



FARMS FOR CITY CHILDREN:
TRANSFORMING LIVES,
GROWING FUTURES



For 50 years, Farms for City Children has connected children with farming, food and nature.

1. Executive summary

For almost fifty years, Farms for City Children has enabled children, many from urban and disadvantaged communities, to spend a week living and working on real farms. New research demonstrates that these experiences are far more than memorable school trips. They are often transformative life experiences that shape attitudes, aspirations, wellbeing and life choices for decades.

The study gathered evidence from interviews with founders, staff, teachers and trustees, alongside a survey of adults who attended Farms for City Children as children. Many respondents were recalling visits that took place 30, 40 or even nearly 50 years ago, yet their memories remained vivid and emotionally significant.

The findings show Farms for City Children:

- Connects children with nature and the countryside.
- Builds confidence, teamwork and resilience
- Supports literacy, learning and engagement with school.
- For some children facing difficult circumstances at home, the farm offered a sense of safety
- Inspires future careers and life choices.
- Creates benefits that are passed on to future generations.

2. The Challenge

Farms for City Children was founded in 1976 by Clare and Michael Morpurgo with the aim of bringing children from towns and cities into immersive residential farm environments where they can experience nature, responsibility, teamwork and meaningful work.

That vision is more relevant than ever as today's children are spending less time outdoors and have fewer opportunities to experience nature, farming and food production firsthand. Many have little connection with the countryside or understanding of where their food comes from.

3. Our Research

To understand Farms for City Children's long-term impact, research was conducted in two phases:

Interviews

11 interviews were carried out with founders, chief executives, farm managers, trustees and teachers who have been involved with Farms for City Children across its history.

Former Participant Survey

66 adults who attended Farms for City Children as children completed a detailed survey, representing 38 different schools and visits spanning almost four decades.

Together, these voices provide compelling evidence of lasting impact.

4. What Children Remember

Years after their visit, former participants still vividly recalled:

- Feeding and caring for farm animals.
- Mucking out barns and stables.
- Sleeping in dormitories.
- Story time by the fire.
- Exploring the countryside with friends.
- Working alongside the farm team.
- Nature walks and outdoor adventures.

Particularly memorable experiences included watching animals being born, caring for livestock, night walks, farm work and shared storytelling.



“The best week of my entire childhood.”

5. Widening Horizons

A consistent theme across interviews and survey responses was that Farms for City Children opens children's eyes to possibilities beyond their everyday experiences.

Children encounter:

- New environments.
- New responsibilities.
- Different lifestyles.
- New foods.
- New skills.
- Different futures for themselves.

One teacher described Farms for City Children as helping children discover "a whole new way of life" beyond the city.



"It was one of the best memories of my school childhood."

