

Let Nature Feed Your Senses



Oh, I can do that!

In 2013 farmer, Jo North from Droke Farm and Eric Spencer from the Oak Community Project partnered to develop a series of themed activities based on the farm and at the Project's centre in Rustington. Their partnership was supported by an England wide project called Let Nature Feed Your Senses (LNFYS).

Droke Farm is a mixed arable and dairy farm nestled in the South Downs National Park near Chichester. The farm has a modern dairy, pockets of woodland, sloping hills and some wonderful views. Wheat, barley and maize are grown for things as diverse as food for the cows to beer!

Oaks Community Project, a community based initiative near Littlehampton on the South Coast provides support to adults with learning disabilities

to develop social and practical skills through participating in their local community. They focus on horticulture (through their two allotment plots) and life skills such as literacy and numeracy, which of course overlap in many ways, for example working on their allotment, tending to crops, harvesting and then selling them at markets.

Jo North first got in touch with the Oaks via their photography club and they have visited the farm several times. This series of visits planned for 2013 would be a great opportunity to build on their confidence and build stronger connections between their work at the Oaks and their experiences on the farm.

Several themes were planned for the visits:

- Connecting dairy foods and the life cycle of cows.
- Linking the allotment and the farm fields, following a crop through the seasons.
- Listening activities, engaging with the farm in a new way. Listening linked to literacy, developing a rich sound vocabulary.
- Building on the group's regular literacy session, poetry, word activities and story-making would be incorporated into the farm visit. The group would keep individual journals of photos, poetry and activities as a way to capture their experiences.



The senses chalkboard points out the highlights of the visit.

All hands on deck to mix morning tea for growing calves.

Looking



Sensory-rich experiences were encouraged. Feeding the calves was a chance to look, touch and smell - it was great to show how calves use their smell at meal times too!

Calves and cows

Smelling



Gentle touch is needed when approaching sensitive noses.

Touching

"The cows were licking us as we fed them. Sometimes the cows made us sticky and slimy with their tongues. When we stroked the calves they were very soft. After the cows had eaten and had a drink they had a wee that made a loud splash. In the barn is a cow about to have a calf. The bull was very noisy mooing!"

Story poem by Kire and Lorraine

Made by the group on the visit using the poetry kit.

“When you observe them on the farm you see the likes of Tim getting physical, moving around. Tim’s got the freedom of being able to stand and look at the cows, to feel the cows, a young calf licked his hands and he was standing imitating the cows.

Kire who is often distracted, through misunderstanding other people, or what’s going on around him, today, is very focused and relaxed and he’s enjoying the freedom that the visit offers.

I think it is fair to say that their concentration levels are better when they are here, it’s the calming feeling of being around the animals, the cows and being in the fields and they know there are no expectations on them.”

Eric, group leader



What puddings are made with milk?



Linking food and farming using widgit stickers, the group added to the bowl puddings made from milk and discussed if they liked or disliked them. It was a great activity in the days following a visit to the farm.

It takes a lot of hard work
 Can't you see?
 To make delicious milk
 Hmm, looks easy to me!

This tiny calf, born whilst the group were visiting, was named 'Oaksey'.



'Freedom!' shouts the calf
 And they all start to run
 The grass is green, the sky is blue
 And it is warm in the sun

Jo wrote some poems and sent them to the group prior to their April visit to build their anticipation. The focus for this visit would be Spring and poetry.





January 25th



July 1st



July 22nd

Crops through the seasons

“At the start of the season we gave the Oaks maize, wheat and barley to grow in their allotment, before every visit they would make sure they had checked the progress of their crops and then we would compare them with ours. Their wheat did not do well but the barley and maize did extremely well. They grew super sweet sweetcorn on their allotment which they then harvested and sold at the local market.” Jo



July 13th

“I think it is fantastic cause it is hands on, you can't beat hands on.”



Crops grown by the group in their allotment were compared with those grown on the farm.



August 12th

The farmer goes to town

Jo visited the Oaks after harvest, in September, to see their allotment, grind some wheat and barley into flour with them and also to show them a video she had made of the harvesting as they had been unable to come out and watch the combining of the crops in the fields whose progress they had been monitoring throughout the year.

