

Transforming the lives of inner-city children



Jamie's Farm at Lower Wernddu, with the Black Mountains in the background, showing the farm house and traditional building which have been adapted for accommodation for staff and visiting schools, with a new cattle building in the foreground

▼ BY IAN HOWE

Jamie's Farms gives children who have been brought up in an inner-city environment and know little about the countryside nor how their food is produced, an opportunity to stay on a farm, work with animals and see how food is produced and cooked.

The organisation works in partnership with schools, specifically to help young people with poor behaviour, or who lack self-esteem, motivation and soft skills. The organisation has three, soon to be four, farm sites in England and Wales where young people come in groups of 12, accompanied by two or three members of the school staff to spend a week living on a farm, working as a team with the livestock and doing other tasks such as cooking, gardening, woodwork and learning crafts, while gaining some idea of farming and where their food comes from.

Jamie's Farm is supported by a mix of trusts such as Children in Need and Comic Relief as well private donors and has worked with 5,000 children between 11 and 16 since the project began in 2009. This all started back in 2009 when Jamie Fielden, a Wiltshire school teacher who had a small holding, took some animals to the school playground and saw the beneficial impact the animals were having on the children. As a result he invited them to make regular visits to his small holding. The impact of those visits acted as the incentive to expand and in 2009 Hill House Farm near Box in Wiltshire was purchased. The farm was bought with the help of local lenders and donors from Bath and a loan from Triodos Bank and with the buildings adapted, it opened for the first time in 2010.

The farming programme is geared to maximise the experiences of the youngsters during their week on the farm

Jamie's Farm was anxious to build on their success with helping young people so in 2014 with the help of funding from Comic Relief and a generous legacy from one of their closest supporters, they bought the 165-acre Lower Wernddu Farm, a hill farm in west Herefordshire in the lea of the Black Mountains close to the Welsh Border. The Herefordshire project is managed by Toby Meanwell, who had been a science teacher in a central London school. He had taken groups from his school to the farm at Box and when Lower Wernddu was purchased, he was asked by Jamie Fielden to run the Herefordshire project. After extensive work adapting the farm house and buildings to provide accommodation and facilities, Lower Wernddu welcomed its first group in February 2015 and was officially opened by the Duchess of Cornwall in May last year.

The farm and the farming activities are managed by Mark Carnie. He plays a major role in the project as he works closely with Toby and the children. He carries a flock of ewes, pigs, some pedigree Hereford heifers recently purchased to establish a suckler herd and bought-in dairy bred calves which are sold post weaning to local farms.

The farming programme is geared to maximise the experiences of the youngsters during their week on the farm. Working in groups of four, the children are encouraged to help with all the livestock tasks, with an emphasis on working with the sheep. They

help with lambing, feeding, foot trimming and drenching lambs. To enable as many of the children as possible to experience lambing, it is spread over many months. The 25 Dorset ewes are the first to lamb, during October and November. Then 70 Suffolk cross Mules, lamb in January and February, with 60 cross-bred ewes lambing into April. Most of the ewes are crossed with a Texel ram. The early lambs go either to the St Merryn abattoir at Merthyr or Hereford market, later lambs go to an Abergavenny butcher, although some of the meat goes back to the farm kitchen.

The farm has a Gloucester Old Spot sow, although the intention is to change over to the Welsh breed and increase sow numbers. The sows are crossed with a Dorset Blue boar (a Berkshire Large White hybrid). Due to the good quality, low fat carcasses, the pigs are taken to higher weights than normal. Some of the piglets are sold as weaners, others finished on the farm and slaughtered at Raglan with the carcasses going to Huw Beavan's butcher's shop, with some returning to the farm as sausages and processed meats.

Toby Meanwell said: "It's a valuable lesson as the children, having fed the pigs during the day, can cook and eat sausages for dinner made from pigs produced on the farm, so learn first-hand about the farming food cycle."

The kitchen garden covers about a third of an acre where the children can sow seeds in open ground or in the poly-tunnel, and tend and collect vegetables to cook in the kitchen to experience the food cycle from seed to plate.

Once all four of Jamie's Farms are operating, every year they will give 2,000 inner-city children the chance to spend a week in the countryside, work with animals and in a kitchen garden, see crops growing, get their hands dirty, their boots muddy, learning how food is produced and how to cook it and act as ambassadors for the industry when they return to their inner-city homes.



From left: Toby Meanwell, senior member of staff at Lower Wernddu, the Jamie's Farm in West Herefordshire with farm manager Mark Carnie



Pupils of Great Academy Ashton in the lambing pen during their week's stay at Lower Wernddu accompanied by Steve Kennerley, a member of staff from the school which is on the outskirts of Manchester