their visit; they give teachers the opportunity to meet the Farm Discovery Co-ordinator and the farmer, discuss H & S issues and opportunities to link to their curriculum teaching. Pre-visits were offered to **88%** of schools and **46%** attended one. If a teacher is doing a repeat visit this is often not seen as being necessary which may be one explanation for the **12%** of schools who weren't offered a pre-visit and the **56%** that didn't attend one.

Teachers felt that the visits were organised and delivered to a very high standard with **99%** of teachers saying the organisation and delivery of the visits were good or excellent and **81%** saying excellent.



Here are some comments from teachers:

“The whole day was well organised and delivered well. We all had a lovely day”

“It was extremely well organised and the transition between activities was smooth and easy. It was excellent.”

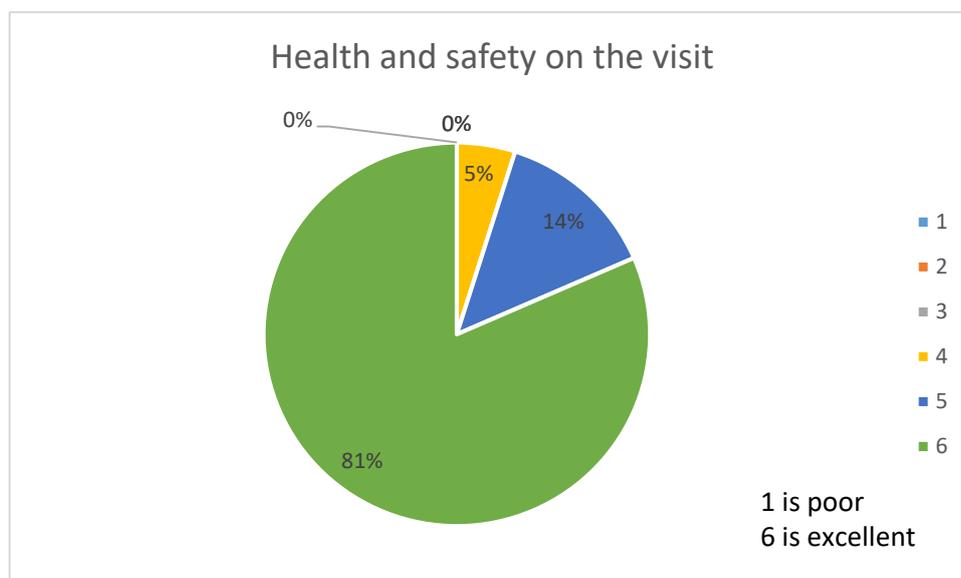
“Brilliant visit, very informative and engaging”

“Fantastic trip! The children get so much from it and all staff and volunteers were extremely helpful. The follow up pack was also fantastic.”

Health and Safety

The health and safety (H and S) on the visits has been an important focus over the last 12 months and all practices and processes have been reviewed. For example, we now have a much clearer distinction between host led, and Country Trust led activities, with our staff completing Activity and Site Specific Risk Assessments in the latter situation.

Farm Discovery Co-ordinators often play an active role in explaining how to keep everyone safe at the beginning of a visit and are dynamically assessing and minimising risk throughout the visit alongside the host. 95% of teachers rated the health and safety of their visit as good or excellent and 82% as excellent.



“Trip led very well by Cathy who covered all health and safety well, handwashing etc. All adults at the kennels, farm etc were superb in their delivery and efforts with the children.”

We feed back to our Coordinators when the H and S score is 4 or lower, ask them if they know why the score was given, and if not to explore with the school. Where relevant we then use the information gained to inform our practices and to update our health and safety information. It has been interesting to see the difference in perceptions of risk that exist where teachers may have little or no experience of the countryside e.g. in relation to stinging nettles.

