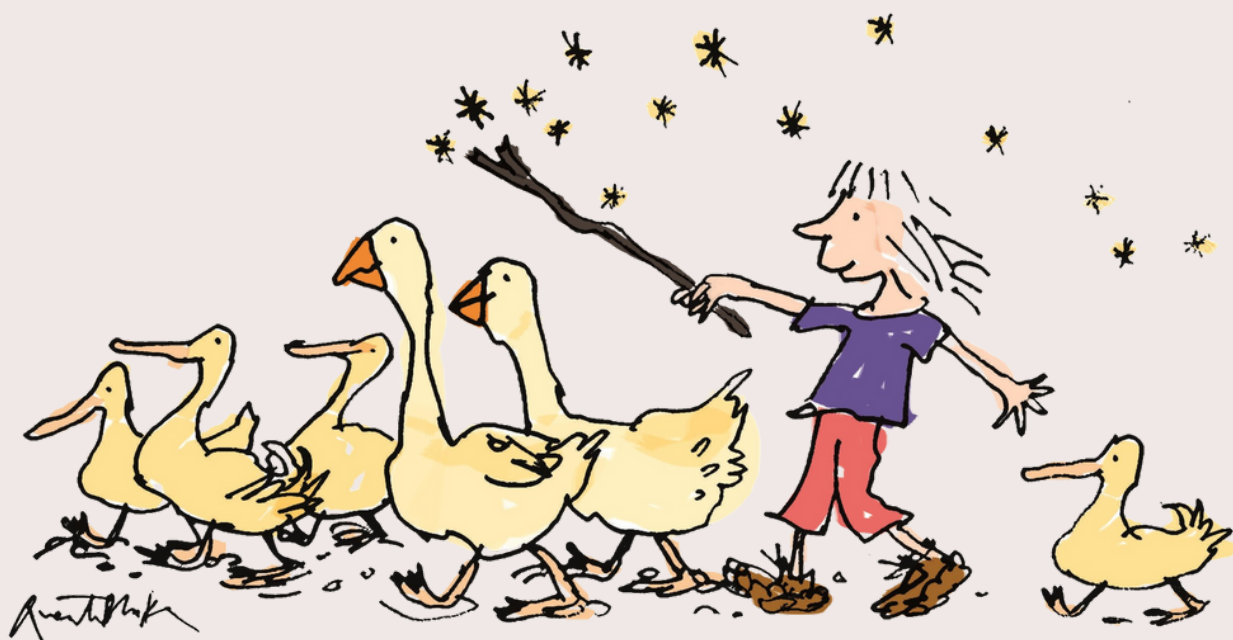


2023 IMPACT EVALUATION

RESEARCH PROJECT REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS



FARMS FOR CITY CHILDREN

Authors: Elizabeth Tree and Claire Toogood
Supported by: The Worshipful Company of Butchers
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PROJECT TEAM & ACKNOWLEDGMENTS



Elizabeth Tree - MRes Agricultural Education student

Whilst growing up in Croydon, Liz developed an interest in agriculture through a chance encounter in the Brecon Beacons. She developed further agricultural experience before completing a BSc (Hons) in Agriculture at Harper Adams University. Liz feels fortunate to combine her understanding of urban life with a passion for farming, the outdoors and the environment. The link between young – and particularly urban – people and the countryside is an issue close to her heart. Currently, Liz is working as a researcher determining methane emissions from sheep, helping farmers to control and reduce their carbon impact.



Claire Toogood - Project Supervisor

Claire has led multiple research projects focusing on people in agriculture, and associated challenges for employers and employees. Her work includes publications focusing on leadership, management and development for those working in agriculture and agri-food who come from non-agricultural backgrounds, a research report on factors linked to self-employment amongst agricultural graduates, and an evaluation of a sector new entrant scheme. Claire previously worked at Harper Adams University, and is now Research and Insights Manager at the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS).



The Worshipful Company of Butchers - Project Sponsor

The Worshipful Company of Butchers is one of the oldest of the 110 City of London Livery Companies, and is at the heart of one of the country's biggest and most important trades. Education, Charity and Fellowship are the key principles of The Worshipful Company of Butchers, and their generous sponsorship and support allowed this research to take place.

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PROJECT BACKGROUND

Concern about the impact of childhood disconnection from agriculture and nature inspired the creation of Farms for City Children (FFCC) in 1976. The work of FFCC is the focus of this research. This project sought to understand and evaluate the impact of a residential visit to an FFCC farm on the children who participate. It also looked to enhance wider understanding of agricultural outreach activities with children.

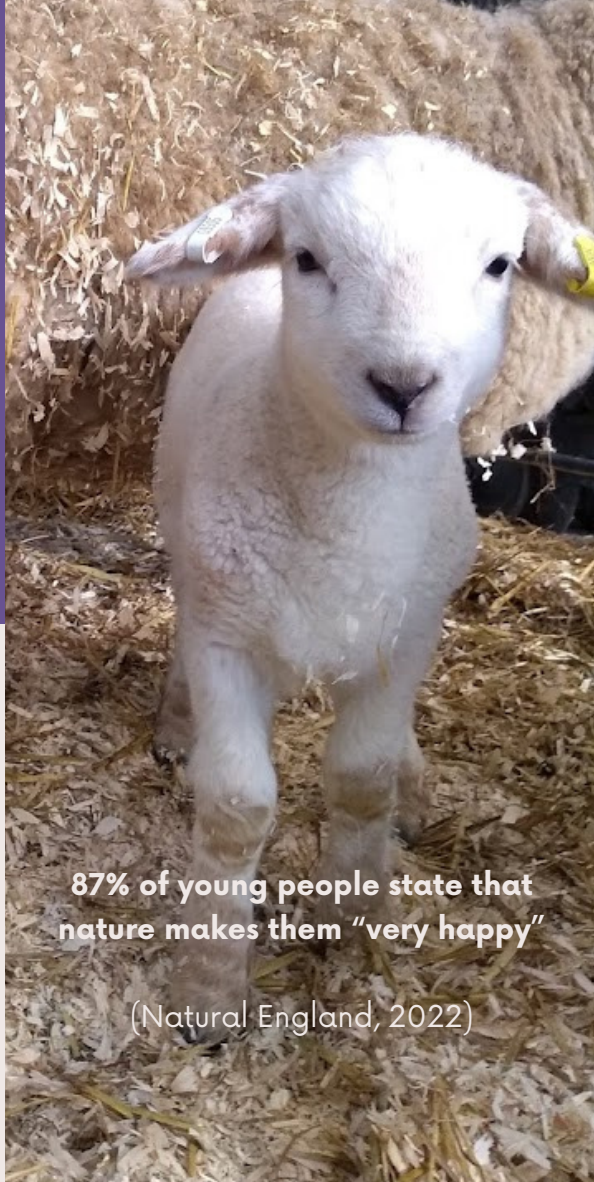
FFCC operate three farms in the UK: Nethercott House in Devon, Lower Treginnis in Pembrokeshire, and Wick Court in Gloucestershire. They enable children to experience working on a farm in a fully immersive residential trip, gaining a greater understanding of food production, rural life and other key skills such as teamwork and self belief (FFCC, 2020).

