

Making Connections: Food on your Fork, Nature on the Farm


Shallowford Farm
making the difference





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Foreword by Mat Cole, Dartmoor Farmers Director and Steering group Chair

Dartmoor Farmers was established back in 2007 when a small group of farmers, after visiting a project in Lenk, Switzerland realised, that working together, linking visitors, the landscape, sustainable farming and our produce, we could help build a more sustainable future for our farming community.

Dartmoor Farmers has grown to over 100 farming members and have a successful, long term trading relationship with Goosemoor Food services who across the south west, trade fresh, locally sourced produce. We are their beef and lamb supplier and are one of their flag ship brands with full Dartmoor farmers provenance. They also have a trading arm called Educatering, supplying over 100 schools in the south west with school meals made up of locally sourced, fresh whole foods which includes our beef and lamb.

The link to local schools and our produce, combined with a visit to Battersea, London on the Farm to City event in 2023 created the idea for engaging schools and getting children onto our farms to learn about how farming on Dartmoor is not only delivering beef and lamb of exceptional quality, but also deliver so much more. Nature thrives in and around our farms, hedgerows, woodlands, trees and streams. The home farms and their small field systems frame the iconic open moorland landscape and give The Dartmoor National Park its unique character. By inviting and funding school visits we can then share that story with the next generation and rebuild those lost connections to our landscapes, nature and our food.

As well as the educational part of the project we needed to get some data around our farms. We had sold Dartmoor Farmers on the back of being environmental and landscape custodians but we never had any evidence other than anecdotal. The Hill Farm Project had been part of the project development and they were able to deliver our Environmental audits. This part of the project would unlock the environmental provenance which we needed to back up the educational messaging, give the individual farmers useful numbers on their farms, sign posting them to ELMs opportunities and finally enabling Dartmoor Farmers to drive sales through evidence.

Dartmoor Farmers our partners in the Shallowford Trust and the Hill Farm Project shared our ambitions and goals for the project, helping us develop a fledgling pilot project to become something much bigger. The word pilot is key here. We have built the foundations for a long-term relationship between our key partners, but most importantly we have broken through to local schools and hundreds of young minds to help them understand the relationship between, food, nature, landscape and communities. The key for me and for Dartmoor farmers is to build on these foundations and continue to educate and inform the next generation as well as help build a sustainable future for the next generation of farmers on Dartmoor.

I would specifically, on behalf of the Dartmoor Farmers Directors like to thank:

- The team at **Shallowford Trust**, Will, Ally, Fiona and David. I would also like to single out Jaime, who started this project as one of our farmers and now has a key role in the Shallowford team and has brought this project to life with her enthusiasm, hard work and passion for both farming and education.
- The **Dartmoor Hill Farm Project** and the hard work, innovation and perseverance Hazel has brought to the environmental audit part of the project.
- **Our farmers** who have delivered innovative, inspirational and educational visits way beyond our expectations. Dartmoor Farmers is about working together for a sustainable future; you have all helped to secure all of our futures by helping to deliver this fledgling project.
- **The Duchy of Cornwall** who shared our vision and helped the project become reality
- **FiPL** for allowing this project to thrive. Without the funding and your investment in us, none of this would have happened.



Foreword by Alison Adlam, Chair of Trustees, The Shallowford Trust

The Shallowford Trust have been delighted to host the Dartmoor Farmers' Food on Your Fork, Nature on the Farm Project which was funded by the Farming in Protected Landscapes Grant. The project has been a wonderful collaboration between the Dartmoor Farmer's Association, the Dartmoor Hill Farm Project, Goosemoor and The Shallowford Trust.

As the Chair of Trustees, I was thrilled to hear of a new project concept being developed at our Farm to City visit in 2023. It very much felt like an important legacy from all the collaboration that took place to enable Farm to City 2023 to be such a success. We have also been grateful to work with the Dartmoor Hill Farm Project and the expertise of Hazel Kendall and to all our steering group members.

Whilst our Trustees monitored the initial difficulties in recruiting an engagement officer for the post with some concern, we have been very much reassured with the way in which the project staffing has evolved, with its strong team work, with our now trust manager, Fiona Lambeck, and Jaime, a farmer in the Dartmoor Farmers Association, initially joint working the role. Following an internal restructure at Shallowford, Jaime has taken on the role in its entirety, very successfully.

