



# Impact Report 2021-22



**Country Trust**

Connecting children with the land that sustains us all

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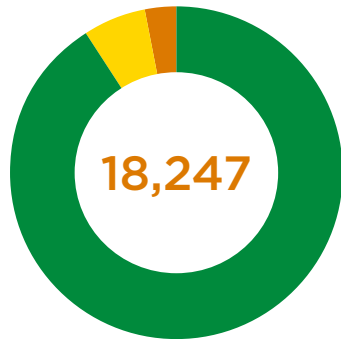
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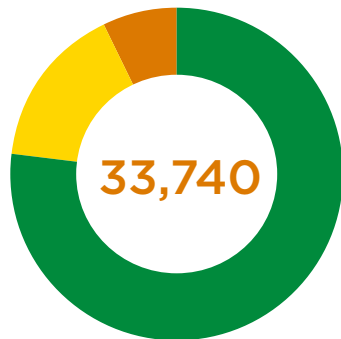
The Country Trust is the leading national educational charity that connects children from areas of high social and economic disadvantage with the land that sustains us all

## Overview in Numbers



Total number of children on farm visits:

- Farm Discovery: 16,652 (91%)
- Food Discovery: 1,055 (6%)
- Residentials: 540 (3%)



Total number of children using Farm in a Box national and local:

- Climate Action: 26,000 (77%)
- Warburtons Discover Wheat: 5,362 (16%)
- Farm in a Box Local: 2,378 (7%)

166

Total number of farmer hosts worked with over the year: offering 664 visits.

35.4%

Average number of pupils who have been on Free School Meals in the last 6 years in the schools we have worked with.

The impact of Covid continued to be felt, particularly in our Co-ordinator-led programmes, resulting in lower numbers than normal.



# Welcome from CEO

**The number of children living in poverty has risen sharply as a result of the pandemic and, with the cost-of-living crisis, looks set to rise even further.**



While most children are discovering possibilities and laying down a rich bank of happy memories from day trips, holidays, conversations, encounters with

learning, time in green space, hobbies and much more, children living in poverty are not. Many of the children who take part in our programmes have limited life experiences: time and time again, their teachers tell us that their lives centre around school, home and the supermarket.

Schools and teachers will increasingly be the main gateway to opportunities and experiences for these children, but

school budgets, and staff, are under enormous and growing pressure. We are already seeing reports from headteachers and from our own research that school visits are being cut out or cut back, meaning that the one door to opportunity for many children is closing. Our mission is to keep that door open and address poverty of opportunity through our food, farming and countryside programmes, designed to contribute to the foundation stones of confidence, curiosity and connection.

But are we succeeding in our mission? Are we responding appropriately to the scale and urgency of need? We are at the end of year 1 of our ambitious 5-year plan. This report is a summary of our findings and our impact analysis tells us that we are reaching children with very limited

opportunities. We are empowering them to be confident and curious, and we are enabling them to form connections between their own lives, their own health and the wider world around them. We are also delighted to see that we are positively affecting the confidence of teachers to sustain the impact of our programmes. However, as a learning organisation we always have a 'to do better/differently' list informed by our analysis, and we are making a conscious effort to listen more to farmers, teachers, and, importantly, to children.

We would welcome any feedback on this report and would be happy to share the detailed programme reports that lie behind it.

## The Need

Re-engaging and motivating learners after nearly two years of interrupted learning.

Teachers working in the most disadvantaged communities need support to enable their pupils to access the natural world.

The impact of lockdowns on children's language skills, particularly the most disadvantaged children.

## Our Response

Our programmes facilitated over **52k** children to take part in hands-on, farm-centred learning, stimulating their curiosity in the world around them and how it works.



**94.5%** of teachers we have worked with agree that they feel more confident to use the natural world in their teaching, with **97%** want to use elements of farming in their teaching.



All Country Trust Coordinators receive in-house Language and Communication training. This supports children's learning of new vocabulary as well as talking and listening across our programmes.



Covid and the cost of living are having the biggest impact on the poorest children, limiting their life experiences.

Increasing pressure on school budgets.

