

### **Country Trust proposals to the National Food Strategy review**

1. Visits to real working farms for every primary school child who would not normally access the countryside (including transport support) using schools with higher than the national average percentage of children eligible for Free School Meals as a key indicator, as well as looked after children, children who are young carers, have SEN/D, refugees or asylum seekers, and children who are in alternative provision.
2. Enabling farmers to share their story with children, to explain different farming practices and how they are responding to challenges such as climate change, and show how the farming community and consumers depend on each other.
3. Enabling farmers to share best practice with each other, learn from educators and discuss contemporary issues.
4. A coherent approach to food within the national curriculum which incorporates proper training around food and learning outside the classroom, increasing food confidence and skills at every level.
5. Recognising that educating adults is equally important.

The Country Trust has been enabling children from some of the most disadvantaged areas of England to access the working countryside for over 40 years. For many of these children, their Country Trust farm visit is the first time they have ever been to the British countryside. The world of farming and food production is alien to them, and often to their teachers and parents. Getting children out on to real working farms means that children get first-hand experiences:

- seeing farm animals shows the way they are kept and cared for;
- through talking with farmers they understand why animals are kept;
- they begin to understand the energy and effort which farmers put into growing and harvesting crops;
- they begin to make connections with products they see in shops.

Visiting the countryside gives many children real experiences of a life which they may otherwise only see in books or on screens, if at all. These bring a new knowledge of, and a new attitude towards food, and shows them how the food choices they make as consumers can influence the countryside and the wider environment.

The majority of us live in urban areas. Giving farmers, children and their teachers the opportunity to meet and spend time together results in both communities learning more about how they depend on each other, fostering respect and understanding.

We currently work with around 20,000 children a year and know the difference it makes to both parties (please see our Farm Discovery Evaluation). We would like to see the National Food Strategy rolling out similarly high quality, high impact experiences to all children, especially those who experience disadvantage of opportunity. The Country Trust would be very happy to support the development of such a large-scale programme.

It is imperative that farmers communicate with consumers. Each is dependent on the other, and decisions and attitudes of one deeply influence the practice of the other. Farming takes place in relative isolation, and most farmers have no experience of telling their story. We know that bringing farmers together (current hosts and those who are considering becoming hosts) is a wonderful way to share best practice and ideas, bring skills and confidence to a higher level, and build support networks. Bringing teachers into these gatherings helps farmers to understand how they can share their story and support educational requirements, and teachers can grow in confidence. Farmers tell us that they don't have the time, resource or ability to 'sell' the possibilities of a farm visit to schools, particularly to those schools most in need where there may be no history of arranging such experiences. Organisations such as The Country Trust offer trained staff able to work with farmer hosts and teachers to facilitate tailor-made safe visits, including extension activities to sustain impact.

The Country Trust also delivers a deeper programme, called Food Discovery. As a result of our evaluation of this programme, we would like to see a more coherent approach to food within the National Curriculum. Alongside mandatory visits to working farms, this approach would incorporate

- growing food on small scale at school (demonstrating how biodiversity is an important part of growing);
- teaching pupils to cook with seasonal ingredients, including those they have grown (connecting them with and enabling them to access affordable seasonal British produce);
- enabling pupils to explore and taste a wide variety of food, including seasonal and regional specialities (most children, and especially those who experience disadvantage, have limited diets which may ultimately result in disease. Exposure to a wide variety of food at a young age increases food confidence and gives children the opportunity to make better food choices);
- running a food enterprise through school so that they can learn about food as a business and therefore better understand farming and food production.

Currently most primary school teachers do not have the skills or confidence in food growing, production or preparation to deliver this. We would like to see proper training for all primary teachers, including at initial teacher training (ITT) level, so that they are able to adequately teach and inspire their pupils. LEAF have already been offering courses at ITT level and we would like to see this rolled out nationwide.

Working with adults is also important: many adults (including parents) have not had access to the countryside and may have limited knowledge of where food comes from, or the consequences of food choices, therefore also needing support to access the countryside and understand food. Giving adults the opportunities to visit farms and have food education (as above) is as important as it is for children. It offers the possibility for putting whole families onto a new trajectory. Providing funds for those organisations who already do this sort of work is critical. We have worked with some of the most vulnerable parents and seen the impact that education around food and food systems has on their lives, from a healthier, more affordable diet to improved physical and mental well-being. We are currently developing further parent work for schools and would love to see work like this being expanded nationwide.