Of particular note has been the opportunity this project has given for the Shallowford Trust to develop new partnerships, particularly with Promoting Children in Plymouth (PCiP) and the Dartmoor Women in Farming Networks.

Both our trustees, all our staff team, and the Shallowford Trust as a whole, have benefited enormously from our working with other Dartmoor farmers, PCiP and new schools. As set out in this report, this pilot project has proved very successful, both in terms of introducing children living near Dartmoor, many of whom have never been to a farm, to Dartmoor Farms, and in introducing farmers to the joys of having children visit their farm and sharing their knowledge with them.

We are thrilled to have very recently been successful in an application to The National Heritage Lottery Fund. As part of our grant, we will be able to continue to work with the Dartmoor Farmers Association, PCiP and all the other schools who have been involved in the project to continue to deliver more school visits to Dartmoor farms.



Background and project summary

This project has been a collaboration between the Dartmoor Farmers Association, the Dartmoor Hill Farm Project, The Shallowford Trust and Educatering.

Funding for our *Making Connections: Food on Your Fork, Nature on the Farm*. Farm to Fork Project was provided by Farming in Protected Landscapes awarded by DEFRA through The Dartmoor National Park Authority.

From March 2024 to March 2025 children from across Devon have been taking part in an amazing project called *Making Connections: Food on Your Fork, Nature on the Farm*. The project was designed to teach children where their food comes from and exemplify how nature-friendly farming on Dartmoor can contribute to high quality food production, as well as offering insight into nature conservation, access, landscape, heritage and climate change. The project aimed to engage over 500 children across Devon visiting one of 11 participating farms hosted by Dartmoor farmers.

Over the years there has been increasing evidence that children are losing touch with nature, the environment, the farmed landscape around us and the connection to where their food comes from. The project was designed so that children could spend a day on a working Dartmoor farm and get hands on in their day's work. The main aim was to show where and how food is grown in and around the landscape and the process from 'farm to fork'. This will hopefully be carried forward into the future, with them making conscious decisions about the food they eat, where they shop and possible future careers in or around agriculture, as well as raising awareness about how farming and nature work together.

The visits were aimed at children in years 5 and 6, as this is the age where we felt that the greatest impact would be achieved. The visits were planned for classes of up to 30 children, and to run for up to four hours. This time frame gave enough time for the children to get the coach from school to the farm for 10am, then leave at 2pm, giving them enough time to get back to school and sorted for the end of the day. This was also a manageable amount of time for the farmers to fit into their already busy days.

The *Making Connections: Food on Your Fork, Nature on the Farm* project was delivered off the back of the really successful Farm to City event, from the Dartmoor to You project, devised in Battersea and taking place from the 5th to 10th June 2023. While working in London, an idea was born to connect Dartmoor farmers with schools by inviting school groups onto Dartmoor farms. The vision was that the visits were to be run by the farmers themselves – allowing them to share their own passion for their farms and animals, add a small amount of diversified income and learn from the positive experiences of sharing their knowledge with young people. Many of the farmers in the project were completely new to the idea of running their own farm visits for schools but were willing to give it a go. Invites were sent out to schools and the recruitment of a team of willing farmers commenced.

The recruitment for the engagement officer was not completely straightforward, and took more time than expected as the first candidate changed their mind before starting the job. A second engagement officer was appointed and started the job, but resigned very shortly after for personal reasons. Third time lucky and an engagement officer, Fiona Lambeck, was finally successfully recruited and able to crack on with the project, with Jaime engaged to conduct the risk assessments of the new farms. Farmers came on board and so began a very exciting year! When Fiona then took over the Trust manager position at Shallowford Farm, the engagement officer position was incrementally moved across to Jaime Bowden. In November 2025, Jaime's role as the engagement officer was formalised.