Curriculum links

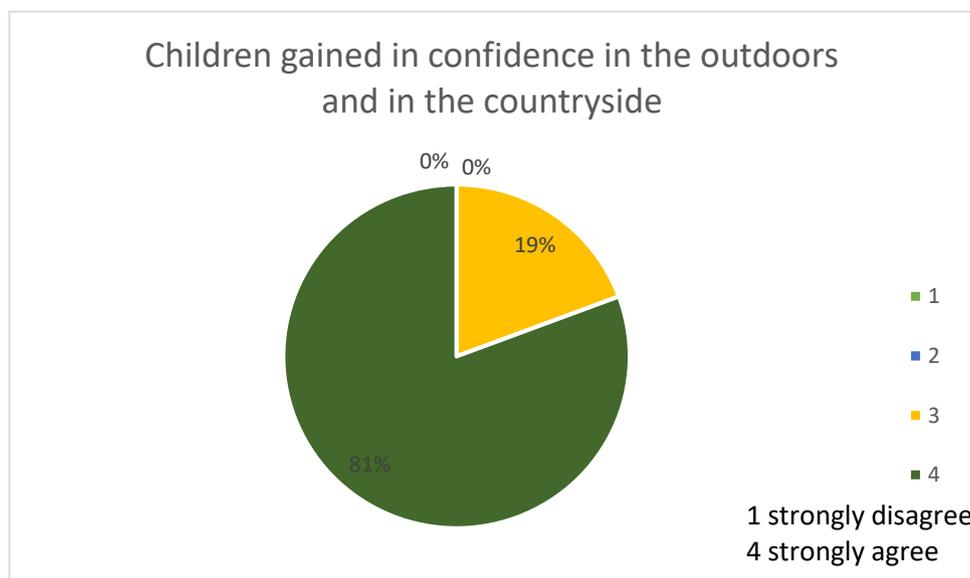
94% of teachers reported that they had been offered the opportunity to tailor the visit in order to link, build on and enhance any areas of the curriculum they were studying. This adds real value to a visit and enables teachers to develop the children’s learning through work in the classroom before and after their visit.

Teachers felt that visits were “very informative and relevant to our curriculum” and commented that co-ordinators “were very keen to make the visit work for us and the curriculum we had delivered” other comments included “David always thinks of how to link learning to the curriculum, is reflective and knowledgeable” and “fantastic opportunity for children to see a working farm and linked well with our reproduction topic.”

Our Impact

We want our visits to help children feel more at home in the countryside and in greenspace; feel more responsible for their wider environment; have more opportunities to develop and display non cognitive skills and to experience patience, wonder and success.

All of the teachers agreed that the children they had brought on the farm visit had gained in confidence in being outdoors and in the countryside with 81% strongly agreeing that this was the case.

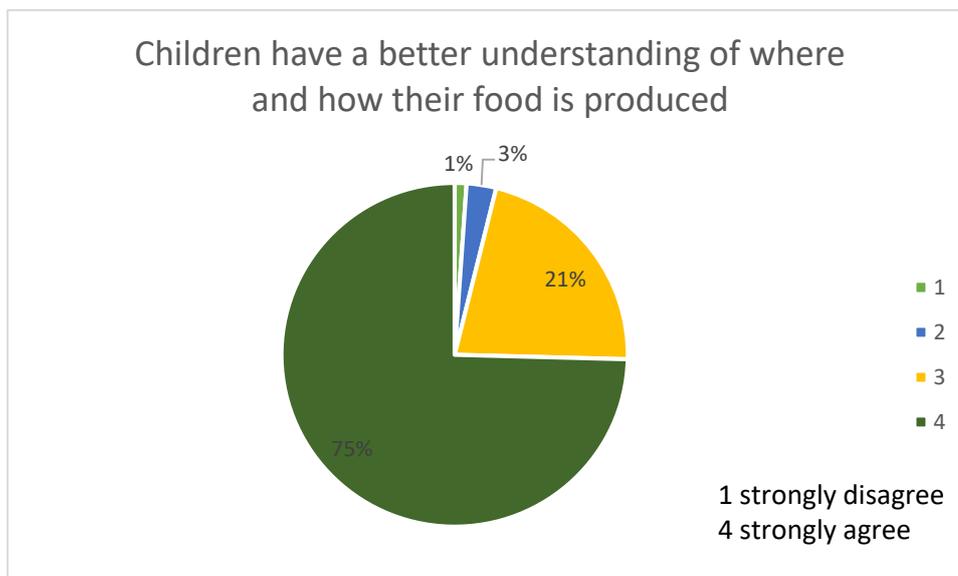


Teachers told us that their visit was “thoroughly enjoyable, engaging, educational and fun. Great to see children enjoying nature and the countryside” and that the visit “gave the children opportunities to see and experience countryside like they would not normally experience.” It was noted that “The children’s confidence definitely grew even during the day itself” and the visit was “a real eye opener for them, it makes a massive difference to learn these things in the outdoors”

These benefits can be particularly strong for pupils with additional needs as highlighted on one farm visit where a boy with autism overcame significant anxiety and distress at the overpowering sights, sounds and smells of a farm. By lunchtime he reported that he was thoroughly enjoying his day saying ‘it was the best day of my life’. He was thrilled to have overcome his fear of heights and new things, and to have climbed up into a tractor which he’d desperately wanted to do.

