

PRESS RELEASE
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03/01/2018



Northumberland Farm Host David Thompson Encourages Fellow Farmers to Follow His Path

Passionate farmers in the North East are being encouraged to share their knowledge with some of the country's most disadvantaged schoolchildren.

Seasoned farm host David Thompson, of Broxfield Farm near Alnwick, works with national charity The Country Trust to bring children into the countryside and onto working farms. He said: "It was my father-in-law who first introduced me to the charity. He was an ex-Head Teacher and saw there was a huge need for children from our cities and poorest areas to experience the rural world and understand where their food comes from."

David invites schools to his own farm from as far as Matfen, Berwick, Hexham and County Durham and is now keen for more farmers in the area to join him by providing experiences on their own land. He still remembers his first visit almost 20 years ago. Since then he has welcomed thousands of children to 680 acre Broxfield Farm in Northumberland.

David said: "At first I was quite nervous as I was worried that the children would be cheeky, get bored, or laugh at me. But that went away quickly when I saw how they were struck by everything they saw during the visit. Not just the size of the animals and machinery; they were also in awe of the space, the quietness, everyday things that I've always taken for granted."

The Country Trust works with schools educating the most disadvantaged children in Britain, giving them access to the countryside and farming through visits to real working farms, plus year-long Food Discovery programmes delivered in schools, teaching children how to grow and cook their own food, and residential visits. New farm hosts are needed across the region to share their passion, knowledge and individual stories.

CEO of the charity, Jill Attenborough, says: "It's not only important for children to learn outside in our wonderful countryside, but now, more than ever, we believe that farmers should have a voice to explain British agriculture to our youngest citizens, and help them make informed choices about food as they grow up."

David's experience means that he has got to the heart of what makes an entertaining and enriching visit. Children on his trips explore farm creatures and wildlife habitats, seeds and seasons, and the legendary 'Enchanted Forest', and they experience a variety of smells, textures and colours.

David said: "It would have been daunting being a host for schools without The Country Trust. They take care of everything, so that the farmer can just enjoy the visit. My advice to anyone considering becoming a farm host is just to give it a go and trust the Coordinators."

A Country Trust Coordinator supports the farmer in organising a safe visit, and they make arrangements with the schools and the farmer to plan how to make the most of the visit for everyone involved. On the day they will be on hand to help.

Educational visits to working farms have long been recognised by the Government as having huge benefits to both children and the rural economy. Visits may be supported through the Higher Level Stewardship Scheme, and farmers should seek advice about accessing available funding from a professional adviser.

The Country Trust is currently looking for hosts within an hour's coach journey of Newcastle, Gateshead, Derwentside and Sunderland. To find out more about becoming a host, please visit <http://www.countrytrust.org.uk/get-involved/be-a-host>.

Ends...

i About The Country Trust

- Founded in 1978, The Country Trust is the leading national educational charity that brings the working countryside alive for those children least able to access it, whether through disadvantage or disability. Every year we support hundreds of volunteer farmers and landowners to welcome thousands of disadvantaged children from all backgrounds and faiths onto their farms.
- The Country Trust has 3 main strands of activities:
 1. Farm Discovery - day visits to real working farms
 2. Countryside Discovery - residential visits to the countryside
 3. Food Discovery - yearlong programmes exploring every aspect of growing, cooking and even selling food
- The Country Trust focuses on working with the following:
 - Primary age children from schools with an above average percentage of children eligible for Free School Meals
 - Schools catering for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities and Nurture Groups
 - Looked After Children and Pupil Referral Units
 - Young carers, refugees and their families
- In 2017-18 The Country Trust enabled
 - 19,820 children to go on a farm or estate visit
 - 1,422 children took part in Food Discovery Programmes
 - 876 children went on Residential visits
 - 361 children with Special Educational Needs took part in Countryside Adventure days in Hampshire.
- The Country Trust currently works with schools in and around London, Essex, East Anglia, Hampshire, Birmingham and the East and West Midlands, Yorkshire, the North West, North Wales and Northumberland.

What we do

- We make it easy and safe for children to visit farms and for farmers to share their knowledge and passion.
- We bring urban and rural communities together, increasing communication, respect and understanding of the countryside as a place of possibilities but also a place on which livelihoods depend.
- We facilitate children's cultural understanding about the life and work of the British countryside through visits and talking with those who live and work there.
- We enable children to experience the wonder of the countryside:- open space, breathing space, the people who live and work there, habitats, farm animals and wildlife.
- We enable children to understand the possibilities of food, what a variety there is, why and how it grows, who grows it and where, what it tastes like, why all this matters.
- We introduce adult role models who nurture and take responsibility for crops and animals. People who often work in strong family units.
- We bring two interdependent but disconnected communities together for a stronger future. Our school community includes many urban children and a significant number of children from ethnic minorities.
- We can help schools to meet the new Ofsted common inspection framework which now includes a judgement on 'personal development, behaviour and welfare'. Ofsted states that the first-hand experiences of learning outside the classroom can help to make subjects more vivid and interesting for pupils and enhance their understanding. It can also contribute significantly to pupils' personal, social and emotional development.

Chief Executive: Jill Attenborough

TEL 07760 171 146

PR: Corinne Caddy

TEL: 07947 388 956

Head Office: Moulsham Mill, Parkway, Chelmsford, Essex, CM2 7PX

E-Mail: info@countrytrust.org.uk

Web: www.countrytrust.org.uk