Aims and objectives

To connect children with nature, the landscape and farming



For children to learn where their food comes from

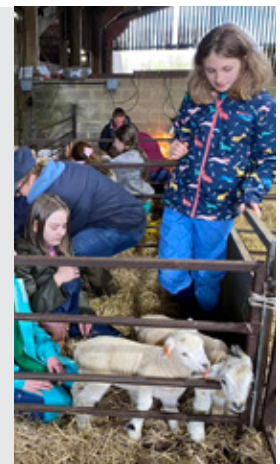


To up-skill farmers to host visits on their own farms and to help farms develop a bespoke farm visit for young people

Make new connections with schools across Devon



To get children out of the classroom into a real working environment



To fulfil the Dartmoor Hill Farm Project objective to visit 10 farms and write an environmental report for each one

Rebuild the Dartmoor Farmers website to reflect new projects and partnerships



Outputs

The project was delivered by a small team consisting of a steering group, an engagement officer and other staff from East Shallowford Farm, Dartmoor Farmers, and with amazing support from partners involved in the project.

Through the *Making Connections: Food on Your Fork, Nature on the Farm* project the following outputs were achieved:

Delivery of

35 farm visits



to schools across Devon

1000 children

getting out on to Dartmoor farms



11 Dartmoor farms

delivering farm visits to school groups



21 schools
taking part in the project



20 Collaborative Knowledge Share Days (CKSDs)

filled, taking place over ten farm visits, to up-skill 12 farmers and interested people who can now host visits in the future



Collaborations

between East Shallowford Farm, Dartmoor Farmers, Dartmoor Hill Farm Project, Goosemoor Foodservice, and PCIP (Promoting Children in Plymouth)

School	Date	Farm	Number of Children
Princetown Primary	21/03/24	Greenwell	30
St Andrews Primary	26/03/24	Greenwell	30
Erme Primary	17/04/24	Broadaford	23
Shaugh Prior Primary	24/04/24	Broadaford	21
Ashburton youth group	25/04/24	Broadaford	15
Cornwood Primary	26/04/24	Broadaford	30
Scouts	24/05/24	Great Dunstone	40
Scouts	24/05/24	Great Dunstone	40
Meavy Primary	21/06/24	Callisham	32
Lady Modifords	05/07/24	Callisham	26
Lewtrenchard Primary	25/09/24	Lower Godsworthy	25
Boasley and North Lew Primary	23/10/24	East Okement	31
St Georges Primary	11/10/24	Bowden	29
Ipplepen Primary	17/10/24	Pudsham	30
Shakespeare Primary	24/10/24	Huccaby	28
Denbury Primary	08/11/24	Hatchwell	33
Mountwise Primary Group 1	12/11/24	Tor Royal	29
High street Primary	12/11/24	Huccaby	31
Mountwise Primary Group 2	07/02/25	Tor Royal	25
Barley Lane	06/03/25	East Okement	7
Marlborough Primary	07/03/25	Huccaby	12
Mary Tavy and Brentor Primary	12/03/25	Huccaby	29
Chudleigh Knighton Primary Group 1	14/03/25	Hatchwell	30
Riverside Primary Group 1	19/03/25	Callisham	24
Riverside Primary Group 2	20/03/25	Callisham	24
Riverside Primary Group 3	21/03/25	Callisham	24
Knowle Primary Group 1	24/03/25	Greenwell	27
Knowle Primary Group 2	25/03/25	Greenwell	29
Knowle Primary Group 3	25/03/25	Callisham	28
St Mary's Primary Group 1	25/03/25	Bowden	30
Chudleigh Knighton Group 2	26/03/25	Hatchwell	30
St Mary's Primary Group 2	27/03/25	Bowden	30
Chaddlewood Primary Group 1	27/03/25	Greenwell	30
Okehampton Primary	27/03/25	East Okement	30 Cancelled
Chaddlewood Primary Group 2	28/03/25	Greenwell	30

Management of the Project

The Team

The *Making Connections: Food on Your Fork, Nature on the Farm* project was overseen by a small steering group made up of Dartmoor Farmers, a Shallowford Trust Trustee, the engagement officer and East Shallowford Farm staff, who worked together to make the visits happen and to support and up-skill farmers in hosting the visits on their own farms.

Initially the contact with schools had been made by Ally Kohler and David Onah, the program Officer at Shallowford Farm. David was instrumental in making connections with the schools early on in the project. He built up connections between school and Farmer. He was able to go along to some of the visits in the early days and has been a great support throughout the project.

Fiona Lambeck came to work at East Shallowford Farm in March 2024 as the engagement officer, but in May 2025, due to an internal restructure at Shallowford, took on the trust manager position. A recent change from her career as a lawyer stood her in good stead for running a tight ship at Shallowford and bringing with her many transferable skills.