We want our visits to help children, their parent helpers and teachers to be more knowledgeable and more aware of food farming and the countryside and we want to help children to be more able to make informed decisions about what they eat. A large proportion of our visits include an element on food production but some of our visits have a different focus so this should be taken into account in the following figures.

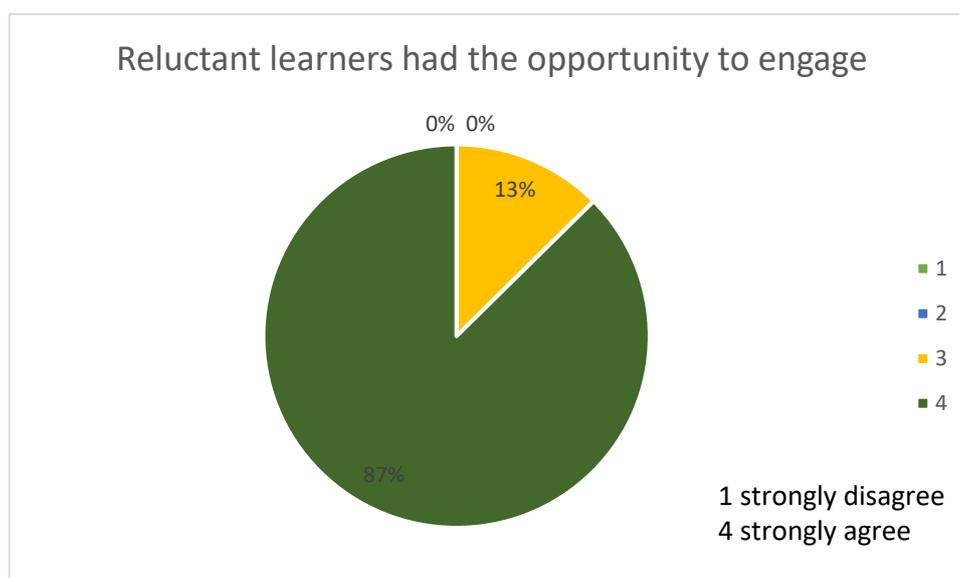
96% of teachers felt that their visit had given children a better understanding of where their food comes from with 75% strongly agreeing that this was the case.



Teachers thought that “all children left with a better understanding of where food comes from”, they felt that it was “great that the children could freely touch taste and smell in the herb garden” and said “The children enjoyed the trip and had a great time in a new environment experiencing a working farm”

We want our visits to help children engage with formal education as a result of increased real world and interactive learning experiences. We often find that children who struggle in a classroom environment come into their own on a farm visit. Indeed, it is often the case that farm discovery co-ordinators and hosts are not able to identify the children with behavioural issues in the classroom, as they are so engaged with the visit.

All teachers agreed that reluctant learners had had an opportunity to engage, with 87% strongly agreeing. Teachers said the visits were “very informative, friendly and engaging for the children” and that “reluctant learners were really encouraged”