Anecdotal feedback and evidence show that a residential week on farm with FFCC leads to a range of positive benefits for children. FFCC were keen to more fully understand what they already achieve, and how to optimise and improve their offer.



In order to achieve FFCC's aim, the Worshipful Company of Butchers generously funded a one year Masters of Research (MRes) programme at Harper Adams University. This postgraduate award included a research project entitled "An Evaluation into the Impact of the Charity Farms for City Children on Participants' Agricultural Awareness and Wellbeing".

The research project took place during the academic year 2022-2023.



87% of young people state that nature makes them "very happy"

(Natural England, 2022)

EXISTING RESEARCH

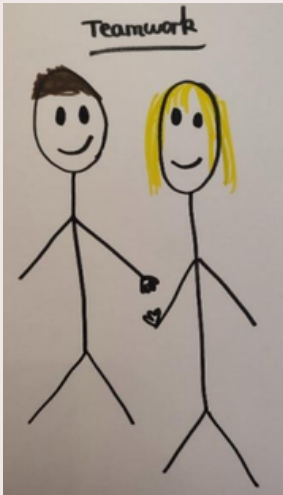
Modern children are also more removed from nature, being less likely to play in the natural world than ever before (Moss, 2013). Significant differences in access between rural and urban children have been identified (RSPB, 2013; Natural England, 2009). Socio-economic background and ethnicity is also linked to different levels of access to outdoor and green spaces (WWT, 2017; Ramblers, 2020; Holland, 2021). The reduced accessibility of nature has created generational differences; 75% of adults say they grew up near nature, compared to 64% of children now (Natural England, 2009). The benefits of connecting to the natural environment are wide ranging; physical and mental wellbeing has been linked to the quality and quantity of experiences in the natural world (Kellert, 2005; Wells and Evans, 2003).

A disconnect between consumers, food production and farming processes has become apparent as urban populations in the UK increase, and people are more physically separated from agriculture.

This disconnect has been identified in children of all ages (FarmingUK, 2017; FarmingUK, 2020; Burns, 2013). Although children have shown generally positive perceptions of agriculture (Williams, 2000), they have a poor understanding of it (Frick et al., 1995; Williams and Wise, 1997; Williams, 2000; Trexler, 2000; Smeds et al., 2011). This is commonly compounded by teachers' lack of agricultural experience, leading to a resistance to teaching the subject (Horton, Krieger and Halasa, 2013).

The disconnect also affects the agricultural labour market and young people's interest in sector careers (RSA, 2019). A lack of understanding may mean parents, carers and educators discourage children from farming career paths (Nye, 2021), contributing to difficulties in accessing labour and staff (Nye, Wilkinson and Lobley, 2022).

PROJECT AIMS & APPROACH



Project Aims

The overall project aim was to investigate the impact of FFCC's residential outreach activities on participants.

The four research objectives were to investigate any effects on:

- Childhood wellbeing
- Childhood connections to the wider environment
- Children's understanding of how agriculture is relevant to, and affects, them
- Children's understanding of the farm to fork journey

This research sought to understand whether a residential visit to FFCC had an impact on children and, if so, the nature of this impact. In line with FFCC's own Theory of Change model there was specific consideration of any "enhanced understanding of the farm to fork journey" and/or "improved grit and growth mindset".

The project also had the potential to enhance the wider understanding of agricultural outreach activities with children. Findings and recommendations were therefore considered at both organisational and sector level to maximise the impact and benefits of the research.

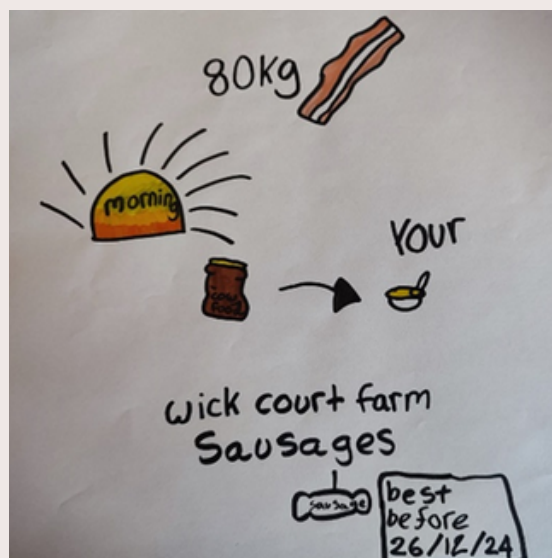


PROJECT AIMS & APPROACH

Project Approach & Design

In this research, “rich picture” design was used to capture children’s FFCC experiences. Children were given a question, and asked to draw their responses. Drawing took place individually, with children sat in small groups. Drawing was followed by a focus group peer discussion about the pictures, before moving onto the next question.

The research was carried out in this order to stimulate creative conversation without leading children or creating any pressure. The discussions were recorded, and viewed as the main dataset, with the pictures offering a way for children to express themselves creatively, stimulating the conversation.



Rich picture design has previously been used as a tool to make sense of complex ideas (Conte and Davidson, 2020). It is part of the soft systems methodology, tackling problematic or messy data and gathering it in one place (Checkland and Poulter, 2020).

The three questions used were:

- What did you learn on the farm?
- Were you worried about anything before visiting the farm?
- How did your visit to the farm make you feel?

These questions were selected to allow consideration and discussion of wellbeing, connections to the environment, agriculture and the farm to fork journey.