Jaime Bowden, who farms at Meavy and spent many years working in nursery and school provision, started work at East Shallowford Farm in April 2024 on the project, conducting the risk assessments of the new farms. Her experience of her own farm and in education was the perfect combination for the project, and when Fiona took on the trust manager role, Jaime was appointed to run the project with help from Fiona. Administrative support was provided by the Dartmoor Farmers Director, Mathew Cole, and treasurer, George Swayne, and funded through the FiPL. East Shallowford Farm manager Will Dracup and Ally Kohler, a valued Shallowford trustee, also brought their wealth of knowledge to the project.



Before the visits could begin

There were many important factors that needed to be in place before the visits could start.

Visits to all 11 farms for a pre-visit and risk-assessment meeting. The risk assessments continued over the summer months, and it took some time to pull together around busy farming diaries.

Early contact was made in January 2024 with Educatering (part of Goosemoor Foodservice) to engage the school customers eating Dartmoor beef.

The engagement officer and trust manager also wrote and engaged schools, under an hour away from Dartmoor farms. Once contact was made, the locations of the schools had to be carefully considered to

match them with farms, to ensure minimum travelling time. New invitations were sent out over the next ten months to ensure that all the available visit slots were filled. The visits were a challenge to fill due to schools having busy diaries, and while a significant proportion of schools were initially interested at the time of contact, many were not able to commit closer to the booking time.

One of our farmers was introduced to Kerry Bidwell from Promoting Children in Plymouth (PCiP), a charity with the aim of eradicating the social injustice, ill-health and misery caused by child poverty. This was a great opportunity to engage with inner city children in our area. Kerry Bidwell, campaign coordinator at PCiP, also saw the great value in the project and what it would mean to the children of Plymouth, for some of whom this would be the first time ever visiting a farm. PCiP contacted schools they work with, who quickly got on board with the project, given its backing from PCiP.

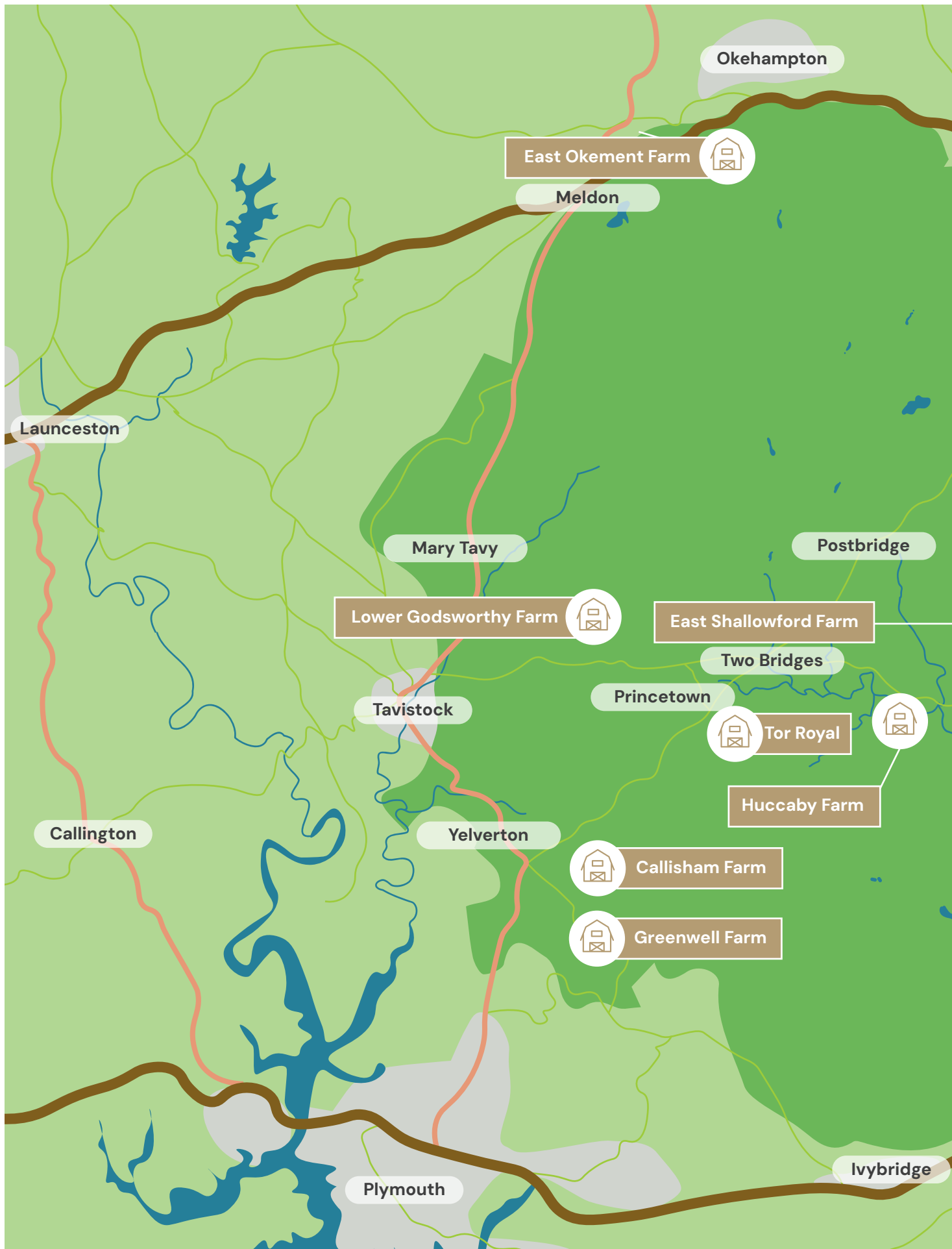
Some schools were slightly hesitant due to time and resource constraints, but with the support of the engagement officer, who did much of the heavy lifting, set them up with a suitable farm, did all the initial correspondence, and made sure they had copies of the risk assessment, location and logistics, email and phone contact with the farmer. This support really helped schools to see how easy it would be to take up one of the visits. Ten of the visit slots were used by Plymouth schools, with over 300 children from Plymouth visiting Dartmoor farms.