Farmers need financial support to host educational visits.

The vital role of farming in taking action on global heating is poorly understood by many.

We work with schools with a higher than average free school meal intake over 6 years, nationally this is **25.5%**; for our schools taking part in our programmes this is **35.4%**



Thanks to our funders, we were able to subsidise travel costs for 12% of our farm visits, contributing over **£14,000**, supporting **82** farm visits to take place for over **2000** children.



As a direct result of our campaigning, Defra and RPA agreed that farmers on mid-tier Countryside Stewardship could claim for educational access visits, including, for a time, making retrospective additions to their agreements.



We created and designed Climate Action Farm in a Box, supporting **26,000** pupils and their teachers to understand the role of farming in this complex subject, ensuring that farms and farming are part of Climate Change education.



## Welcome: Chair of Trustees, Steve Bell



The last two years have brought more significant change to our lives and our economy than ever before. As a charity, I have been thrilled by our ability to innovate and bring the countryside into the classroom through Farm in a Box, as well as how we have adapted our three long-standing programmes (Farm Discovery, Food Discovery and Residentials) where necessary.

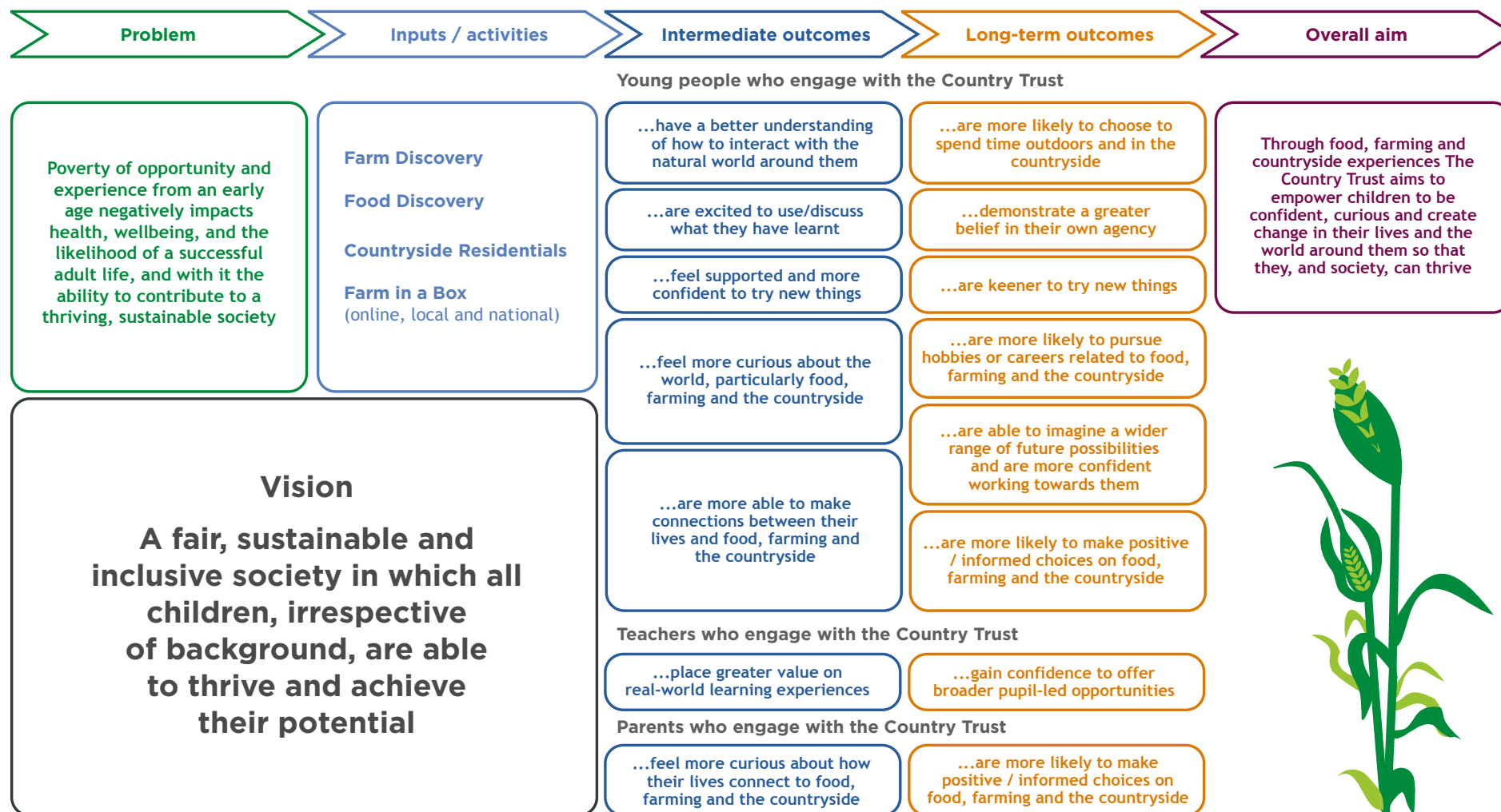
However, the long-term impact of covid restrictions on the development of children is now becoming clear, while at the same time schools are feeling the effects of the economic crisis on their budgets. Now, more than ever, children need opportunities and experiences to open up their world.