PROJECT AIMS & APPROACH



Teacher interviews

Alongside the rich picture drawing and focus group discussions collecting data from children, semi-structured interviews took place, with nine teachers who attended FFCC. This methodology was chosen due to its versatility at establishing people's experiences as well as exploring underlying theories (Galletta, 2013). The researcher can tailor the interview to the participant, allowing for extra questions to explore themes as they emerge during data collection (Young et al., 2018).

These interviews sought to provide context and detail to the children's comments. Under 18s have previously been identified as potentially unreliable witnesses (Ceci and Bruck, 1994). The interviews helped to minimise the effects of any confirmatory bias.

Ethical considerations

Careful consideration was given to ethical data collection from under 18s and appropriate permissions were sought from the children themselves, and their carers. Age-appropriate Plain English statements were used to support the children's understanding of the purpose of the project and how their responses would be used.

School staff were present throughout data collection. The researcher collecting the data also underwent a DBS check and took an online safeguarding course.

All data was collected within four weeks of each school's visit to Wick Court. In total, 43 children aged 8-11 from four London primary schools participated in this research.



PROJECT FINDINGS



Following data collection and transcription, data was coded by theme. nine themes were identified from the children's group discussions and the teachers' interviews:

- 1 Personal Growth & Character Development
- 2 Knowledge of Agricultural Systems
- 3 Food Choices, Production Systems & Cooking
- 4 Environmental Knowledge & Natural Awareness
- 5 Staying Away from Home
- 6 Outdoor Activities
- 7 Immediate Positive Sentiments
- 8 Lasting Positive Sentiments
- 9 Negative Sentiments

After coding teacher interviews, a further four themes were identified from teachers only:

- A Tangible Learning Experiences
- B Perspective Shift
- C Equality & Inclusion
- D Unexpected Benefits

1

Personal Growth & Character Development

Teamwork was the most common element within this theme, 14% of children used this as an example of something they learned on the farm. Children were very enthusiastic to talk about the teamwork they developed, and showed positive emotions in relation to teamwork. Children also talked about **developing independence** and **manners** within this theme.

Quotes from children

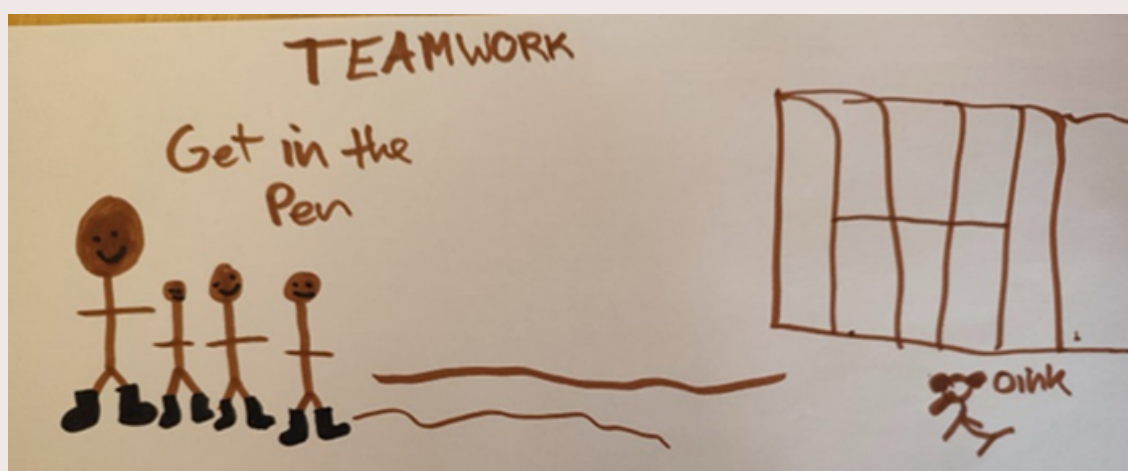
"I learned **teamwork** very much because, for example, when we when we're doing pig weighing, at the beginning, everyone was just doing their own thing, trying to get the pigs in the weigher. But we weren't working as a team, but in the end we all found a way to get all the pigs weighed and back in the pen. And then the farmer Dave let them out again and we had to do it again. **That really showed us teamwork**"

"**Manners, that was the big thing.** I like I normally say please and thank you and stuff. I learned a lot more than what my like, my parents teach me at home"

Quotes from teachers

"**And the teamwork...** because our children are sometimes separated when they do their learning actually mixing both cohorts of children, they became very patient with each other. They were able to work within a team... you don't get that opportunity in school. Not so much. I think the **behaviours** in accepting each other's needs, being patient with each other, seeing how impatient other children actually are as well. That surprised me a bit."

Example of the children's pictures on this theme



2 Knowledge of Agricultural Systems

An interest and increase in agricultural knowledge was identified by all groups of children, with more than 70% mentioning animal production and animals' needs. Some children talked in ways that suggested the development of in depth technical knowledge around agricultural production systems, such as in the first quote below, about **pigs and meat**, which was referred to by the children as "pigonomics".

Horses were drawn by many children, and teachers noted some children who struggle in classroom settings seemed to develop an affinity for horses. **Milking cows** was also specifically mentioned by 7% of the children.

Quotes from children

"I learned how heavy a pig has to be to become sausages or bacon. They have to be 100 kilogrammes to be a bacon and 80 to be a sausage. And I also learned how cows get pregnant artificially with like a glass sort of tube that gets inserted into their uterus."

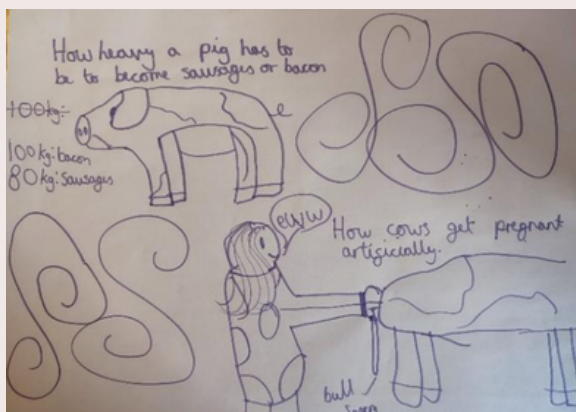
"There's Oreo the horse. **I love this horse.**"

"When the cows get milked, cause I never knew they did it in machine I thought they just did it with their hands"

Quotes from teachers

"So, one boy was particularly fond of the horses straight away, like really confident and really kind with them. **And that isn't what I would necessarily have expected him to demonstrate**"

Examples of the children's pictures on this theme



3

Food Choices, Production Systems & Cooking

Over 25% of children mentioned both cooking and food and drink production. **The children demonstrated an understanding of the joined-up nature of animal production and farming with the food on their plates.** 12% of children mentioned their trip to Wick Court encouraged them to eat a wider range of food. Teachers also mentioned pupils sampling new foods, and making more informed choices about food, thanks to increased knowledge.