The engagement officer did all of the initial communication with schools to get the visits booked and risk assessments sent out to schools. The connection was then made between the farmer and school, which was a vital part of the whole process. No one knows a farm more than its own farmer so this connection was instrumental in the smooth running of the visits, right down to the logistics of what size vehicle could access the farm. The engagement officer worked with the farmers to plan activities and source ideas that could be used in the farm visits. A guide was created by the engagement officer detailing the exact requirements for hosting a visit, including the time frame and all necessary considerations. Activities were sourced from Linking Environment and Farming (LEAF) and the National Farmers Union (NFU). These were sent out to the farmers, and the engagement officer helped them select suitable activities for their visits. Many of the farmers hadn't worked with children before so this was completely out of their comfort zone but they all rose to the challenge and embraced the visits wholeheartedly. Any concerns were voiced and quickly allayed by the engagement officer. Much time was spent carrying out risk assessments, working on logistics, planning activities and talking with farmers and schools to make the visits happen.

Many of the farms in the project had limited handwashing facilities. There was money in the budget to build a mobile hand washing station so Will Dracup and David Onah from East Shallowford Farm set to work creating a portable handwashing trailer, with sinks, taps and soap dispensers, which could be hooked up to running water. For farms without easily accessible toilets, we organised the hire of Portaloos from one of the farms in the project.

As Making Connections: Food on Your Fork, Nature on the Farm was a pilot project, the whole year was one of learning for everyone involved. There have been challenges along the way but all have risen to and learnt from them.

On the following pages is a map showing the farms across Dartmoor that were involved in the project. The farms are quite spread out and this was a considerable factor when selecting a suitable school for a visit, to ensure minimal travel time. One success of the project was that one of the local schools was able to walk to their local farm (Meavy Primary School to Callisham Farm). Each of the Plymouth schools were allocated farms on the western side of Dartmoor.





Timeline

The majority of the *Making Connections: Food on Your Fork, Nature on the Farm* project was carried out from the beginning of April 2024 to the end of March 2025. The delay from January to April 2024, has been outlined earlier in this report. It then took 12 months to plan and complete all of the visits. Along the way the project picked up momentum, as confidence grew between engagement officer, farmers and schools, and the very helpful connection with PCiP, which greatly assisted with communication with the Plymouth schools. A lot was learned in the first visits, early on in the project.