We know that using the inspiration of the countryside and the great outdoors stimulates children's curiosity, enables deeper learning and supports confidence growth. I am proud to see what we have achieved, and look forward to The Country Trust welcoming even more children to our programmes - in schools and on farms - over the coming year.



# About us: Theory of Change

We are implementing our Theory of Change, created in 2021, and measure all of our activities against these outcomes, and they form the basis of the design of new programmes such as Farm in a Box. It underpins how we measure our impact, and keeps us accountable to ourselves, our funders and our participants.



## About us: Our Programmes

### Farm Discovery

Day-visits to working farms for school and community groups. These are led by our Coordinators who work with host farmers and teachers/group leaders to ensure a safe visit with appropriate sensory experiences and hands-on activities.



### Countryside Residentials

Immersing children in the countryside for 2-4 days, Coordinators organise and support a tailored programme, including a farm visit, working with teachers and third party providers to ensure a memorable, safe, and happy time away from home.



### Sustaining Impact

Throughout our programmes we train teachers: formally through CPD and informally through modelling and conversation, resulting in pupils having a deeper and more impactful experience, particularly children experiencing persistent disadvantage



### Food Discovery

A Country Trust Coordinator takes a class on a journey through food: growing vegetables, preparing and cooking meals, tasting produce, visiting local farms, running their own markets, and experiencing the joy of sharing a feast. The depth of the programme gives children the time to explore many aspects of food.

### Farm in a Box

A box of farm-centred activities and resources created by the Country Trust, delivered by school staff either: Local - created by a local Coordinator with a local farm for a local school or National - a range of boxes funded by different partners, packed and distributed centrally to hundreds of schools.



### Core Values:



We believe you grow by learning from others



We think the quality of our connections with others has an important effect on who we can be and what we can do



We are active participants in a world which inspires and sustains us

### Aspirational values:



We want everyone to know that their contribution is welcome and valued



We aspire to be child-centred, no matter what our role is

## About us: Our Participants

We work with children who experience persistent disadvantage. We have spoken to the Office of the Children's Commissioner and on their recommendation use the percentage of children eligible for Free School Meals over the last 6 years (Ever6FSM) as our primary indicator of disadvantage. We work with schools who have 25.5% or more (the national average) of Ever6 FSM children.

We also work with:

- Pupil Referral Units
- SEND and SEMH specialist schools
- Specific groups of children who are in receipt of Pupil Premium in mainstream schools with a lower than average FSM intake.

We also work with children and their families outside of school settings, through supporting organisations like Barnardo's, Young Carers, Refugee Action and Local Authorities.

For the purposes of this report, children's names have been changed.



“What children need is very simple. They need someone to go places with, somebody to talk with, to open their eyes, to create some new environments and plan experiences. Sadly, too many children lack this basic opportunity.”

Professor Mick Waters

## Focus on: Curiosity

We want children who engage with our programmes to:

- better understand how to interact with the natural world around them
- feel more curious about the world, particularly food, farming and the countryside

Children learn best when they can see how what they study links to real world experiences and connects with and supports their learning of other subjects.