Quotes from children

“[I learned] how farmers live on a farm and what they do [with] the animals before they make it into food”

One child mentioned changing behaviours at home, building his own vegetable patch after growing food on the farm. **“I have tomatoes planted... and I’m gonna grow broccoli and salad as well. Already got the seeds... I want to go back to the farm.”**

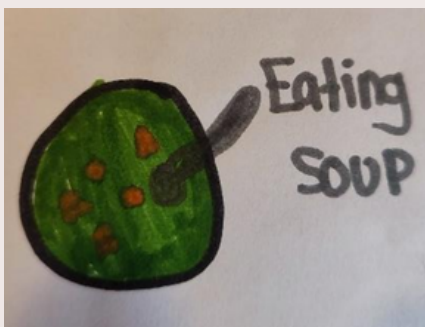
“[What] I drew was a picture of soup because **I had never tried soup before** and I didn't think that I was going to like it, but when I tried it, I did”

Quotes from teachers

“By the end of the week, they're at least trying stuff, and most of them are finishing things or, you know, remarking and commenting that **they tried something and they didn't realise they liked it, and actually they do like it.**”

“They're making informed decisions and they're more aware [...] that's part of their route to becoming a grownup. Being able to get that information and then make those choices with the information that they're given.”

Examples of the children's pictures on this theme



4 Environmental Knowledge & Natural Awareness

Children spoke enthusiastically about a range of relevant topics in relation to this theme including **wildlife, spending time in nature** and learning to reduce or **limit their time on electronics**. Teacher comments linked this to **children developing a wider understanding of the world**.

Quotes from children

"We went bird watching. We went in a little shed, we had like a book with us to show all the birds are in it. **So we counted how much we saw. I think it was like 13. And we saw a black bird** and we were like, as was a team we counted her and saw how much we saw at the end."

"**I learned how to not play [computer] games very often.** I played them loads on the weekend."

Quotes from teachers

"**[One child] was really into bird watching.** Really, really into it and **I never would have expected that.**"

"Now they understand [more]... like **we're talking about carbon footprint the other day and they knew exactly what that meant, because were they taught it at the farm**"

A teacher speaking about changes after the farm visit said "The children always say that they will spend **less time on technology** and more time outside"

5 Staying Away from Home

More than 40% of children mentioned homesickness as one of their biggest worries ahead of their visit to Wick Court. Other worries included **leaving family behind**, and worries about **food, staying in dorm rooms** and **forgetting to bring items**. Teacher interviews touched upon wider benefits of being away from home, including an **enjoyment of regularity and structured days and tasks**, which supported a **positive mindset and development of a more mature and responsible outlook**. Teachers also discussed how parental worries or concerns frequently affected the children.

Quotes from children

"The one thing that I was worried about on my first time was being away from my parents because **I've never been away from my parents** for five days or not even one day."

"**I was worried about sleeping, like sleeping on my own** at the farm. Like for the first time."

"I was also **worried that the food might have not been good**. I was worried the people in my dorm would keep talking and I wouldn't be able to sleep"

Quotes from teachers

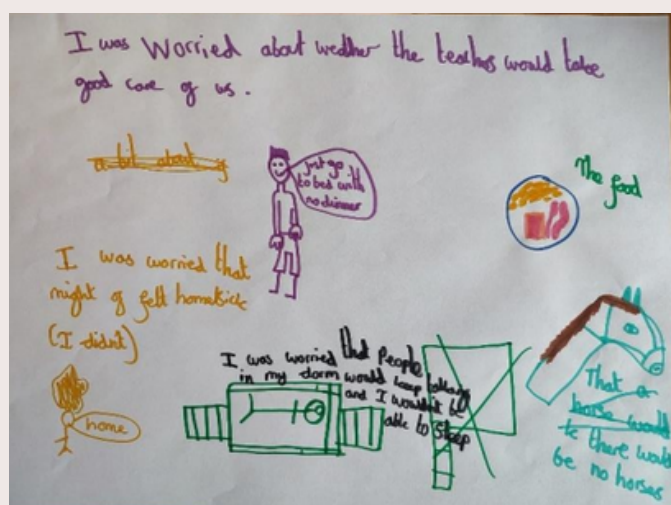
"**Parents not thinking the children were old enough to be away** for that length of time. Parents not thinking the children's behaviour would be good enough - that was a big thing."

"I think **a lot of the children that went this time had a hard time convincing their parents** more than the parents trying to convince the children."

"The getting up in the morning, initially there was like oh, we got to get up at this ridiculous hour and do work. And actually, **by the 2nd day they were just doing it.**"

"It's just incomparable. There's just a wealth of things that they learn. **And it's part of the growing up.** It's a bit like going off to university."

Examples of the children's pictures on this theme



6 Outdoor activities

Worries about animals featured in 35% of children's conversations around their fears before visiting the farm, with concerns including being bitten by a pig or kicked by a horse. Before their visit, **children also worried about the weather and getting muddy**, and teachers commented how children's attitudes to mud and dirt changed. Some children mentioned concerns about illness, slips, trips and falls. Teachers noted that children had a lack of familiarity with farm life and animals, and enjoyed some unexpected tasks.