"As soon as I arrived we walked down to their allotment and I was super impressed by all that is growing there, tomatoes, wheat, barley, maize, raspberries, cabbages, lettuces, potatoes, runner beans, gooseberries, wild strawberries, the list goes on! All carefully managed by David and the team and of course the clients themselves. There are two tables and some chairs here and David said they enjoy coming down here and having a cup of tea in their allotment, they find it very peaceful.

"They enjoy coming down here and having a cup of tea in their allotment, they find it very peaceful"



"The clients were keen to show me the fruits of their hard work and I came away with two cobs of sweet-corn and a huge beef tomato. The day before they had harvested some of their produce, packaged it and sent it to a local WI market to be sold on their behalf, they receive the proceeds which are re-invested into the allotment.

"We then meandered back to the centre, having harvested some barley, and while David made cups of tea we got the barley from the allotment ready for grinding. I put the film on that I had put together, showing the journey of harvest on our farm, in the field that the group had been keeping an eye on during the spring and summer.

"I had brought a shopping basket with some cereal based food in with me so we thought about what we had harvested (I had also brought some wheat in with me as their wheat has not done so well) and then we got on with important job of grinding the grains. Of course, despite me doing a test run, it wasn't completely smooth to start with (I think the barley was a bit soft for the purpose) however with the help of a spoon to push the grains through and perseverance we were soon grinding and everyone had a go. Again Mark seemed to really enjoy it, as you can see in the film I took of him having a go. They ground about 200g of flour which they are going to keep (maybe to bake with!?) And then it was time for lunch."

"Mark, who has visited the farm a couple of times, loved the film and must have watched it six or seven times. He loves tractors and all kinds of machinery by the sounds of it so this was really exciting for him."



A memorable moment



“One lady hadn’t been on a visit to the farm, although I have met her at the centre, she has never engaged with me, and is always on the periphery. When she arrived she was very clear saying to me ‘you must not leave me on my own’ which I took to mean I am not happy or comfortable here. She wasn’t that fussed about the calves and during lunch sat alone and did not really join in with the poetry and story-making.

“After lunch one of the visitors had asked if he could feed the adult cows so we went along on our way out to the fields and fed them handfuls of ration through the gates. The lady came up to me, asked me to help her feed the cows and then proceeded to grab handfuls of feed and on her own, fed the cows. It was such a touching moment, the group leaders were saying how incredible this was and took lots of pictures. They said when she arrived three years ago this kind of behaviour would have been unheard of (which I think says so much about how wonderful the Oaks is).

“She and I then walked out, arm in arm, to see the cows. The lady really engaged with the sound map activity and then drew the electric fence which again really surprised the leaders. I felt that I won over her trust on this visit.”

Jo North, host farmer

Exploring listening

"We could hear them chew"

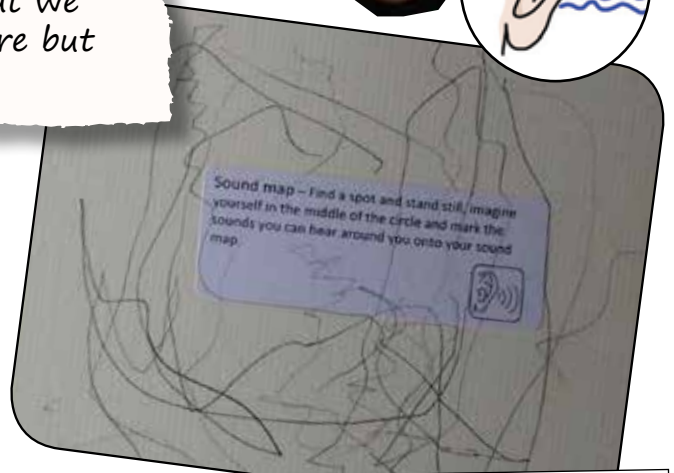
Individual sound maps

In April the group explored listening to the sounds on the farm. This activity would be repeated on other farm visits and by the group when on a visit to the beach. In August the group used their sound maps near the cows in the barn. They engaged really quickly with the exercise and enjoyed it. They were proud of their maps and liked showing what they had done to the group leaders.