**“Learning in this fashion engages and enthuses pupils, develops their natural curiosity, and motivates them to find out more.”**  
(Maintaining Curiosity, a Survey into Science Education in Schools, Ofsted Publications 2013)

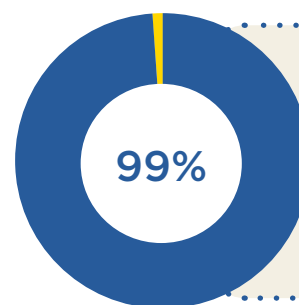
We work hard to support teachers and children to understand the vital place that food, farming and the countryside has in all our lives: it is the land that sustains us all. For many of the children we work with, the farmed landscape is a new world and a new experience. Helping children explore this world on their own terms and at their own pace is critical as it gives them ownership of their knowledge through their own curious exploration.

**“I loved when we dug through the soil... I learned the actual names for some insects so it was pretty cool.”**

Pupil, Great Yarmouth Primary Academy

An increasing number of teachers tell us that they have children in their class with sensory processing needs. These pupils can find encounters in the natural world particularly problematic. However, carefully scaffolded opportunities can support many children to overcome their fears.

**“I got to smell a pineapple weed, it smelled great.”**  
Pupil, Calcot Junior School



**of teachers said they had observed all or most of their children engaging with the natural world through touching and feeling, listening, tasting, smelling and observing**

## Focus on: Curiosity

I've never tasted honey until today. I love it! It tastes so sweet! The bees are so clever to make it and so kind to share it with us. Thank you bees!

Pupil, Bishop's Primary School



Gave children more awe and wonder about the natural world and the importance of nature in areas they didn't realise.

Laura Vincent, Scunthorpe CoFE Primary School

Children are encouraged to ask questions to further their learning during our programmes - what do they want to find out? Who can they ask?

So, there's more than one type of apple? I love apples but didn't think they had different tastes.

James Knott CoFE Primary School

How does the same seeds know to grow different types of peas? All the pea seeds in here (magazine) look the same. How do they get different?

Pupil, Banks Road Primary School



## Case Study: Ollie's Farm Visit

Ollie, year 4, visited a dairy farm with his class. It wasn't his first visit to a farm, but he said he felt nervous about being there as, "it's different to being in school, so it's unusual."

We went to look at the growing calves and had the opportunity to go and bottle feed them and touch them. Ollie was very keen to watch how they behaved and had a lot of questions about how old they were, why their tongues were so rough. We went into the milking parlour next and were able to watch the cows being milked. Ollie was fascinated and wanted to know everything:

"Why is that one not being milked? Look at that one, there's already milk spurting out! Are they going

to use that one what's been on the floor? That won't be clean". When the cows had gone out, the herdsmen gave the children the opportunity to put their fingers into the suction units so they could feel what the cows felt. Ollie and his friend agreed, "It's really gentle, the cows probably really like it."

Ollie noticed that the cows were eating while they were being milked and when they looked at the feed nuts he enjoyed feeling and smelling them commenting, "They smell quite sweet".

The herdsman brought out a patient and friendly cow which all the children were allowed to take turns to stroke while she was eating some nuts. Ollie couldn't get over how soft she felt.



## Focus on: Confidence



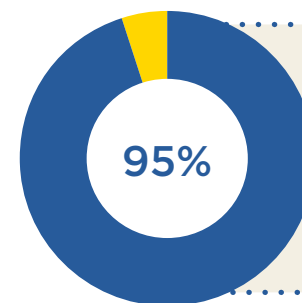
We want children who engage with our programmes to:

- feel supported, confident to try new things

Confident children believe in themselves and their abilities and ideas. Our Coordinators and host farmers consciously scaffold experiences for children so that they can build up their confidence in doing new things in small steps. This could be tasting new foods, touching a farm animal, or going pony trekking.