Quotes from children

"I was worried that I would like get kicked by a horse cause like coz I was worried that I wouldn't groom the horses properly and I'd get kicked by one so. When we were grooming the horses, **they seem to be very gentle in the end."**

"I was worried about getting hurt"

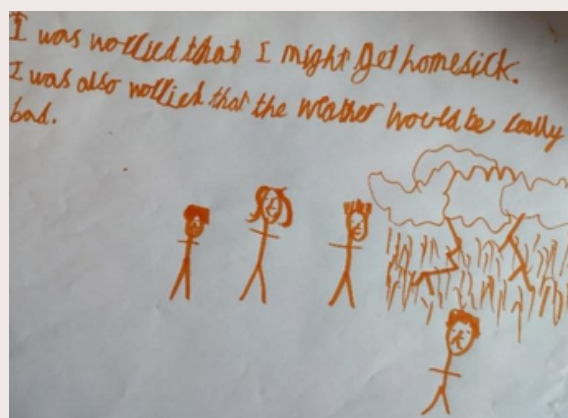
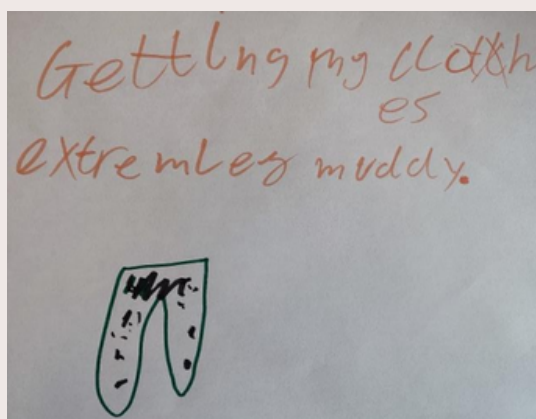
Quotes from teachers

"I was also really surprised at like the jobs that they seemed to enjoy the most. They loved using the wheelbarrows, they loved getting the woodchips."

Teacher interviews highlighted children initially not being able to differentiate between horses and cows: "[on the coach, when] they saw an animal outside... ohh, there's a horse and we're like it was a cow."

"It really does show children what it is like on a farm all be it in a sort of managed setting."

Examples of the children's pictures on this theme



7 Immediate Positive Sentiments

A variety of emotions and sentiments were expressed towards Wick Court by the children; many of their discussions and pictures involved a combination of short term and long term positive and negative sentiments.

The most common short term positive sentiment expressed by the children was that they had fun on the farm, with 19% of children mentioning this. Drawings frequently showed **feelings of welcome, joy, and happy faces**. Teachers observed the development of these positive attitudes and sentiments throughout the week at FFCC.

Quotes from children

"It was really fun... **it was so fun**"

"I was really, really excited before I went... while I was there on like the first day, I was like still feeling really excited... **it also made me feel really good because, like, I knew more stuff about where our food comes from and how it's made**. And it was really an amazing experience."

"So the moment I kind of went into the farmhouse, **everyone was just really nice and they made me feel really, really warm and, like, happy and like welcomed**... we had such a fun time doing [the jobs] that I just fell straight asleep. **Overall it was just a really awesome experience and if I had the chance to go again, I would definitely go.**"



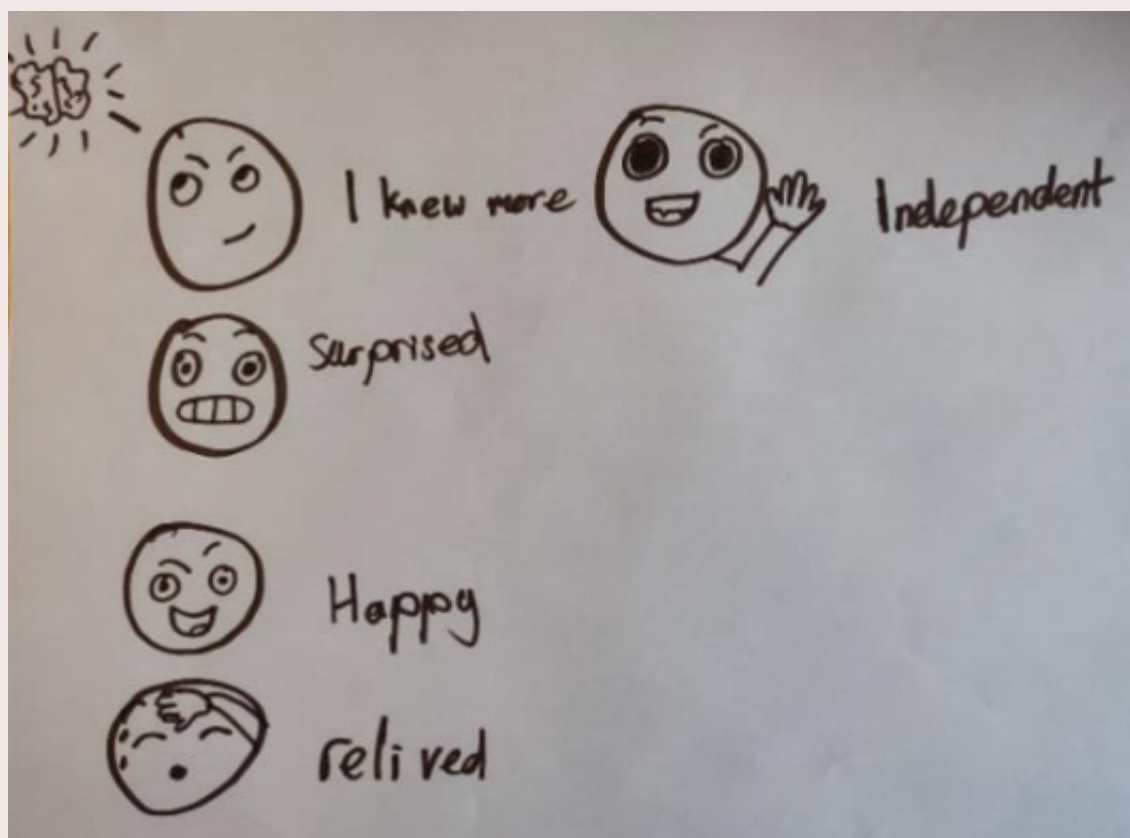
Words used by the children to describe their immediate positive sentiments

Quotes from teachers

"Initially they are very much very excited about being on the farm... by the end it was much calmer."

"The way they responded to activities and things just became more and more positive throughout the week and they didn't want to leave on Friday. They'd all have happily stayed for another week."

