



PlayAction Guide

CITY FARMS: Help The City Grow

Using wasteland for Community Purposes.

Fair Play for Children originated the Make Waste Space Playspace Campaign in the 1970's. One of the most successful flowerings of this has been the City Farm/Community Gardens Movement.

City Farms are community projects in urban areas centred on farm animals and horticulture, situated on derelict land. Community gardens are similar but smaller ventures without livestock. Many have been set up on former rubbish sites - care is taken to check the nature of the refuse. On them, children, young people and adults are able to spend time and develop skills in caring for animals and tending produce in a reasonably 'professional' setting. Cows, goats, hens, vegetables etc provide both items for sale and consumption but, more importantly, offer the participants opportunity to experience the 'business end' of where the food they take for granted on the shop; shelf actually originates.



There are 59 city farms, nearly 1000 community gardens, 75 school farms and a number of community-managed allotments in the UK. An estimated 500,000 people volunteer on them and they attract over three million visitors each year. FCFCG promotes and represents its members at a national, regional and local level. It also provides a wide range of services, advice and support for city farms and community gardens, whether they are well-established or just getting off the ground.

Planning a City Farm

Such a venture takes a great deal of planning to get off the ground in terms of acquisition of lands, public/neighbourhood consultation, obtaining of funding to run the project, obtaining planning consents and attention to details of hygiene, safety and other legal requirements, structuring a management for the project, and staffing/volunteers to run it day-to-day.

An article in The Sunday Times 18th February 1990: Seeds of Hope in The Concrete Jungle describes the Hackney City Farm as an example of the movement at large (over 70 in operation in the U.K. or planned). Describing the work of a typical Farm, the article dealt with the initial challenge of communication with youngsters who may live in a pre-existing climate of disaffection, vandalism, petty crime etc. There would be set-backs: "This idyll used to be disrupted by persistent vandalism of farm buildings and theft by groups of bored teenagers. Instead of reporting them to the police, the staff persuaded the youths to work on the Farm as volunteers. They have found that, as well as reducing damage and loss, this also cut the crime rates in the immediate area."

The scope of such a project is illustrated by the numbers and range of users: "The Farm had 32,000 visitors last year, 13,000 of them school-children." The Farms' co-ordinator ascribed the success to a close relationship with the local community. Many schools take advantage of this unique facility, and all Farms actively involve people with special needs - one Farm created a Riding for the Disabled facility, for example.



PlayAction Guide

The aim of City Farms is to enable city-dwellers of all ages and abilities to become involved with growing and living things. Many varied groups and individuals benefit and are brought together. This creates opportunities for training, education, work and Play for the very young, the elderly, people with disabilities, youths and adults.

They can come to terms with and respect the realities of food production including on some Farms rearing livestock for consumption, even as meat. Produce from the Farm "reaches the producers' and community's tables". The social value of City Farms is important in the wake of disruption of traditional communities by de-industrialisation, unemployment and mass housing policies. Projects are set up and managed by local people and respond to the needs and resources of their communities.



Re-introducing Balance to Urban Areas

Another emerging feature of City Farms and Community Gardens is that they are one way of re-introducing some sort of ecological balance to urban areas - they help protect and revive the latent natural ecology of urban areas, and many people only become aware of the possibilities because of their City Farm involvement. The re-introduction of nature and natural processes helps stimulate awareness and encourages community action and development. The skills learnt in running such a project are transferrable on a community and individual level into many other aspects of life from local government to school to workplace etc.

"Heeley Farm, Sheffield, adopts a similar approach" to Hackney. "At one stage there was anxiety about gangs of unemployed young youngsters wandering the streets looking for trouble. Staff took the risk of employing the ringleaders on the Farm, with positive results. 'They were able to identify the Farm as theirs and in effect police it themselves.'" This approach is fundamental to all and any forms of successful Playwork.

