



Evaluation report

2015/2016

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About The Country Trust



The Country Trust is a small, but dynamic national educational charity dedicated to bringing alive the working countryside for children least able to access it, whether through disadvantage or disability. With the vital support of a strong network of farmers and landowners, we help disadvantaged 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 focus is on primary schools with a higher than average percentage of children eligible for Free School Meals (FSM), as well as schools supporting children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEN/D).

Our outcomes

We are very clear about the difference we want to make to children's lives

- 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

The children and schools we work with

"I enjoyed playing with my friends because at home I don't usually play outside"

"I will remember everything that I did and ate because this was a once in a lifetime opportunity"

By the time they start school, children from the poorest families and therefore eligible for FSM, have already fallen behind in language and personal development, and are twice as likely to be obese, and to have Special Educational Needs. Head teachers and school governors are having to make very difficult decisions in the face of significant budget cuts as they strive to close the attainment gap for these children, teach them how to live healthier lives, help them to feel safe and provide experiences and opportunities that they may not get at home. Much of our work is repeat business, with some schools having worked with us for a decade or more. However, we are also seeing growing demand as schools expand to absorb the sharp rise in the primary age population (94,000 extra pupils in 2015, with

minority ethnic pupils making up 71% of the increase) and/or come together into Multi Academy Trusts.

A new approach to evaluation

Having established our outcomes, over the last year we have been working hard to try and measure **the quality, relevance and impact** of our work. We surveyed teachers on 346 day farm visits, teachers and children from 26 schools before and after residential visits, and teachers and children from 15 schools before, during and after year long Food Discovery programmes. We are keen to share these results with all those who are part of The Country Trust, as well as those who have an interest in the health and wellbeing of the next generation and their understanding of food, farming and the countryside.

Summary

Farm visits: Hands on visits to real working farms and estates are at the heart of our work and between January and July 2016 we received feedback from 224 teachers with extremely positive results. **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. **96%** of teachers agreed that the visit had given children a better understanding of where their food comes from.

Residentials: Our evaluation tells us that The Country Trust is successfully helping to address poverty of opportunity. Approximately a third of the children taking part in our residentials in Suffolk, Norfolk and Yorkshire are visiting farms, forests, rivers and beaches for the first time, a figure that increases to 40% for children on our Suffolk residentials. Visits to farms and the countryside are amazing opportunities to build a rich bank of experiences vital to language, literacy,

social relationships, self-esteem and aspirations.

“Children about to leave to go to secondary school have met and interacted with a whole range of new and unfamiliar adults - they’ve learnt about different landscapes, jobs and lives.”

Teacher, Woolmore Primary School

Food Discovery: Learning is sustained and transformative - 77% of our Food Discovery children went on to cook one or more recipes at home, and 61% of children said that they particularly enjoyed tasting new foods, a huge step for some children who really fear new tastes and textures and have very limited diets as a result. Growing, tasting and cooking food, learning where and how it is produced for us, and meeting those who produce it helps children and adults to develop a healthy, happy and confident relationship with food.

The benefits of our programmes, especially farm visits, can be particularly strong for pupils with **additional needs**, with very positive feedback received for visits including children with behavioural issues, autism, visual and mobility impairments. **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.

Building confidence and resilience

1. Countryside Discovery Residentials

“Most children from our school have never been to the countryside, the beach or seen real life animals. An experience not to be missed.”

Teacher, Winston Way Primary School

Approximately a third of the children taking part in our residential in Suffolk, Norfolk and Yorkshire are visiting farms, forests, rivers and beaches for the first time, a figure that increases to 40% for children on our Suffolk residential.

“The chance to see and experience life outside of London, which many of them rarely leave.”

Teacher, Harry Gosling Primary School

We asked children heading off on a residential what they thought their destination would be like. The majority of children were very positive, using words such as *“fun, sunny and amazing”*. Others were more hesitant, giving us an insight into what it feels like to be stepping into a new world. Children worried that they would miss their families, be cold, wet or muddy. Some children from ethnic minority communities will have concerns based on experiences or stories of rural life in countries such as India or Bangladesh. One child thought *“Suffolk will be nerveracking”*, while another, heading for the Dales, noted that it might be *“scary because they mite be a bear”*. Not liking insects or spiders featured regularly in the children’s comments and some were not looking forward to *“poo or manure”* which they recognised was a feature of the countryside.

“the countryside is quite scary”

Facing your fears and finding that not only have you survived but you have enjoyed the experience boosts self confidence and self-esteem, increases engagement and leads to a sense of well-being. The negative comments and fear of getting muddy and wet expressed in the pre-visit surveys for our residential were followed by positive comments in the post-visit surveys, including *“it is actually fun getting dirty”*, *“I really enjoyed the stepping stones because I didn't fall in and because I had two*

boulders in my pockets”, *“I really enjoyed the really long walks”*.