Examples of the children's pictures on this theme



8 Lasting Positive Sentiments

The children showed longer term happiness and enthusiasm when talking about the farm, indicating the emotional impact had not worn off, even after returning home. **65% of children mentioned that Wick Court made them happy**; at least one child within each group. **35% of children also said they wanted to visit the farm again**, although this question was not directly asked of them. **The ability of children to relax and behave like kids was noted by teachers, and identified as a longer-term benefit once back at school.**

Quotes from children

"I want to go again. If I had another chance, I'd like to go again... and again and again and again."

"I could go a thousand times."

"This is my face the whole time... **I'm just very happy.** And as you can see, I went a bit crazy with the happiness as well"

Quotes from teachers

"[The children were] just a little bit more able to relax, I think and be happy and play and yeah"

"They flourished. They were the happiest and calmest I think we've ever seen them."

Example of the children's pictures on this theme



9 Negative Sentiments

The most common negative sentiment stated by children was sadness due to either **missing family**, or **leaving the farm**, and in particular the animals, behind. **Smells on the farm** were also commented on, as a point of annoyance and frustration for children.

Tiredness was also commonly mentioned due to waking up early and not being used to tough physical work. Teacher interviews also touched upon the increased difficulty of managing overtired children once back at school.

Quotes from children

"I felt sad because **I missed my family**"

"I felt happy, but I also felt sad that **I was going to miss all the animals that I looked after**"

"**[I] felt tired...** I normally wake up at 7:15... someone had to wake me up out of bed and I had bags under my eyes and I had sleep under my eyes"

Quotes from teachers

"It's been very hard for some of the children, especially SEN[D] children, to come back and adapt to the classroom environment again. **We've noticed quite a lot of... challenging behaviour and dysregulation, and I think part of that is they are just very overtired.**"

Example of the children's pictures on this theme



Complex negative sentiment - wider perspective

One child's picture and discussion stood out within the theme of negative sentiments. Their picture illustrated multiple ideas, including not using electronics on the farm. However, the globe and arrow represent the child's thoughts around only knowing a very small part of the world and being trapped inside a box their whole life. This was an extremely difficult idea to code. Although explained in simplistic terms, **the picture and comment shown a complex understanding of the child's place in the world, facilitated by their visit to Wick Court, and a complete perspective shift shown by the feeling of being inside a box.** This was coded under negative sentiments due to the child expressing themselves negatively and with frustration in terms of how little understanding they now realised they had of the wider world.

The child's picture



The child's quote

"At first, I didn't think I'd cope without devices. And then I thought that I thought **I was in a box my whole life.** I'd never saw any animals. Only thing I saw was a pigeon. That's the only animal I've seen in real life. **I lived in one part of the world.** And [on the farm] I didn't see any pigeons. I'm used to seeing pigeons... It's just a whole different place like there were no pigeons. Horses, pigs, I've never seen that. The only time I've seen a pig is Peppa Pig. I did not know anything about animals."

Further themes emerging from interviews with teachers

A Tangible Learning Experiences

Teachers mentioned the impact and benefits real-life, hands-on learning experiences had on children. Although this was also inferred by some quotes from children, learning outside the classroom was explored in a much more in depth way by teachers during interviews.

Quotes from Teachers

"It was a **completely different learning environment**, isn't it, that for some of those children being on the farm and being more hands-on is much more suitable."

"They're connecting all of the things that they learn in classroom, and **it's a more kind of tangible experience that helps them, I guess, consolidate some of the things that they learn here** in a different context."

B Perspective shift

This theme refers to both teacher interpretations of their own time on the farm, adult interpretation of the children's experiences, and a child's own perspective shift.

Quotes from Teachers

"I was open minded, but I think it was the fact that **we just really, really got stuck in**. I wasn't expecting to be in the pig pen brushing against pigs. I wasn't expecting to see – one of the groups saw a live birth, we saw an artificial insemination. I wasn't expecting to see quite as much, but it was great. It was. **I felt like I really was a farmer for that week**. I felt like I left my life and to like, became a farmer"

"**They literally tackled every single thing**. To me, that was a surprise. Yeah, the way that there was no aversion of even pig weighing or brushing sheep. There was nothing"

"**that's what really surprised me. How they just mucked in.**"

"[the farm] **exceeded my expectations**"

C Equality & Inclusion

Teachers referred both to **children becoming more accepting of each other**, and **accommodations the staff made at Wick Court to include everyone**. Integration of children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) was also a common theme, with this acceptance continuing after groups returned to school.

Quotes from Teachers

"there's a little lad in our class... who the boys can be quite mean to... leave him out... **I've seen him be more accepted**, like on the playground and things like he's joining and playing football now, whereas before they wouldn't want him to."

"I think this was a credit to Wick Court Farm as well, the way they adapted everything to meet the needs of our children. You know, they were like, no tools because they knew that wouldn't work and credit to them how accepting and like we had high needs children. And they would, on a daily basis go, right we're not going to do this activity, it's not going to work. We had a child who really struggles with walking and drove her up to the dairy farm with another adult so she could just do the walk back. So she still felt involved. And actually, we didn't think she'd be able to do any of that bit and that was holding heavy on my mind. So, for me, **the best experience was the fact that they were so adaptive and knew what would work** for them within a day."