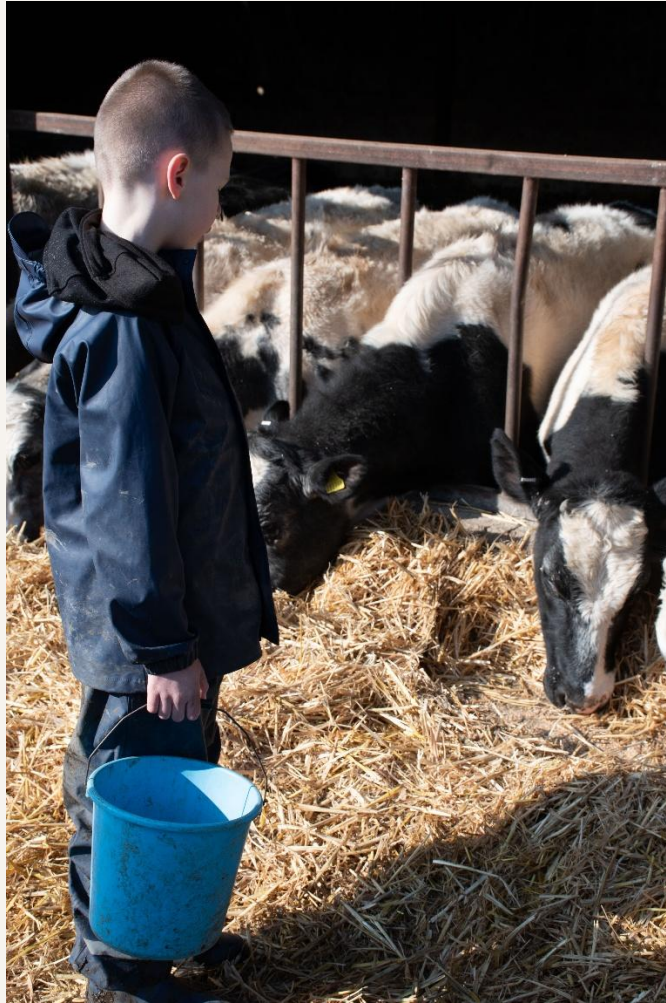
6. Building Confidence and Life Skills

Across decades of operation, staff and teachers observed that children often reveal strengths that are not always visible in the classroom.

Children develop:

- Self-confidence.
- Perseverance.
- Responsibility.
- Teamwork.
- Communication skills.
- Independence.
- Practical problem-solving abilities.

Many participants described gaining a lasting "have-a-go" attitude that influenced later life.



7. Supporting Learning

The farm is an authentic learning environment where children learn through experience.

Visits support learning in:

Science

Understanding life cycles, food production and animal care.

Literacy

Expanding vocabulary, reading recipes, listening to stories and inspiring creative writing.

Numeracy

Measuring, weighing, counting and understanding real-world farming economics.

Personal Development

Working collaboratively and taking responsibility for meaningful tasks.

8. Nature Connection That Lasts

One of the most significant findings was the enduring impact on participants' relationship with nature.

Nearly half of comments about long-term impacts referred to:

- A stronger connection with nature.
- Greater appreciation of the countryside.
- Spending more time outdoors.
- Recognition of nature's role in wellbeing.

Seven respondents specifically said that their experiences contributed to decisions to move to the countryside later in life.



“Great memories of finally feeling safe.”

9. A Place of Safety and Belonging

Some of the most powerful testimonies came from people who experienced difficult childhood circumstances. For these children, Farms for City Children was more than educational. It was a place where they felt safe, valued and cared for.

“Great memories of finally feeling safe.”

“The visit was a temporary refuge from an unhappy childhood home.”

“Safe loving family feel to a child who didn’t have that at home was life changing.

These experiences demonstrate the social and emotional value of residential outdoor learning.

*“The only time I ever went outdoors as a child.
It wasn’t safe to do that.”*



10. Influencing Futures

Many participants described Farms for City Children as influencing their career choices and future aspirations.

Former visitors included:

- Farmers.
- Veterinary professionals.
- Smallholders.
- Outdoor educators.
- Teachers who now bring their own pupils to Farms for City Children

“I'm now a full-time shepherdess. All because I stayed at Nethercott.”

The experience gave many children a vision of futures they had never previously imagined.

11. Impact Across Generations

Perhaps the most remarkable finding is that Farms for City Children's influence often extends beyond the individual child.

Former participants reported:

- Taking their own children outdoors more frequently.
- Reading stories with their children.
- Supporting outdoor learning.
- Volunteering with youth groups.
- Returning as teachers with new cohorts of children.

This intergenerational effect means that one week on a farm can continue shaping lives decades later.



12. Why This Matters

The research shows that Farms for City Children continues to address issues of growing national importance:

- Nature connection and experiential learning
- Children's wellbeing and mental health.
- Healthy lifestyles.
- Food and farming literacy.
- Social mobility.
- Confidence and resilience.
- Educational engagement.
- Teamwork and social skills
- Environmental understanding and stewardship

The charity's founding vision remains as relevant today as it was almost fifty years ago.

13. Looking Ahead

Evidence from this study demonstrates that Farms for City Children creates experiences that are memorable, meaningful and transformative. For many children, a week on the farm becomes a defining chapter in their life story.

With continued support from donors, partners and schools, Farms for City Children can ensure future generations benefit from opportunities to:

- Connect with nature.
- Develop confidence and resilience.
- Learn where food comes from.
- Experience a different way of life.
- Discover new possibilities for their future.

One week on a farm. A lifetime of impact.

For more information about spending a week on the farm head to the Farms for City Children website: www.farmsforcitychildren.org

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