“It’s been amazing to see the children grow in confidence trying new foods. I have loved seeing them try things for the first time and whilst I was aware of the level of deprivation in the school it has reminded me of how limited some of our children’s diet and experiences were. This has opened up their world a little bit and given the adults an opportunity to talk about new foods as well.”

Teacher, Waterside Primary School



of children said they had done something for the first time

“A child who did not want to stroke the chicken went from hands in her pockets, to a little touch with a finger to a quick stroke to a continuous stroke with a big grin on her face. This was achieved by the farmer choosing the right chicken and being supportive and mindful.”

Observation from Coordinator for Valley Primary Academy visit

“I loved the horse riding and I even asked my mum if I can start a horse riding lesson there because I had so much fun.”

Amelia, St Joseph’s Primary School, Yorkshire school thank you letter

“Some of the shy children were very active and participated a lot. Had more confidence. Children with English as an additional language were talking more and happier.”

Martin Sjaz, St Cuthberts

## Focus on: Confidence

We want children who engage with our programmes to:

- be excited to use/discuss what they have learnt



This desire to talk about what they have learnt and done often has a longer term effect, supporting the retention of learning, with lots of teachers mentioning that children are still talking about their experiences after the visit or session, which then naturally feeds into writing across different subject areas:

“The engagement from our children was amazing and every child came back and could talk about the experience. Many children had been able to retain a lot of the new vocabulary which they had heard.”

Luisa Pancisi, St James' C of E Infants

Pupils who speak English as an additional language, or who lack confidence speaking to others, particularly benefit from these farm-centred experiences:

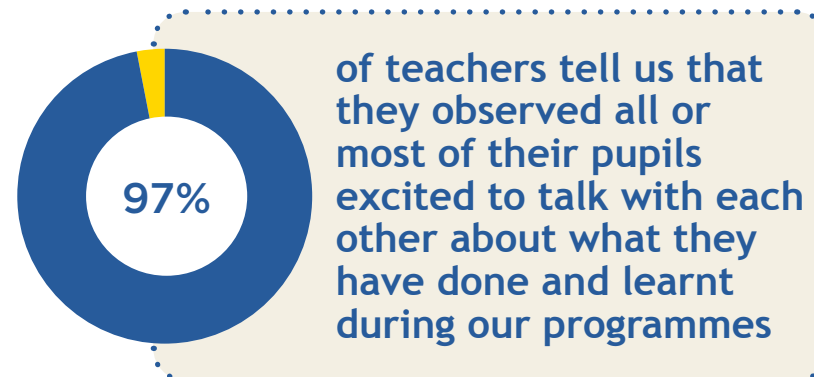
“One child who is usually quite reserved, really came out of their shell when we were gardening as he found he was good at it. It was lovely to see him become more of a ‘leader’ and more confident at talking to his peers.”

Teacher, Food Discovery end of programme evaluation, Waterside Primary Academy

Doing new things generates feelings of pride and independence, and can open opportunities for new hobbies and interests:

“The majority of the children loved the visit. This is something that the children in my school would not normally be able to see and so the children enjoyed talking about it later that week in our lessons.”

Richard Nicholls, Star Academy



## Case Study: Alma's Farm Visit

Alma came on a visit to a mixed farm with her mixed year 1 and 2 class. She had never been to a farm before and was very excited to be there, although she was worried that the animals might bite. She was pleased that she had put her own wellies on, as some people in her class had to change their shoes when they arrived at the farm and wear some from the farmer's welly bank.

Alma was really engaged with all the activities during the day: bottle feeding lambs, pretending to be a lamb after watching them play, looking at cows and chickens, grinding wheat to make flour, exploring a tractor, gathering different plants in a field and doing a bug hunt.

She was very keen to learn words for the new things she was seeing and on the class's walk back to the bus at the end of the day she instigated a guessing word game which enabled all of her peers to practice some of the vocabulary they had learnt and used during the day like butterfly, froghopper, ladybird, buttercup.