"We are going to close our eyes and listen to what we can hear, you might think it's really quiet out here but actually there is lots of noise going on."

"The sound cards are great, we tried them on the beach but today was a good opportunity because the cows were eating and we could hear them chew and other sounds around and they are getting the idea, as much as anything it is getting them to listen. Using the sound cards had a big impact on individuals encouraging active listening. It's not what they are doing with the cards it is the fact that they are stopping, the card is the means to the ends."

Eric, group leader



"One lady drew a beautiful wiggly electric wire across her sound card, the leaders were astounded."

Group leaders, David and Eric



Group sound map

By the October visit the group was more familiar with listening for sounds and they stopped to listen at several different places on their way around the farm. A group sound map was used at the end of their visit enabling them to share what they heard and where they heard it. The map comprises a Velcro circle (about a metre tall) and lots of widgeit sound symbol cards and blank cards for additional sounds. The Velcro enabled the group to move the sounds around as they decided together where they had heard them.

"The group really enjoyed the activity - they thought that the way they described the words were hilarious eg. motor mmm mmm"

"The listening exercises engaged them, I had been a bit dubious about doing them as I didn't want the visit to be too taxing or 'organised', however it was really fun and most of the group bought into it at some point during the visit. Once the group get warmed up, they really get into it. The sound map exercise was made easier and better because of the leaders' involvement." Jo



Mapping sounds

Listening to sounds as an activity also involves locating where the sound is coming from - our sense of space and hearing are intertwined. We mentally map our aural landscape usually without paying attention. It was a fun exercise to combine listening and mapping on the Oak's last visit.



Jo made an outline sketch of the farm area before the visit (approx A1 size). She assembled widgit stickers, some of her own sound words and the sound words provided by the project. She showed the group the outline at the beginning of the visit as a way of introducing what they would do and where. At the end of the visit the group identified the sounds they had heard and located them on the map.

Jo describes how she went about this activity, "On this visit we went to three main areas of the farm which I felt were good places to think about what we could see and hear and also because they linked well with the other theme of 'autumn/harvest festival. We went out into the fields which we have been watching over the year and saw the stubble, felt the baled straw, listened to the wind in the trees and the birds swooping overhead.

"We then went to see the animals, the pigs, the cows and the calves which I thought was a good opportunity to do some listening for our sound map and then we finished in the dairy and did lots of shouting listening to the echoes!

"Most of the words went on the map as a result of their listening at several different spots on the farm throughout the visit. We used the list of sound words provided by LNFYS to choose from. We talked about their meanings and it was a fun process for the group to learn new words. Making the map was quite nice to do, something creative beforehand - a nice way to prepare.

"I made copies of the completed sound map we did reduced to A4 and sent the group copies for their journals with some photos as well as the original map."

"We finished in the dairy and did lots of shouting listening to the echoes!"

Poetry and story making

warm hay

The poetry dice kit was created by the Sensory Trust for the Oak group to help them learn new words and make story making fun on and after the visits. It extends the impact of the farm visit, supports communication and in many instances helps develop literacy. Visitors pull farm and sensory related words out of a bag at random using the dice and, working with the group leader talk about each word and formulate stories or poems around the words. The words aim to bring back memories of the visit, initiate conversations amongst the group and encourage participants to be creative. The kit is designed to be flexible and suit a wide range of participants from those with very little literacy (being supported) to those more competent at writing and reading. At the end of each session the participants are left with a written memory of their time on the farm, the poem or story can be looked at before the next visit to help prepare and focus the group.

What Jo thought about trialling the poetry kit...

"Using poetry to engage the senses was fun, words such as 'fluffy' 'taste' 'noisy' helped the group to use their five senses to experience the farm and then express it

through a story which we all created using the dice and word bags during lunch time. We did not actually 'taste' on the April visit but described the taste of the cow's feed which worked well.