Comparing pre-visit and post-visit ratings and comments for individual children taking part in our residential enabled us to see some changes in behaviour and



attitude. One child asked *“What kind of food are we going to eat?”* on the pre-visit survey and was unsure about the farm visit and walk. Following the visit, she reported feeling *‘scared’* and *‘proud of herself’* for trying new food, and noted that she had eaten a jacket potato in the additional text box. She’d also felt *‘proud of herself’* on the walk and *‘happy’* at the farm. Resilient children have a bank of happy memories, and experiences of success to draw on when faced with change, challenges, or failure.

Time with friends has scored very highly at each venue. Fears of being away from family were overcome and comments included;

“I discovered how to make your friends into your little family”

Some of the comments give an insight into the children’s usual play - one discovered that kayaking was like canoeing *“Which I had done before (on Nintendo Wii of course)”*, whilst another said *“I liked not being lazy”*

A third of the activities provided on our residential visits were rated as being ‘off

the scale - AMAZING!' by more than half the children, including the most sensory experiences - pony trekking, caves, the beach, the forest, and the campfire. Following a residential in Suffolk one child summarised her visit:

"I liked visiting minsmere nature reserve the most because i liked seeing emily's chicken which liked cookies :) My second favourite thing to do was Seeing the horses because i have never ever seen a horse before and my third favourite thing to do was seeing the sea and again the same reason i never sawed the sea before and that was my first ever time being on a beach."

2. Farm Discovery day visits

"It was amazing because we went to a farm which was really fun and for everyone that welcomed us into the farm thank you".

When we asked children how they felt after visiting farms as part of their year-long Food Discovery programme, 95% wrote positive words like happy, excited and joyful. Many children wrote very specific things: the name of the farm they visited, a specific activity they had done on the farm, seeing the size of the machinery at the farms, or watching various animals, suggesting that it was a very positive and memorable experience.

One teacher reported after a farm visit that the *"The children's confidence definitely grew even during the day itself"*

Teacher, Breamore Primary School

3. Food Discovery

We know that the unfamiliar environment of a school garden, and exposure to soil, compost and the creatures living there can make some children feel anxious. Change and new experiences may have negative connotations for them. Feedback suggests that through Food

Discovery many children discover a new confidence;

'I really like putting my hands in the soil now'.

Teachers agreed strongly that the programme had given their pupils opportunities to succeed, to increase in confidence, mental and physical well-being, to improve self-worth and self-identity. By the end of the year, over 60% of the children said they felt confident to grow something at home by themselves.

Increasing engagement

We want our visits to help children engage with formal education as a result of increased real world and interactive learning experiences. We invite teachers to provide observational feedback as part of our surveys, and analysis of this feedback showed that children who struggle in a classroom environment came into their own during all our programmes. This is particularly evident in Food Discovery where teachers are able to observe change across two or three terms. Teachers recorded opportunities for improved motivation, a strong context for classroom learning and a chance to close the gap for Pupil Premium pupils. All teachers surveyed following a farm visit agreed that reluctant learners had had an opportunity to engage during the day visit

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

Teacher, Boothroyd Primary Academy

1. Food Discovery

"Even quiet children were eager to share what they have found and done"

Teacher, St John Vianney
Catholic Primary

“Less able and English as an Additional Language children were able to grasp more vocabulary and became more confident in sharing ideas”

Teacher, Cannon Barnett Primary School

“Brilliant (gardening) session - it got children working together and talking”

Teacher, Hague Primary School

“Some children find it hard to interact, but practical work [like this gardening session] helps bring them out of their shell”

Teacher, Catton Grove Primary School

And in cooking *“one particular child who finds classwork a challenge demonstrated great knife work”*.

Teacher, Magdalen Gates Primary School

2. Farm Discovery

“A child who finds it difficult to sit still and concentrate was enthralled by the farmer and hung on his every word.”

Teacher, Waverley Abbey C of E Junior School

“Children who find learning inside the classroom difficult at times, really shone on the day!”

Teacher, Newlands Primary School

“We have found that they are so engaged in their learning if they have visited the farm and have had hands on experiences as they are able to relate what they can see to their own learning.”

Teacher, St Bede C of E Primary School

“it makes a massive difference to learn these things in the outdoors.”

Teacher, Bilterne Park Secondary School

“At school, we find some of the children are now more outgoing, particularly in outdoor activities. Their confidence is showing during lessons.”

Teacher, Hampshire

3. Residential

“The residential trip provides an opportunity for children to have a number of enriching life experiences; it gives them a number of 'firsts'. In this respect, the residential trip is an important part of our provision in closing the gap between those children eligible for pupil premium and those who are not.”

Teacher, Woolmore Primary School

A greater sense of agency

We asked teachers to rate the Food Discovery programme against particular measures of active participation. Creating a sense of agency, the opportunity to make choices, developing team work and sensory experiences scored particularly highly. We also aim to ensure that all children can experience patience, wonder and success. With its focus on growing, nurturing and harvesting, teachers identified that the Food Discovery programme provided opportunities for awe and wonder, developing imagination and promoting an interest in the wider world.