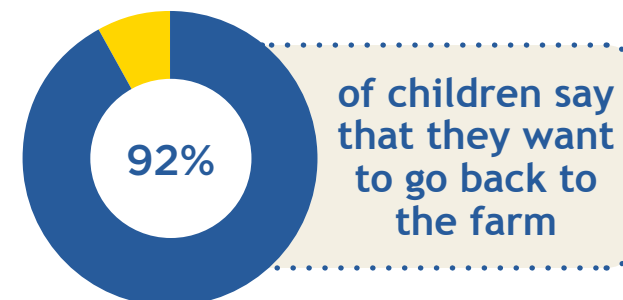
## Focus on: Connections



We want children who engage with our programmes to be more able to make connections between their lives and food, farming and the countryside.

As children explore the world around them through our programmes, they make sense of the journey of food, from farm to fork, and start to make all sorts of connections. The most fundamental of these is understanding how important farms are and over 90% of the children we have worked with say they think farms are important - a 9% higher score in comparison with a national Childwise survey asking the same question. The connections children make range from environmental to emotional to academic.

This could be ascribed to the happy memories they have built during the visit (all those new experiences which have boosted their confidence), but Coordinators also try to do activities which teachers and children can repeat so that they can recreate the same feelings they had on the farm:



“We were lying on the tarp under the trees doing a listening exercise and afterwards talking about how being in the forest made us feel, the answers I expected were given including ‘relaxed, calm, peaceful, chilled, sleepy’ and then a boy said ‘alive’ which I thought was wonderful.”

Coordinator session report after The Beeches Primary school visit

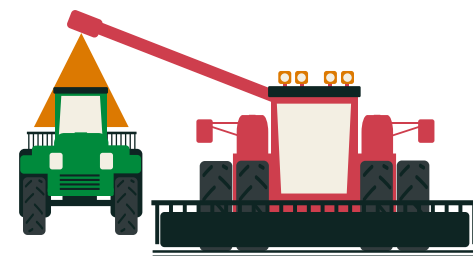
Some of the connections children make are academic: their curiosity and the tools they have used during the day to discover things for themselves enable them to start making connections with their classroom learning:

“It was really hands on and the children were able to consolidate the learning they had carried out in school. The children all said how much they had enjoyed themselves and how much they had learnt.”

Amanda Batterbee, Marshland St James Primary & Nursery School

## Focus on: Connections

Learning in the ‘real-world’ supports children to make their own connections, further supporting the retention of their learning:



**“We were looking at tiny holes in sprigs of rosemary with magnifiers, and talking about photosynthesis. He said ‘it’s like a perfect circle, with plants giving out oxygen and taking in carbon dioxide, and animals doing it the other way round. We all depend on each other’. I could see that it was a total ‘light bulb’ moment for him.”**

Farmer Host, Yorkshire

Over the course of longer programmes, like Food Discovery, children can realise their own agency, and start to take learning from school and farm to their home environments:

**“The children have become more aware that they are in control of the food they eat, and able to make their own choices. They are now looking forward to growing their own food at home and educating their parents!”**

Teacher, end of programme questionnaire, Beccles Primary Academy

With all our programmes, to a greater or lesser extent, there are also opportunities for teachers to explore how food, farming and the countryside are integral to global topics like sustainability:

**“Many of our pupils are disadvantaged and would not engage in activities involving cooking, growing, farming etc. at home. [...] The sustainability aspect of the Food Discovery programme is vital in supporting our children’s cultural capital and international responsibilities for a better future. We are starting to weave the UN sustainable goals into the curriculum, through Food Discovery these can be implemented in much more depth. The children have grown in the understanding of the importance of making sustainable changes, and their actions can have an impact both positively and negatively on the world.”**

Teacher, end of programme questionnaire, SS John Fisher and Thomas More Catholic Primary

## Case Study: Nathan's Residential

Nathan, year 4, was on a Residential visit to the Yorkshire Dales with his class. Most of his class hadn't stayed away from home since before Covid, if at all, and most hadn't ever left their urban Yorkshire town. They had arrived the day before and were all quite tired after quite an emotional first-night away from home.