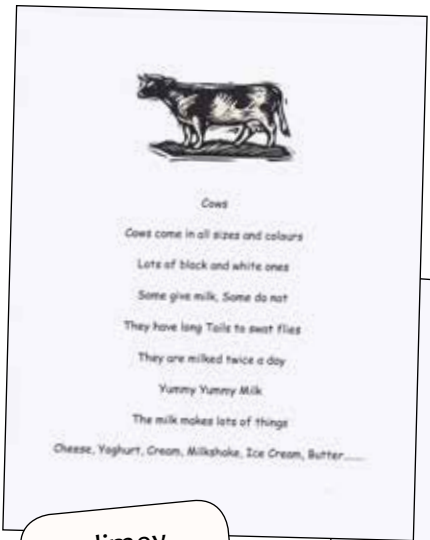
"We used the poetry kit on most of the visits to the farm, this was a simple but fun tool which involved throwing a dice with colours on it and then picking words out of the appropriately coloured bag. We picked out 12 or so words and then would make a poem about the day's visit. It was a brilliant way of engaging the whole group with what we had just done, using words they wouldn't usually have thought to use as well as an opportunity to discuss the visit as a whole. It was also very funny as we tried to shoe horn some of the words such as slimy into the poem. The leaders also used this tool after a visit back at the centre, still using it to create a story poem about the farm.

"The group leaders were completely on board with the poetry and story-making and had prepped the group the day before and helped me keep the theme going throughout the day. David, one of the leaders, took notes of the words that the group were using throughout the day, which we used in story-making and also will be helpful for after the visit as well. Without the help of the leaders I would have struggled with the poetry, if Eric and David were not so engaged I know that the value of this visit would have been much less. As a team we seem to work together to deliver a visit which is enjoyable to every single visitor as well as for me."

prickly enormous

tractor

slippery

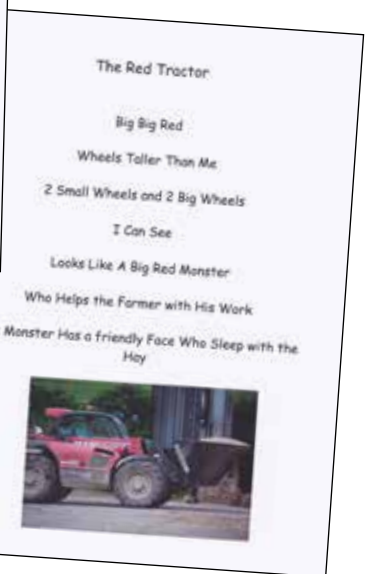


slimey

mooing

farmer

silently

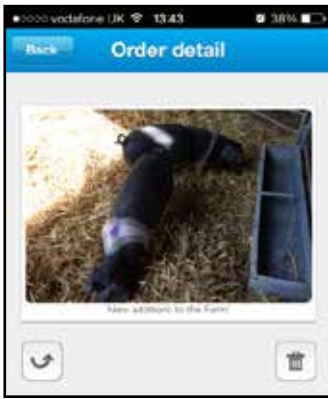


"The poetry kit takes you places that you wouldn't think of, because you can be set in your ways and do what people expect you to do, but the words don't do that, they take you somewhere else, it really is fun."

Lou, group leader

soft

Staying in touch between visits, made easier with a smart phone and postcard app



"As well as the poetry kit we used postcards which I sent between visits with pictures and a few words describing what was happening on the farm, for example when the pigs arrived I sent a postcard as I know one of the girls in the group loves pigs!" Jo

There are several apps available that enable you to send photos as postcards - once you have entered the address once and added some credit it takes only a couple of minutes to shoot, write and send. A wonderfully easy way to maintain a connection between a farmer and the group.

This was the ultimate experiment in working together

"The group also kept journals which they updated, usually after a visit. We used pictures with sound bubbles which they filled in, as well as widgeit stickers, particularly when we were looking at different foods related to what we grow on the farm. On one visit, we had breakfast when we arrived and found out how our breakfast originates on the farm, and then using a picture of a bowl and some stickers with food on we did an exercise around what everyone ate (or would like to eat) for breakfast, this was then transferred into the journals.