Some projects work with local schools, taking in animals to be weighed, discussed, measured, written about, drawn etc. This enables academic disciplines to be related and integrated to practical, everyday matters. One Farm works with patients from a psychiatric hospital, acting as a bridge to the outside world: "They are in charge of the Farm's gardens".

Recreational as well as educational

The Farms see themselves as recreational facilities as well, "open air social clubs" and during spring and summer especially there will be an event of some type happening on many Farms at the weekends: jumble sale/produce sale at the small end to The Annual Sheep and Wool Fair etc at the larger-scale end. All Farms, however, are run as 'working concerns' because the welfare of animals demands responsible and caring management.

Many farms have e.g. resident potters, spinners, weavers, carpenters etc, and some even have fully-equipped classrooms. However, the City Farm is not to one model - each is different and some are able to afford better facilities than others.



PlayAction Guide

Orchards are being established in some City Farms - they could also be planted on less-used corners of playing fields, housing estates etc. Common Ground at 45 Shelton Street, London WC2H 9HJ have produced a Guide. Finding Sponsors for Community Projects is from Friends of the Earth, 26-28 Underwood Street, London N1 7QJ, Tel: 071-490 1555 - this is about commercial sponsorship. Many City Farms are grant-aided by their local authorities.

The Play value of the City Farm

is immense - they started as play facilities and most open after-school, run summer projects and facilities etc. For many children unable to have the benefit of pets at home, the City Farm still provides a focus for their care and concern.

City Farm produce: Eggs, goats and cow's milk, cheese, yoghurt, pork, bacon, lamb, turkey, ducks' eggs, rabbits as pets, fleece, all manner of vegetable/fruit, honey, compost, potted/bedding plants/shrubs, manure, herbs, animal feed, straw and hay.



It is ironic that perhaps children who benefit 'hands-on' in an inner city area from living near such a City Farm may know more about 'country life' than their suburban or even village counterparts. This may raise the question as to whether City Farms are needed outside of urban areas.

Starting a City Farm

The Federation of City Farms & Community Gardens offers advice on all aspects of community-managed city farming and community gardening, including:

- Animal husbandry and welfare
- Community involvement
- Funding and budgeting
- Horticulture
- Land use management
- Legal requirements
- Committee and management roles
- Working with young people, volunteers and people with special needs
- Planning and design
- Staffing... and many more

They can usually put you in touch with a city farm or community garden within travelling distance from you and are always happy to provide advice and support on the community management of gardens and farms. Advice can be given by correspondence on the telephone or on site where appropriate.



PlayAction Guide

National programmes

The Allotments Regeneration Initiative

Allotment groups throughout the UK are benefiting from nearly £1,000,000 of funding to promote their regeneration. The fund is administered by the Allotments Regeneration Initiative (ARI), a unique new partnership between the National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners, the Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens and the Esmeé Fairbairn Foundation.

School Farms Network

There are some 75 school farm members of the Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens. A new network is under development to offer support to such groups across the country

Growing Schools

Growing Schools is an initiative run by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) to develop opportunities that enhance teaching and learning through farming and growing. FCFCG undertook research on behalf of DfES during 2001 and sits on the Growing Schools Steering Group.

Access to Farms CEVAS Vocational Training Scheme

Access To Farms is a partnership of 12 organisations promoting quality educational visits to farms.

Contact details

The best source of full information and details about City Farms (and they are Fair Play for Children Members) is: FCFCG, Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens. FCFCG is the representative body for city farms, community gardens and similar community-led organisations in the UK.



For further information please contact the FCFCG Director Jeremy Iles on tel: 0117 923 1800, Fax: 0117 923 1900, or write to The GreenHouse, Hereford St, Bristol BS3 4NA.

Web site: www.farmgarden.org.uk

This Fact Sheet is one of a series published by Fair Play for Children:

35 Lyon Street, Bognor Regis PO21 1BW. Telephone/Fax: (01243) 869922