

Case Study

Farm School – connecting children with food, farming and nature

Brighton and Hove City Council

The Vision

For over 100 years, Brighton and Hove City Council has owned large parts of the South Downs, with the land managed by tenant farmers.

Farm School was set up to connect local school children with tenant farms to give children hands-on opportunities to learn more about food and farming on their doorstep, engage with nature preservation and understand more about the wonders of chalk grassland.

Background

Many children are disconnected from where their food comes from and are less likely to spend time outdoors in nature.

Schools are also under increasing pressure from the lack of adequate funding to provide opportunities for children to engage with the outdoors and go on educational visits. Funded Farm School visits enable meaningful connections between children, farms, food, and nature.



Bottle-feeding lambs at Truleigh Hill. Credit: Brighton & Hove City Council

What we achieved

Farm School engaged ten schools, focusing on schools that have a higher-than-national average number of pupils receiving free school meals. Over 1750 children have visited a working tenant farm as part of a Farm School visit. A further 2000 children have been involved in Farm School webinars, assemblies, lamb visits or Early Years Seasonal Farm School workshops.

Nine tenant farms across the South Downs have opened their gates and hosted Farm School visits. Four farmers accepted the offer of training, funded by the project, run by Linking Farming and the Environment (LEAF) and achieved the Countryside Educational Visits Accreditation (CEVAS). Farmers have responded positively to sharing their knowledge of food production and the local landscape; one farmer said he “looked forward to the trips as much as the children”.

A key achievement of the project has been linking one school with one farm, this has enabled meaningful relationships to develop between the children, school, teachers, farmer and farm and lays a foundation for a relationship beyond the duration of the project.

How we did it

Setting up the Farm School project involved lots of cups of tea over farmhouse tables, meetings with cake, and persistently emailing schools to get in touch with the teacher responsible for educational visits.

Following training in Asset-Based Community Development, it was reassuring to find that this process, although at times slow, really was essential to ensure that the different project stakeholders were on board with the proposals and willing to commit their own time to the project. Because of this

solid base in relationship-building between the farms, schools and Farm School Coordinator, the project has retained all original schools and farms for the duration of the project.

Having a project lead with a background in education was essential in engaging the schools and creating activities and resources that were educational, curriculum-linked, engaging and achievable in a variety of outdoor farm settings. The farmers also felt supported by having the day organised and all associated paperwork completed by the coordinator.

“Many children who struggle in a traditional classroom setting have flourished on the farm, gaining confidence through hands-on tasks. There has also been a shift in how children think about food, nature, and sustainability.”

Lily Peacock, Teacher, Benfield Primary School



Further information

Training for farmers:

[Farmer Training](#) | [LEAF \(Linking Environment and Farming\)](#)

Educational links for schools:

[Home](#) | [Countryside Classroom](#)

Lessons learnt

Key success factors were the continued involvement of all farms and schools. Feedback was collected formally, through questionnaires and informally, through discussions. The feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with any suggestions for improvements actioned where possible.

Another key success factor was ensuring appreciation and gratitude for people's time and energy. The farmers were all sent thank-you letters by the school and children, and the coordinator kept in regular contact via newsletters, emails and phone calls.

If the project were starting again, we would build in realistic time for developing stakeholder relationships. The original plan assumed these trips could begin immediately, but in practice the groundwork takes longer. Once protocols and resources are in place, however, the project gains momentum.

Lack of indoor facilities on some farms occasionally restricted activities during poor weather, and the absence of toilet facilities resulted in additional costs for hiring port-a-loos.

The Changing Chalk Partnership

Led by the National Trust, Changing Chalk was a four-year partnership project from 2022 to 2026 working to reverse the ecological decline of chalk grassland in the eastern South Downs, bring histories to life, and connect local communities to the internationally significant landscape on their doorstep.

www.nationaltrust.org.uk/changing-chalk-partnership



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