"The journals have become a personal memory book of their year visiting the farm, as well as providing useful pre and post visit support. This was the ultimate experiment in working together, it worked I think so well, because of the leaders' enthusiasm and also because of the fantastic ideas and support from LNFYS, for example the pictures with speech bubbles, the stickers, the ideas, it made it easy for me and the leaders to work this into the visits and the exercises became a key part of the experience rather than just an 'exercise.'" Jo

Oh! I can do that!

"There has been a big spin off from the farm visits for what we do in the literacy groups - doing poetry, writing stories, making up stories, photography and the films. It is really key and raises their expectations of their own abilities which is really good, they actually think - oh! I can do that! - and there is no real process they just do it. I hope over the winter period we'll use all we've done over the summer and work on it a bit more, it would be good if we could get our poems into a competition."

Eric, Group Leader



Spotting a good subject - photos for journals prompted another way of seeing

Nature, food and farming journals



"The journals were a significant part of the project, very successful. We will continue to use them to link with the farm." Eric, group leader



THIS IS A PICTURE OF A ROBIN ALSO
 A HOUSE AND A HARETT SPY CAN FIND
 THESE ON THE FARM AT THIS TIME
 WOODEN



Made from milk

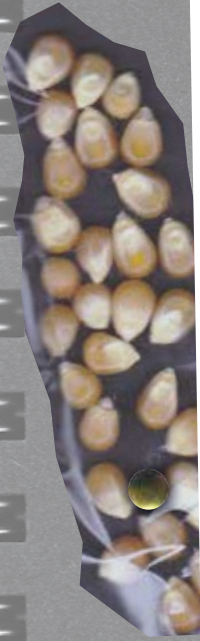


What is it like to taste fresh milk?

What other foods come from cows?

MILK, BUTTER, CREAM, CHEESE, YOGHURT, CHOCOLATE MOUSSE,
 ICE CREAM, MILK SHAKE, BEEF, BURGERS





POETRY

HEAR
THUMP
NOISY
PLAYING
MILKING
TASTE
MILK
HAPPY
COLD
HOT
EXCITED
KIND
SEEDS
FUN

DROKE LANE FARM.

I FIRST WENT TO THE FARM
IN MARCH 2012, I HAD TO
WEAR MY BOOTS BECAUSE ITS
DIRTY AND ITS A FARM. WHERE
WE VISITED THE COW SHED AND
SAW THE COWS EATING THEIR
FOOD.

I ALSO SAW SOME PIGS WHO
WERE EATING APPLES.

I SAT IN THE CAB OF THE
BIG RED TRACTOR.



Like Dislike Happy Hopeful Help Job

I liked
the pigs because
they are dirty.

I like OWLS
because of their
BIG eyes



This special moment was recorded in his journal.



Memorable moments

“One of our visitors really liked Bess (our farm dog) so I asked him to hold onto her lead whilst I introduced the sound map activity, he is a real live wire and yet with Bess he seemed to calm right down, both of them started to mirror each other and he had complete control over her.

We got some beautiful photos of them both looking pensively into the distance sat on the ground and then another one with big smiles, straight at the camera!”



“Mark, who loves tractors and all things mechanical, was transfixed by the straw chopping machine which was literally taking a bale of straw, chopping it up and then shooting it out the top into the barn for bedding. I think he probably could have watched this for the whole visit.”

“They loved them!”

A final visit from Jo to the Oaks at Rustington to award the group their certificates.

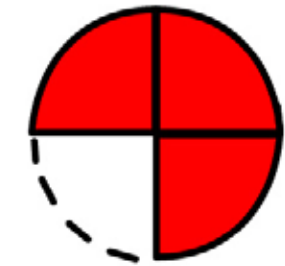


December 19th

Understanding benefits

The goals of the activities, farm visits, and the partnership between Droke Farm and Oak Community Project was to effect positive changes for the group in the following areas:

- Feelings of health and well-being
- Understanding of the links between nature, farming and the food we eat
- Confidence to engage with nature and the farm environment
- Social engagement
- Literacy and/or vocabulary



Quite a lot

To understand the impact of the visits interviews, questionnaires, observations, photographs and film with the host farmer, group members, some parents, and group leaders were undertaken throughout April through to October, 2013. Many of these responses have been included in this case study. In the final questionnaire, Eric Spencer, group leader, was asked to reflect over the year and rate the impact on a five point scale (not at all, a little, some, quite a lot, a great deal) for five questions. Across all five goals he gave a rating of 'quite a lot'.