There was a 2 mile walk in the morning, including crossing a river using stepping stones. There were lots of stops to learn about the countryside they were walking in, how it was farmed, and with time learning to look out for specific plants and signs of life. The children knew that there would be a quiz in the evening covering some of this information. Nathan was struggling a bit with both with the length of the walk (as were most children), and that in the afternoon they would be doing pony trekking which he was very anxious about. He asked his

teacher several times during the walk what his horse would be like, how big it would be, whether he would like it. After lunch, when we arrived at the pony trekking centre, Nathan waited nervously by the horse he had been matched with for someone to help him on. With some assistance he mounted the horse and once he felt stable, he beamed and said, "I can feel the horse's heart beating!".

As they went on their short trek, he learnt he was very good at controlling his pony, "I'm so good at stopping him", and he was very proud of himself and grew in confidence over the afternoon. All the children were very keen to exchange their pony experiences once they had dismounted, comparing how old their ponies were and discovering that they were all younger than the ponies. They visited a trout farm after they had been pony trekking, and Nathan touched a

massive trout which he said felt cold and slippery, and which amazed him. They spent some time exploring a purpose built dry stone wall, climbing stiles and crawling through holes, and they all were absorbed by this experience.

The overall experience for Nathan, and his class, was success in lots of gentle, achievable challenges in a new environment away from home.



## Sustaining Impact: Teachers

We want teachers who engage with our programmes to place greater value on real-world learning experiences and, longer term, gain the confidence to offer broader pupil-led opportunities.

Teachers play a vital role in ensuring that the work that we do in our programmes has a lasting and deep impact. Teachers see their pupils every day and can use the farm-centred experiences that we offer as a spring-board for learning across the curriculum and to support their pupils' personal development. We offer teacher training within Food Discovery but acknowledge that much of the training across our programmes is informally modelled by our Coordinators sharing knowledge, expertise and Country Trust values.

“The idea of cooking in the classroom and making a big pot to split between 30 children [...] making a small portion to take home proved that to do a food activity is not as tricky as you might think. Gives me more confidence to do something with food in other topic/science lessons.”

Teacher, Aylesbury Vale Academy



“It has been wonderful to allow children to flourish within structured, hands on learning. This has been an area I have rolled out to many more lessons to encourage engagement from all.”

Teacher, Beccles Primary

“The experience allowed myself and other teachers to see the huge benefit being outside has on enhancing the children's learning and engagement.”

Teacher, Maple Court Academy

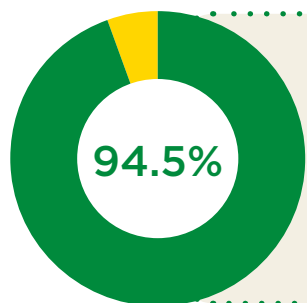
## Sustaining Impact: Teachers

“The idea of starting with things in a box really offered some curiosity into what we were doing - this is an element that I would try again.”

Elizabeth Hill, Rossmere Academy

“The day has clearly had a massive impact on my class. It makes such a difference when they can actually make those real life connections that bring their learning to life.”

Teacher, Poplars Community Primary School visit



of teachers agree that they feel more confident using the natural world in their teaching after being involved in one of our programmes

In our two school-based programmes, Food Discovery and Farm in a Box, **74%** of teachers agreed that their pupils had taken the lead in their learning, further demonstrating that this style of teaching is achievable in the classroom.



## Our Influence: Policy

The Country Trust is speaking up to ensure food, farming and countryside opportunities and experiences are available to ALL children, especially persistently disadvantaged children.

We know these opportunities offer the right balance of emotional, physical, social, and educational development that benefit children and are vitally important for the future of British agriculture, and for people and the planet to thrive.

We are calling for:

- Every child to have the opportunity to visit a real working farm, to discover through first-hand experience where their food comes from.
- Every child to have the chance to discover the connections between the food they eat, their own health and the health of the planet.
- Every child to develop the confidence and curiosity to explore the natural world.



## Our Influence: Policy

### Support For Farmers

Over the past year we have been working hard to ensure as many farmers as possible are financially rewarded for opening their farms for educational visits. Through our efforts, Educational Access Payments (ED1) have been added to Mid-Tier Countryside Stewardship agreements. Now our challenge is to ensure such payments continue when the new Environmental Land Management scheme is rolled out in 2024.

