

BEST of BRITISH



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Efficient production is even more important when your farm business is part of a charity, as **Aly Balsom** discovered when she visited Jamie's Farm.

Jamie's Farm working hard for vulnerable city children

From day one, Jamie Feilden was passionate that his charity, Jamie's Farm, should not be a petting zoo, but instead use real jobs on a commercial farm to re-engage vulnerable children.

Undoubtedly, managing about 12 secondary school children every week on a working farm of 250 ewes, 40 pedigree Aberdeen-Angus suckler cows and 12 sows

brings its challenges. But the template has proved hugely successful and is now being rolled out to a second farm, with a third already planned.

Jamie's interest in agriculture started from a young age. Having grown up on a smallholding in rural Somerset, he was an active member of Bath Young Farmers Club. However, with no feasible route into the industry, he eventually chose to become a

teacher, with his first job taking him to Croydon.

With farming always at the back of his mind, he was keen to find a way to link teaching and agriculture. After introducing a small farm to the school, it was clear to see how farming could help with behaviour.

Jamie says: "Difficult children turned up early and showed real care [towards the animals]. As farmers you know what it feels like to work hard and achieve a lot, but a lot of children have no sense of this. I thought you could improve the behaviour of chil-



Among the livestock are 12 sows, offspring are sold to a butcher.

The growth of Jamie's Farm

- **2005** First visit from Haling Manor School, Croydon, to Jamie's family smallholding
- **2007** Working with 11 London schools on part-time basis
- **2008** First visit from Manchester and Liverpool schools. The team aims to make Jamie's Farm a national

- charity, while based out of a horse box 'office'
- **2010** Purchase permanent home for the charity at Hill House Farm, Box
- **2014** Duchess of Cornwall becomes patron
- **2015** The first group of children visits the new farm in Herefordshire



A barn has been converted to provide living space, work rooms and a kitchen for visiting children.



Jamie Feilden (third from left) has seen his charity help 2,000 children. PICTURES: Jonathan Page

Hill House Farm facts

- 24 hectares (60 acres) around the farm and a further 40ha (100 acres) rented ground within 20 miles
- Six staff working with children
- Farm manager, apprentice and Jamie work on-farm
- Produces hay and silage, buying-in hay and straw when necessary
- Half lambs grade E and U, with the rest R
- Aim for lamb carcass weight of 20kg
- 12 sows - offspring sold to local butcher
- 50 laying hens

“Difficult children turned up early and showed real care [towards the animals]”

JAMIE FEILDEN

dren through real work and activities on-farm.”

Things developed quickly, with the first groups of children visiting his family's smallholding, Bathford, in 2005.

As demand grew, it was clear a larger site would be needed. As a result Hill House Farm, Ditteridge, Bath, was bought in 2010. Since then, more than

2,000 vulnerable children at risk of social and academic exclusion have visited.

As the charity has grown, so have stock numbers and farm infrastructure. Having started with 23 sheep, 15 cows and nine pigs, the farm now runs 250 ewes, 40 sucklers, plus followers, and 12 sows.

Tasks

Children are involved in all farm tasks including dagging, weighing, mucking out, feeding and lambing.

Ewes lamb in three batches. The 20 Dorsets lamb in October, 80 Suffolk cross Mules in January and 150 North Country Mules in March. Everything is served to a terminal sire, with about 50 replacements bought every year.

“We put most to a Texel or a Berrichon. We're trying Berri-

chon for the first time this year to achieve a fast finish off grass and easy lambing. We finish all lambs, with about one-third going to a local butcher and the rest to M&S and ABP for Tesco.”

Lambing in three batches helps make the most of markets at key times, with Dorset lambs hitting the early Easter market. Regular lambing also means there is greater opportunity for children to get hands-on experience at different times of the year.

As a self-proclaimed 'farming geek,' Jamie has a passion for breeding and believes in investing in quality genetics. Well-bred replacements and rams are bought from Thame or Kendal livestock markets, with Jamie



The January-lambing flock of 80 Suffolk cross Mules are one of three blocks of sheep on the farm.



The beef herd is made up of 40 pedigree Aberdeen-Angus and replacements are bred on-farm.



Fruit and vegetables are grown in the market garden at Hill House Farm, Ditteridge, Bath.

Jamie's Farm Charity

JAMIE'S Farm aims to re-engage vulnerable children at risk of social and academic exclusion and act as a catalyst for change.

Children from schools in London, Birmingham, Liverpool, Manchester and Bristol, come on a week-long residential placement and are involved in a combination of practical outdoor tasks, including woodwork, gardening and horsemanship, along with other creative skills, such as cooking, artwork and therapy. The aim is to build confidence and improve social engagement.

Jamie says: "Half the kids just need support or a boost. They may have challenges at home or are in care or have few positive role models."

The benefits of working at Jamie's Farm are clear. Of the pupils referred for self-esteem, disengagement and behavioural issues, 80 per cent reported an increase in self-esteem and 56 per cent of pupils were no longer at risk of expulsion six weeks after their visit.

Pupils

To date, more than 2,000 children have visited Hill House Farm. The charity's aim is to reach 10 per cent of the UK's 30,500 vulnerable pupils by 2020.

To meet this target, an additional farm in Herefordshire was taken on this year.

This follows a similar template to the site near Bath, with 150



Children are taught practical skills, including woodwork.

ewes and 15 pedigree Herefords.

"We're now looking to lease another farm in 2016 to enable us

to work with more children, so we're looking for land owners and farmers near Bath who might be interested."

believing the quality stock has proved its worth.

"Despite the lower lamb price, with better genetics, health and timed marketing, the revenue from sheep will be the same this year as last," he says.

A similar attitude is given to the predominantly pedigree Aberdeen-Angus suckler herd. Cows calve in spring and summer batches, with the best six bulls sold as breeding males to local dairies and suckler producers.

Suckled calves are then either sold straight off the dam at eight-months-old or at 15 months through Frome mart. Core females have been bought from top breeders and these animals are now breeding replacements.

Jamie says that because it is owned by the charity, there is even greater need for the farm to pay for itself and be as efficient as possible. This means more farm income, along with money from other fundraising activities, can be

put towards supporting children on placement.

"The trustees give us a target to break even. We want to go beyond this and make a profit and, by honing our practices, we're getting beyond that. If we can make small technical advances to improve profitability, it can be fed back into the charity," he adds.

Analysis of the farm's performance highlighted how they could benefit from improving technology, breeding and health.

As a result, after lambing next year, the farm will move to full EID recording. The ultimate aim is to regularly record lamb growth rates and link back to sire selection to allow more targeted breeding decisions. Eventually this will be rolled out to cattle.

Decisions

Jamie admits having the children on farm does influence some farm management decisions. For example, without the



Dorset ewes and lambs are a core part of the farming operation.

school visits, he would choose to only calve in one spring block and not run Dorsets. The farm's 12 sows would also probably not be needed.

Overall, Jamie says seeing the positive impact on children's confidence and social skills from working with animals is hugely rewarding.

This is an attitude shared with a number of local farm partners who take the kids on visits during the week. This includes sheep farmer Steve Carnie, who

runs 1,000 ewes, and dairy farmer Chris Quick.

"Steve and other members of the farming community say it can be a lonely profession and they really enjoy sharing their experience with others," says Jamie.

"With vigorous risk assessment, children can go onto most farms. It's about limited use of machinery and we have got a good handling system [at Hill House Farm] so the kids can work closely with stock."



Hill House Farm, Ditteridge, Bath, was bought in 2010 after initial school visits at the family's Bathford smallholding proved a success.



There is a pizza oven in the outside dining and socialising area.