Our Coordinators note children's responses after each session. For example:

“Look! We planted the rocket seeds in a row, and they've come up in a row!”

The world can seem a chaotic place. Children who understand that their actions can make a difference are more likely to have a stronger sense of identity and a stronger voice¹. In other words, they are more motivated to engage with what is going on around them in a meaningful way.

1. http://www.barnardos.org.uk/what_works_in_building_resilience__

Children learn and grow

Our aim is that, as a result of our programmes, **children, their parent helpers and teachers are more knowledgeable and more aware of food, farming and the countryside, and are better able to make informed decisions about the food that they eat.** 96% of teachers felt that their visit to a real working farm had given children a better understanding of where their food comes from.

“Great that the children could freely touch taste and smell in the herb garden.”

Teacher, Beccles Primary School

“Great to get up close to the cows and understand the breeding and slaughtering processes and how food gets onto our plate”

Teacher

“I discovered that there is a long process to make cheese”

Pupil

Encouragingly, the percentage of children cooking one or more of the Food Discovery recipes at home increased from 69% in 2015 to 77% in 2016. Where parent sessions have been run in schools, these have really helped the ‘take-home’ messages of a varied diet which is affordable, and have given parents the confidence to try new foods at home.

“I have found the cooking sessions very brilliant as I am cooking with ingredients I don’t normally cook with and I am now buying more fresh ingredients to cook with and I have gained confidence in teaching my children to cook.”

Parent, Catton Grove Primary School

Teachers comment that children on our programmes learn without realising it. They love to acquire new skills, vocabulary and knowledge, which in turn boosts their self-confidence. Our farmer hosts often share quite technical knowledge with them, and answer questions about life cycles, reproduction and the raising of livestock for food, very factually and directly which the children really appreciate.

“I learnt that a pig is not called a pig, it is an Oxford, Sandy and black and a dulock. Not just a pig.”

Teachers learn and grow

We also aim to **build teachers’ confidence in learning outside the classroom.** We know that for many teachers, a farm visit is outside of their comfort zone and so feeling safe is very important. Farm Discovery Co-ordinators 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. Scores of 4 or less (out of 6) were followed up and provided us with an opportunity to understand more about perceptions of risk that exist where teachers may have little or no experience of the countryside, for example in relation to stinging nettles or electric fences. We believe that a well-managed visit to a real working farm is a rare and valuable opportunity for children to learn to take responsibility for themselves.

Extending the impact

Where parents were able to attend farm visits with their child, some parents were able to see that taking their children 'out' was hugely valuable. A parent at one Norfolk school was emboldened to look at bus timetables to take her children to a farm park in the holidays after she had seen how much her son had enjoyed being on a farm visit.

As a result of funding from the Postcode Community Trust, The Country Trust was able to organise transport on Open Farm Sunday² for two Birmingham schools, enabling children to share the farm visit experience with their parents and wider family - 2 coach loads of families in all. About a quarter of the families completed our survey; none of them had ever been to a farm before and 29% had never visited the English countryside. Overwhelmingly they wanted to find out where their food came from and get out with the family to the countryside, they loved the opportunity to see their children playing safely, and also to talk to the farmers.

Many schools, particularly larger ones, are finding the cost of coach travel for visits to farms and the countryside a real barrier to participation. As a result, two of our Food Discovery schools went on local visits to community gardens or allotments instead of a second farm visit. A teacher at a Birmingham school was particularly impressed with their visit and commented that the children;

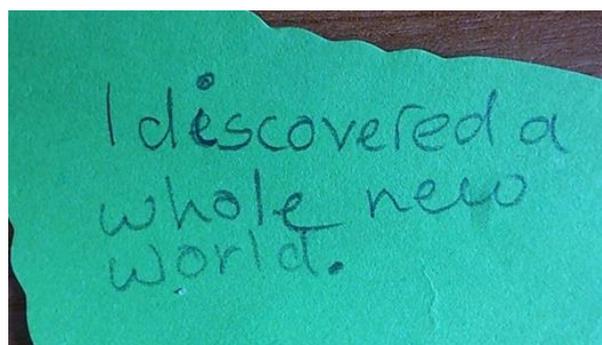
“enjoyed speaking with and questioning the older people there. Several children wanted to know if they had to wait until they were old to have an allotment space”.

It proved to be a really good link between the small school growing area and the large farms that they visited. Children were invited to join in the allotment community days with their families, and several were very keen to do this.

Areas for development

Our evaluation also highlighted some areas of focus for the coming year

- 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 refine some of our questions in order to elicit even more meaningful responses.
- We will extend our evaluation to gather feedback from our host farmers, to inform our delivery and to give us a broader picture of the impact the programme is having.



“the city is not everything you can ask for.”

Pupil

² <https://farmsunday.org/>