D Unexpected benefits

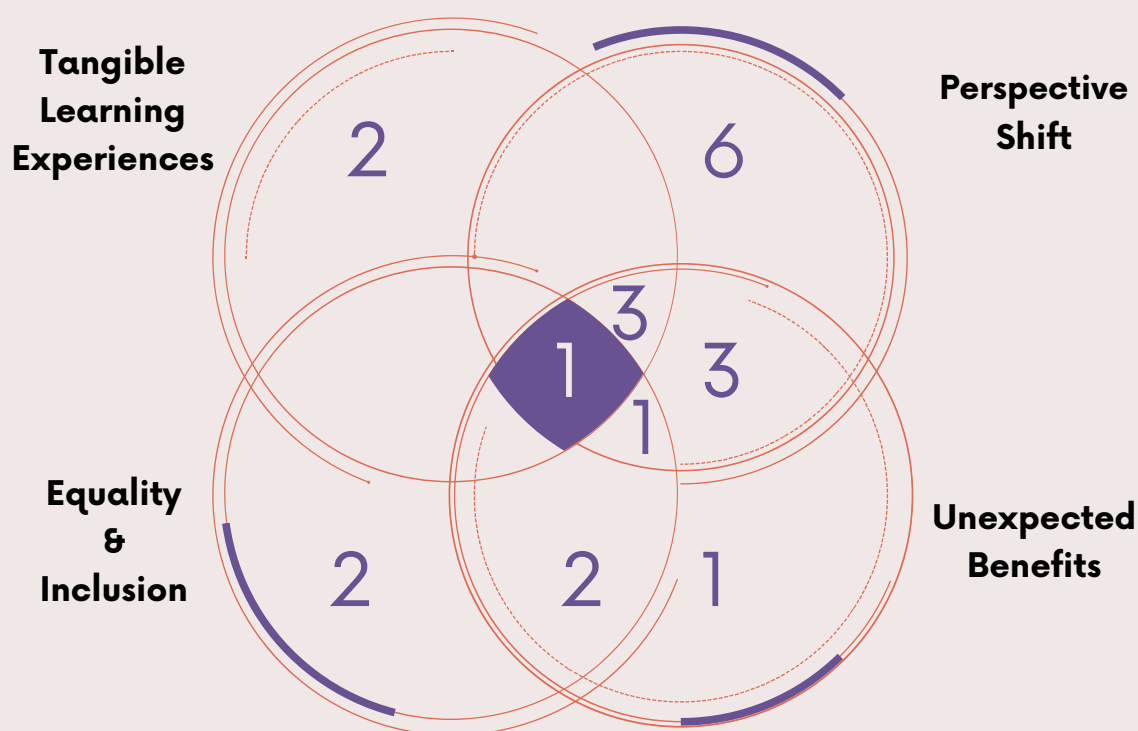
This broad theme was identified in reaction to what surprised teachers the most from their time at Wick Court, with one quote fitting into this category, rather than any other.

Quote from Teachers

"They're learning to work and almost live with certain other individuals in the path that they wouldn't usually necessarily choose or talk to or work with. So, it's kind of really, **it really gels them a class.**"

Crossover between themes

in the teacher interviews, a number of quotes and comments fitted into multiple teacher-led themes. A selection of these quotes are shown below. The Venn diagram also shows the interlinked nature of teacher feedback and number of quotes arising during interviews that interlinked across the themes.



Quotes from Teachers

"When we did the night time walk to the dairy farm, they were just so excited by the moon because it was red. How many stars are in the sky. **And they all asked, because they had their overalls on, "can we lay down?" And they just laid on the grass and looked up at the stars.** And I think that surprised me because I take for granted that, you know, I've been in the countryside a lot and I've seen those things a fair bit, but for some of these children, that's the first time they've experienced it and I think we take that for granted. It will always shock us that - or for me - being the first time that they haven't seen those things, that they don't know the plough."

"They were talking about the animals, about their food, everything. **They had no idea they were learning. They were like, literally doing everything that we tried to do in the classroom. But they were doing it there. And it's... brilliant.**"

Quotes from Teachers (continued)

"Oh it's just a walk from the one place to the activity... actually there's a learning experience there and **there's something that they have never experienced before.**"

"We do have a policy [...]. If they're children that can tend to misbehave, that that shouldn't be a boundary that they come to the farm... **You see those children change completely. They're different at the farm. And most of the time they come back and their behaviour changes a little bit.**"

"We are now starting to think about developing things like life skills and learning outside the classroom for our SEN[D] kids starting next term because they're communicating with us about what they need... we are hopefully in a position where we can... bring some of that out again and it's **I think it's because of the farm that we've seen... they can be independent. We know that they can... they can go and do learning outside and not run off** and be, you know, be completely dysregulated"

"it really does show children what it is like on a farm all be it in a sort of managed setting but obviously **for most, if not all, of these kids, they've never... They've only seen a farm, they've never walked through a farm.** They've probably never been next to a pig, you know, which some people take for granted. And also seeing stuff about food where food comes from the reality of milk and eggs. Not this time as much, but because of bird flu and stuff. But that reality of farming"

"I'm sure at least two of them said **they would love to be farmers.**"

"They literally saw a field and just ran 56 through the gate even though we had explained earlier stop and why in my head like it's a gate, you just stop. They didn't finish. **So that was quite a surprise... how much they hadn't seen greenery.**"

These quotes support the themes already identified and demonstrate how all the themes and benefits interlink. Although studies have been undertaken to identify specific benefits of agriculture, or of nature connection, there has been no investigation of their interconnected nature. The themes emerging from the teachers' feedback suggests that it could be beneficial to carry out further work to understand the links and connections between the benefits.

CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Results were remarkably consistent; the same themes emerged from the children's drawings and discussions, and the teacher interviews, at all participating schools. It is therefore reasonable to assume that the offer and experience FFCC provides to schools visiting Wick Court is consistent. This indicates that the findings are reliable in the context of visitors to Wick Court, and potentially in relation to FFCC's other farms. The outcomes of this study also support the existence of a childhood disconnect from agriculture and nature, as identified in existing research.

The results' consistency also supports the validity of the approach. This is a small study, which may not be generalisable to wider populations, but the results are extremely rich. Future projects could be developed to expand on this work e.g. examining other FFCC farms, expanding the number of schools studied, and examining schools or agricultural outreach projects in different locations.



Conclusions and recommendations have been summarised on the following pages, based on the four objectives identified for the research.

Overall, many positives have been identified in the work of FFCC at Wick Court, including:

- Positive character development including teamwork and resilience.
- Positive effects on both short and long term emotional wellbeing.
- Perspective shifts and wider understanding in children and teachers.
- Increased awareness and enjoyment of nature.
- Improved childhood knowledge of, and connections to, agriculture.
- Increased confidence around farm animals.
- Tangible learning experiences linking school learning and real life.
- Increased understanding of the joined-up farm to fork journey.
- Promoting adventurousness and resilience regarding food choices, and the knowledge and ability supporting more informed choices.

CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

CHILDHOOD WELLBEING

Throughout this research children identified many aspects of positive character development, which has the potential for supporting their wellbeing. Teamwork was most commonly mentioned, and teachers noted how learning on the farm has facilitated longer term changes once back at school. Teachers highlighted that the farm visit fostered resilience, suggesting improvements in participants grit and growth mindset, in line with FFCC's Theory of Change.

The structured days on the farm were identified by teachers as a benefit, with improvements to children's mindsets and maturity levels. Children described the trip as "fun", indicating a positive impact on emotional wellbeing, with teachers identifying positive changes in attitude throughout the week. Longer lasting feelings of happiness were also identified, and many children wanted to return to the farm.

