



The Farm Visitor

A newsletter for farmers in Educational Access

Welcome

Welcome to the first edition of The Farm Visitor.

Increasing numbers of farmers are throwing open their gates to school children and other educational groups with help from the Educational Access part of Environmental Stewardship. This newsletter is a way for working farmers like you to share your ideas and experiences of farm visits, and find out new ways of inspiring young people.

At Natural England, through our One Million Children Outdoors programme, we're addressing the very real problem that far too many young people have no real connection with the great outdoors. In 2009 350,000 children participated in this programme, 200,000 of them by visiting an Educational Access Farm.

As farmers, you understand the value of wildlife, nature and the countryside, and by opening up your farms to young people you're very much part of the solution to this problem.

We're going to produce printed copies of the first two issues of The Farm Visitor to ensure all farmers involved in educational access receive one. Subsequent issues, however, will be sent out by e-mail to keep the newsletter as up to date and environmentally-friendly as possible.

In order to receive future copies of the newsletter electronically, please sign up at <http://eepurl.com/vxnl>

If you have any ideas or comments about The Farm Visitor please e-mail david.burton@naturalengland.org.uk

Sowing the seeds

The Farm Visitor interviews George Eaton, a farmer with nearly 15 years experience staging farm education visits.

Where is your farm? "I run Rectory Farm in Tingewick with my wife Ann. It's set in Buckinghamshire's beautiful Ouse Valley.

What goes on there? We've got 150 acres which we own, and another 200 that we rent. It's a mixed farm, with 550 ewes and 32 suckler cows, while about 40 acres are given over to crops such as winter wheat and winter oats. We've had a stewardship agreement since 1994.

When did you start farm visits? The first one was in 1996 when our eldest daughter Rachel's Rainbow unit came to see the lambing. We now do about 60 a year.

Why did you start? I enjoy meeting people and farm visits are a great way of increasing people's interest and understanding of farming and the countryside. And obviously the payments you receive through stewardship are an important source of income.

So who visits the farm? Because we've been established so long, we get a real mixture of groups such as Brownies, Beavers and Cubs, as well as farming clubs like the Young Farmers, and horticultural groups.

The younger groups love lambing and summer pond dipping and cray fishing, while most of the adult come for an evening walk along the dis-used railway line and through the water meadows.

Most of the schools that visit are primaries but what's been great recently is the interest from a secondary school in Brackley, because visiting a farm fits in well with the new national diploma in science.

Students from Northampton University are also visiting to find out more about conservation and environmental schemes such as ELS.



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What do you do on a visit? The underlying message for all our visits is the positive role that farming can play when it comes to conservation. With school visits this is all linked into the national curriculum and we're able to cover subjects such as river studies, life cycles and different habitats. We also look at farming history, care of young animals, farm machinery, and run farm tours.

What do you think children get from a farm visit? I'm pretty sure most of them have a great day out, and of course, when kids are enjoying themselves they're much more open to learning new things.

Where do you get your inspiration for activities? Our inspiration comes from previous experience and the fact that we're farming and out in the countryside all day. I think it's important to tap into what's around you and the day-to-day running of the farm rather than feeling the need to constantly think up new activities.

What is the most popular activity you run? It's a toss up between the quad bike trailer rides and lambing.

What one piece of advice would you give to other farmers about staging visits? To start with think small and local – don't get carried away! Try and arrange for trip organisers to come on a pre-visit to the farm and then, after you've held a few, it's well worth doing a CEVAS course."



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Sign up for Open Farm Sunday

Open Farm Sunday on June 13 is a great opportunity to invite the local community on to your farm. Last year over 400 farms took part and the day was covered on national television.

The majority of farms welcomed between 100 and 200 visitors but you can make your own event as big or as small as you like. Some farms mark the day by inviting a few families from their local village, while others take a festival approach, with thousands of visitors coming along to enjoy a variety of farming related stalls and attractions.

And in this International Year of Biodiversity, Open Farm Sunday can help you remind your local community about the key role farmers play conserving wildlife.

Natural England is one of the principle sponsors of Open Farm Sunday and we'll be running wildlife activities at around 45 farms on the day, particularly farms with Educational Access schemes in place.

Open Farm Sunday events also qualify for one Educational Access visit claim – simply ask a visitor to fill in a feedback form on the day.

If you haven't signed up for Open Farm Sunday yet it's not too late to receive the free farmer support pack from LEAF (Linking Farming and Agriculture). Just register before the end of May.

To find out more visit the www.farmsunday.org/ofs/open/register.eb

In 2009, over 400 farms took part in Open Farm Sunday.



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Bee Scene down at the farm

An excellent activity to get involved with this summer is Bee Scene, which aims to give our struggling bees a helping hand.

Bee Scene is a national survey designed by Plantlife especially for primary school children. It's simple to complete and provides an easy way for children to become citizen scientists and monitor the natural environment.

Children have to search for fifteen wildflowers in a natural space local to them – their 'Bee Scene area' – and using their findings to decide whether or not their area is good for bumblebees. And of course, farms offer up the perfect habitats to carry out the survey.

Once they've logged all their data as part of the farm visit, they can then head back to school and help plant a virtual meadow online, which will link all their findings with hundreds of others across the country.

The survey should be carried out between April and August and can be done in about an hour or so. Alternatively with the help of the Bee Scene education pack the teacher can make the activities form a whole day's fieldwork.

The education pack provides extra activities covering areas such as teamwork, map skills and problem solving. It will also teach children more about topics such as food chains, pollination and biodiversity – again, all topics that are relevant to farm visits.

The survey and activity pack are available online at www.wildaboutplants.org.uk.



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Learning about the great outdoor classroom

Natural England has produced a new Educational Access leaflet for school teachers (enclosed with this newsletter) which spells out many of the benefits of using farms as outdoor classrooms.

If you need more copies of the leaflet – reference number NE262 -to help market your farm, you can order them free of charge by visiting the publications section of the Natural England website:
www.naturalengland.etraderstores.com/NaturalEnglandShop



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Growing Schools

Natural England has signed up to the Government's Growing Schools schemes so that most Countryside Stewardship Scheme and Higher Level Scheme Educational Access agreement farms are now promoted on the website.

The site has been designed to give support and ideas to teachers looking to use 'outdoor classrooms' as a way of teaching young people of all ages, and it is hoped that the new farm listings will lead to a significant increase in bookings. www.growingschools.org.uk

Natural England needs you!

A big thank you to the farms who are e-mailing us with the number of school visits they have hosted each quarter. This data is invaluable in helping us to demonstrate to the public the major contribution that farmers are making to outdoor learning.

The more farmers who can send data to us in this way the stronger the case we can make, so if you aren't already involved, please e-mail – web@naturalengland.org.uk – and we'll sign you up to the programme as well as sending you future copies of this newsletter by e-mail.



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Coming up in the next edition of **The Farm Visitor** –

- Thoughts from farmers on how to increase the range of education visits.
- Ideas for outdoor learning through hedges.
- Latest developments with Educational Access.

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