We are also backing the call for support for farms under 5 hectares on urban fringes, especially as they are so well placed to provide opportunities for children from urban areas. With fuel costs so high, it is more important than ever that farms within walking distance or accessible by public transport from the schools we work with open their gates for educational access visits.

### Education For All

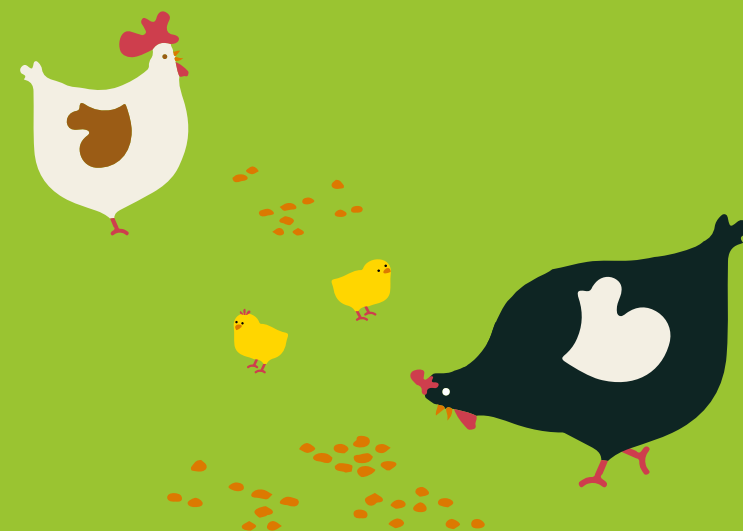
We are pushing for better and more food and agriculture education. An important part of this is backing the 'Eat and Learn' recommendations in the National Food Strategy.

We are asking Government to work across departments to ensure we achieve the much-needed shift in food culture to create a sustainable, resilient food system that supports people to live healthy lives. We believe this starts with first-hand experience of farming and food production.

Our ambition is to establish food, farming, and countryside opportunities as part of a fair education for all children. That's why we support the call for a Nature Premium, a government funded, statutory requirement for schools to take children regularly into nature.

### Joining Up The Dots...

We are very concerned that food and farming opportunities and experiences are the missing link in so many recent government strategies, from the National Food Strategy, Sustainability and Climate Change Strategy to the Environmental Land Management scheme. We are both leading the sector and joining with others to amplify our voice as we urge those formulating policies to help us address this.



## Our Influence: Partners

We are supported by a diverse range of funders, supporters, project partners and passionate individuals, and we contribute to networks including Fair Education Alliance, Access to Farms, Food Education Network, Nature Premium and Sustain. We would like to thank all our supporters for their encouragement and commitment to our mission.

- Our Corporate Partners enable us to grow and innovate e.g. Warburtons, Ardian, Impax Asset Management
- Funders supporting us both financially and as critical friends e.g. Westminster Foundation, Ernest Cook Trust, Bruno Schroder Trust, Bernard Sunley Foundation
- Education partners - Reach2, Ernest Cook Trust
- Individuals - sharing their expertise, championing our cause



## Our Plans for 2023

This will be year 2 of our 5 Year Plan and another step towards our ambition to bring food, farming and countryside experiences to 120,000 children from disadvantaged backgrounds each year by 2027.

### Our Aim:

- 60,000 children taking part in our core programmes
- 10,000 children get their hands in the soil through our new Soil Campaign and in soil/photosynthesis focused farm visits
- Progress in making our Farm in a Box National boxes more regularly available
- Roll out of Farm in a Bag - a confidence building pre-visit encounter with farming
- Evidence that we are reaching children in the most disadvantaged areas
- Evidence that we are consistently achieving our outcomes
- New techniques to support teachers to sustain the impact of our programmes including a new partnership with Reach2 Multi Academy Trust
- Ensuring food and farming education is visible and audible to policy makers





**Country  
Trust**

**To support our work visit:  
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**Registered charity no. 1122103**

**Head office: Moulsham Mill, Parkway,  
Chelmsford, Essex. CM2 7PX**

**President: The Duke of Westminster**