The primary worry for children, ahead of their visit to FFCC, was staying away from home. This may connect to research that shows children have less freedom than previous generations.

Parental attitudes also affected the children's outlook. Supporting parents ahead of a visit to FFCC may help foster parental confidence and comfort around their child's participation. This could be done using online resources, producing videos, or encouraging schools to hold meetings where parents and children who have visited FFCC previously can share their experiences.

Tiredness was mentioned by both children and teachers. Children with SEND struggled most with the transition from farm life back to school life. This presents an opportunity for FFCC to further develop their offer by assisting in the transition between the farm and school. Additional research could be carried out to identify how best to manage and support this transition.

One child also identified a complete perspective shift. This highlights the impact that a visit to FFCC can have. Development of the National Curriculum and associated funding for schools to embed and support activities such as farm visits would allow more children to engage with the wider world in this way.

CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

CONNECTIONS TO THE WIDER ENVIRONMENT

Connections to the wider environment were explored throughout this project. In their discussions and drawings children demonstrated their enjoyment when spending time in nature, in line with existing research. Teachers also commented on the children's enjoyment and as they embraced time spent outdoors and in the natural environment. This supports FFCC's Theory of Change to increase awareness of nature and enhance environmental stewardship.

Teachers also stated that children say they will spend time outside after returning from FFCC, but there is no evidence to support this. Further longitudinal research on the impact of residential farm visits would be valuable to capture any long-term behaviour changes around time spent outside versus time spent on electronic devices.

Spending less time on electronic devices was another common theme within the discussions and drawings. A relationship between environmental awareness and knowledge, and decreased screen use is suggested, but not identified. Further research could be carried out to clarify this topic.

Before they went to Wick Court, children were particularly worried about the animals, being outside, the weather and getting muddy. This suggests a lack of understanding and confidence, probably due to being in a new and unfamiliar situation and setting. Regular opportunities for increased interaction with the natural world and farm life for all children, would help to make these experiences more familiar and less daunting, increasing their comfort, understanding and confidence.



CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

CHILDREN'S UNDERSTANDING OF HOW AGRICULTURE IS RELEVANT TO, AND AFFECTS, THEM

The research showed that children's agricultural knowledge had been enhanced by their FFCC experience. Teachers highlighted an increase in children's agricultural knowledge, and improvements in their connections to agriculture. Animal production and animal needs were most commonly mentioned by children, with some in depth technical knowledge around agricultural production systems shown. An increase in confidence around farm animals was also highlighted by teachers, along with greater appreciation for animals.



The term "pigonomics" was used, with many children referencing an economics lessons based on pigs. The children's discussion clearly demonstrated how maths lessons in school complemented lessons on the farm and vice versa, showing tangible learning experiences with real life applications of classroom concepts. The importance of hands-on learning as a way to promote agriculture and support classroom learning was also mentioned by teachers; this is established in existing research. By encouraging farm visits such as those offered by FFCC, children will become more conscious consumers whilst their in-school learning is supported. Embedding farm visits in the National Curriculum, with government support (such as financial assistance) would ensure all children have the chance to benefit.

Some children showed specific affinity to horses, particularly children who may struggle in a conventional classroom environment. This is outside the remit of this project, but it connects to earlier sentiments around the positive benefits of time spent in nature and on farms.

CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

CHILDREN'S UNDERSTANDING OF THE FARM TO FORK JOURNEY

Children showed strong understanding of the joined-up nature of animal production and farming, and how this connects to the food on their plates. FFCC seek to enhance children's understanding of the farm to fork journey, and this principle is embedded in the charity's Theory of Change model. Children and teachers highlighted how greater knowledge of agriculture and food has changed their behaviours at home, such as growing their own food. This indicated a wider change in mindset around food provenance and choices.

FFCC could work with schools to support the provision of follow up activities, which sustain and develop the learning and mindset changes from the farm visit. For example, FFCC could support schools to offer opportunities to continue food production after the residential farm stay by providing advice to schools around growing food on a school site, particularly where children do not have access to a garden at home. Similarly, FFCC could develop teaching materials linked to what was learned on the farm or ingredients in school meals and packed lunches, to link with lessons and experiences from the farm.

Following their visit to FFCC, children were also more adventurous with their food choices, becoming more resilient and open to trying new things. Research has explored how time in nature can encourage resilience in children, but the role of food specifically has not been considered. The sampling of new foods was mentioned by teachers, alongside the ability to make more informed choices around food due to increased knowledge. This has resulted in some sustained long-term changes in children being reported by teachers, such as becoming, and staying, vegetarian. Further research could explore any long-term changes the children feel have occurred after a visit to FFCC.



CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

OVERALL RECOMMENDATIONS

FFCC-specific recommendations

To further develop their offer, FFCC could:

- Provide further support and guidance to parents about the purposes and benefits of a farm visit, in advance. FFCC could potentially offer online resources and videos, and encourage schools to set up meetings with those have visited FFCC previously, to talk about their experiences first hand.
- Assist transition between the farm and school. Further research could be carried out to identify how best to manage this transition.
- Work with schools to sustain the learning from the farm, particularly in relation to growing food. Advice could be given to schools around growing food on school sites, and teaching materials could be developed, to reinforce and build on what was learned on the farm.

Policy recommendations

Requiring significant intervention to facilitate change at a national level:

- Review the National Curriculum to ensure it supports opportunities for all children to have a wide, holistic view of the world and nature, beyond their immediate surroundings.

- Expressly encourage farm visits such as those offered by FFCC, within the National Curriculum. Support for visits e.g. financial assistance, could ensure all children are able to benefit from these opportunities.

Further research recommendations

This research also identified areas where further valuable research could take place into related matters, including:

- The role residential farms play in fostering a feeling of engagement with the wider world and promoting childhood resilience to stress.
- Reviewing whether residential farm visits have a long-term effect on time spent on electronic devices, or time spent outside.
- Understanding the longer term impact on children's choices and behaviours of increased agricultural and environmental awareness and knowledge.
- Reviewing whether a change in mindset around food supports a child to be more open to new experiences in other parts of their life.
- Exploring any long-term changes in food choices after a residential farm visit.

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