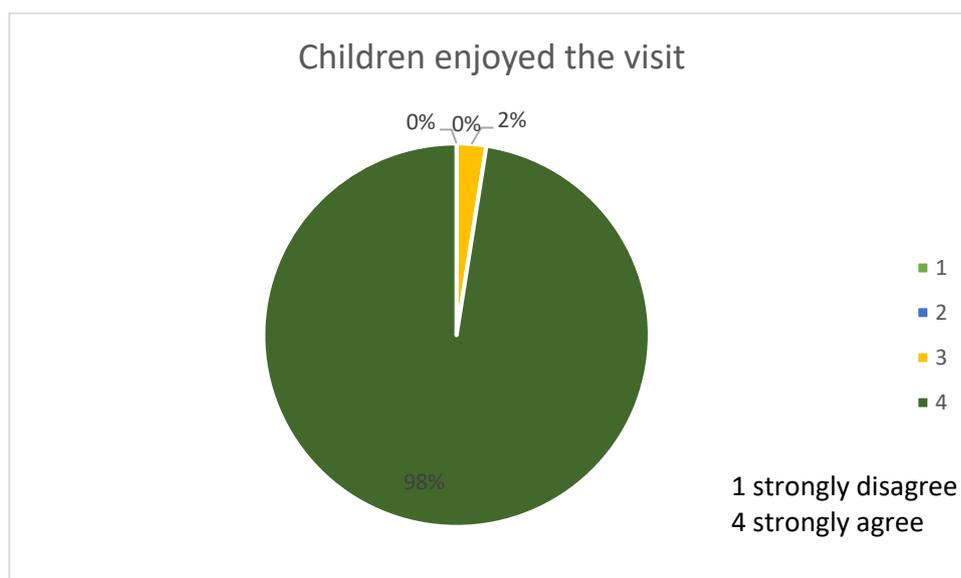
Other comments from teachers include:

“Seeing the less confident children engage and join in made my life as a teacher worthwhile”

“It rained throughout our visit but the children remained up-beat as the day was well-structured with lots for them to get involved in. We all thoroughly enjoyed it”

We aim to address the poverty of opportunity experienced by many children from low income families, and to help them build a rich bank of experiences vital to language, literacy, social relationships, self-esteem and aspirations. Enjoying an activity is key to engagement, to boosting self-confidence, and to a sense of well-being. Resilient children have a bank of happy memories, and experiences of success to draw on when faced with change, challenges, or failure.

All teachers agreed that the children had enjoyed their farm visit with 98% strongly agreeing.



Comments included “children and teachers thoroughly enjoyed visit and learnt lots”; “thoroughly enjoyable, engaging, educational and fun. Great to see children enjoying nature and the countryside” and “a thoroughly enjoyable day, all the deliverers were very knowledgeable and engaging and this trip has given us lots of writing and other opportunities to take back to the classroom”

This area can also offer really valuable experiences for children with additional needs, and we aim for all our activities to be accessible to all children, tailoring the visits to ensure they provide rich and enjoyable experiences for all. For example, when a severely visually impaired child joined a farm visit, she was able to take part in all aspects of the visit including smelling herbs, cutting sweet pea flowers, watering vegetables and meeting a litter of puppies. Her one to one support let us know that “it’s been absolutely amazing and the child thoroughly enjoyed herself with the activities! Thank you for making the day easily accessible for her, she was very confident in watering the plants and picking flowers! Both yourself and Tango made her feel a part of the activities by giving her a

close up of the things we saw and picked out. Today was not what I expected, it honestly surpassed my vision of how it would be”

Areas for development in the coming year

We will share findings from this evaluation with Farm Discovery Co-ordinators and offer support and training to maintain and improve the quality of our visits. We will continue to share best practice across the team about how to organise and deliver high quality inspirational visits and how to ensure a high return rate on evaluation forms. We will make sure Co-ordinators know the importance of returning forms for the agreed deadline to enable us to capture feedback from as many visits as possible. We are improving our ability to communicate with our hosts and volunteers as a whole and will also share findings with them, and with our funders.

We will seek to improve the process for communicating with schools and farms before a visit and the information that is sent out.

We will continue to closely monitor feedback on Health and Safety, following up with co-ordinators and schools when schools have any causes for concern.

We want to continuously improve our monitoring and evaluation and will consider refining some of our questions in order to elicit responses even more closely related to our outcomes.

We will also extend our evaluation to gather feedback from farmers and children to give us a broader picture of the impact the programme is having.

Conclusion

Our Farm Discovery Co-ordinators and host farmers are delivering consistently high quality, safe farm visits, having good communication with teachers before and during visits.

We have worked well to upskill our co-ordinators in their knowledge of the National Curriculum and their ability to support teachers and hosts to enhance curriculum learning during our visits. More staff are taking schools on pre-visits than has been the case historically and this may also have helped improve communications for first time visits and help co-ordinators develop a tailored programmes for schools.

The impact that teachers felt our programme was having on their children came through very strongly aligned with our outcomes, with 100% of teachers agreeing that:

- children had enjoyed their visit,
- Children had gained confidence in the outdoors and in the countryside
- reluctant learners had had the opportunity to engage

In addition, 96% of teachers agreed that:

- the visit had given children a better understanding of where their food comes from.