What did the group leader say?

Feelings of health and well-being

"There would be lots of talk about the farm and what they have seen. Also the group would be in a relaxed and cheerful mood."

Understanding of the links between nature, farming and the food we eat

"The group talked about the products on the farm, and by-products like cereals, milk bread and cheese, and even sauces and beer. It was interesting to see the group unravel their ideas as they realised the different foods that come from a farm."

Confidence to engage with nature and the farm environment

"With different groups visiting at different times of year and paying more than one visit it has helped with confidence and engaging with nature and the farm."

Social engagement

"When putting photos and symbols into the journals this had positive effects on increasing concentration, sharing ideas and poetry writing."

Literacy and/or vocabulary

"A definite sense of ownership of the journals, and wanting to write, particularly using worksheets sent from the LNFYS team."

What did the Mums think?

"Adrian liked the animals. He feels at home on a farm. He is happy and wants to go back, it's good to do more of what he likes doing. Adrian always comes back in a good mood, that's a good thing because he can go up and down."

Adrian's Mum

"Steven really enjoyed the visits, he has appeared relaxed after each visit. Steven is probably more confident as he is a little nervous around animals, the more he goes to the farm the more his confidence grows. It's helped him too in understanding more where his food comes from."

Steven's Mum

To sum up...

a series of visits

is an opportunity to develop themes that relate to natural cycles such as seasons, farm cycles for crops and animals. Visitors, group leaders and hosts confidence, trust (of each other and the environment) and knowledge builds through familiarisation, repetition and exploration. Themes enable host and group leaders to work together creatively as a team to develop ideas and activities, review, fine tune and build the best possible experiences for the visitors before, during and after the visits.

building on interests

integrating the groups interests and/or development goals into the visit themes increases the impact of the visit many times and creates continuity. For example increasing literacy characterised many of the activities eg. words, poetry, journals, growing of oats, maize and wheat in the group's allotment and on the farm was a creative and meaningful way to link on and off farm experiences.

"I hope that over the course of the year I managed to strike a balance between using the activities to enhance the farm visit as well as letting the group just be, absorbing all the wonderful positive energy of the farm and the countryside." Jo

striking a balance

A farm is a busy, sensory-rich, purposeful place. Designing a visit requires a balance between choosing one or two activities that will enhance without overpowering the rich farm and nature experience.

evolving memory books

journals (memory books) are inspirational for hosts, group leaders and visitors as they provide a 'home' for all kinds of documentation that can be revisited, shared, built upon and personalised.

sharing multi media

smart phones have made film making, sound recording and photography an easy and unobtrusive activity. The many apps available allow for raw material to be transformed into postcards, films, audio guessing games etc. that can be used to enhance the farm experience back in the visitors home or group life. They help groups share their experiences with family and friends, reliving them and gaining the benefits all over again.

acknowledging achievements

a final event and the awarding of certificates, viewing films, sharing poems, displaying the journals reaffirms the positive feelings and is a place and space to be proud of achievements.

"I enjoyed having a theme, it helped me plan the visit and differentiate it from other visits the group have had, on the flip side there are elements that they know they love (like seeing the calves) so I tried to incorporate them but using the themes of spring, words and poetry." Jo

"The group very much enjoyed asking Jo about the farm and felt very confident talking to her, the support staff felt very confident in Jo as the host and look forward to working with her again." Eric

Let Nature Feed Your Senses is a partnership between Sensory Trust and LEAF, supported by Natural England's Big Lottery funded Access to Nature programme. For more information www.letnaturefeedyoursenses.org