The timeline in detail is as follows:

Early 2023

Dartmoor Farmers directors met with Kevin Bishop (DNPA) and David Attwell (HFP) to discuss opportunities for Dartmoor farmers around FiPL based around an environmental and educational opportunity to raise profile, support sales through Goosemoor and Educatering and help up-skill our farmers.

June 2023

The project was further discussed by Dartmoor Farmers and Shallowford Trust trustees, who were visiting London as part of the Farm to City event in June 2023, which was a collaboration between the Shallowford Trust and the Dartmoor Farmers Association. The Farm to City team very much wanted the Farm to City event to start a new wave of farmers hosting their own farm visits and educating children about farm life on Dartmoor and where their food comes from.

February 2024

There were some teething problems in recruiting the right person initially, but the project continued with a steering group consisting of Dartmoor Farmers Directors and members, the trust manager, trustees and East Shallowford staff, who took on parts of the project to keep it going through these early stages. A group of farmers interested in hosting visits came to a meeting at East Shallowford Farm led by the steering group. A list of interested and enthusiastic farmers was drawn up.

March 2024

Finally, engagement officer, Fiona Lambeck, was appointed to run the project. Jaime Bowden, one of the farmers who had shown an interest initially in hosting farm visits, was also appointed in a supporting role and to conduct the risk assessments of the new farms.

April 2024

Risk assessments commenced by Jaime and Fiona. Initial visits took place over the lambing period on two of the farms who were already set up for farm visits and had been already risk assessed. These farmers offered valuable support and ideas to other farmers who were new to hosting.

May 2024

Other farmers started to host their own visits with help from the engagement officer. Due to an internal staff restructure at Shallowford Farm, Fiona took over the trust manager role whilst also continuing in the engagement officer role, which was then transferred to Jaime over the summer period and formalized in November 2024.

November 2024

In total 18 school visits had taken place on Dartmoor farms. Jaime, alongside her role as engagement officer, was recruited for the part-time administrative assistant role at East Shallowford Farm, which gave her two roles that worked well together.

From January 2025 to the end of March 2025

The budget had been monitored throughout the project and due to saving on certain parts of the project like transport, Portaloo hire and various other items, an underspend was identified as we projected costs through the project time line. The steering group were very keen to use all available resources to deliver as many visits as we could offer, but due to FiPL scheme rules we could only deliver 25 educational visits through the project.

We met with the Dartmoor FiPL team who had been very pleased with the outcomes of the project and the engagement from schools and farmers so far. With some negotiation and safeguards, we were able to re-purpose the underspend to deliver Collaborative Knowledge Share Days (CKSDs). The purpose of the CKSDs were to enable farmers new to the project to learn from each other's visits, with a view to increasing knowledge and confidence for future visits; and, as a side benefit, enabled more schools to take place on farms. This was particularly useful as by this point the project had gained significant momentum and more schools had come forward asking for visits.



Partners



Farming in Protected Landscapes programme

Farming in Protected Landscapes is a grant scheme for farmers and land managers in National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) across England.

The program has been developed by DEFRA, and is being delivered locally through the Dartmoor National Park Authority. It aims to support farmers and land managers in carrying out projects that support the natural environment, mitigate the impact of climate change, provide public access opportunities or support nature-friendly, sustainable farm businesses.

The program started in March 2021, and has now been extended to March 2026.

Dartmoor Farmers is a group of over 100 farmers across Dartmoor, working together since 2007 to bring our farming community together and help to support a more sustainable future, preserving the iconic landscape, nature, the cultural heritage and our farming businesses. Many of the hill farms have common rights and play a vital role in managing the moor and conserving Dartmoor's iconic wildness, wildlife and biodiversity. Dartmoor farmers supply native bred beef and lamb to partners Goosemoor Food services who wholesale and retailers across the South West.



Shallowford Farm

making the difference

The Shallowford Trust is a charity based at East Shallowford Farm, Widecombe in the Moor, which aims to provide opportunities for young people (often from deprived inner-city communities) to gain holistic, hands-on experience of farming and nature through day or residential visits to our Dartmoor farm. The Shallowford Trust is turning 50 next year so has many years of experience delivering farm-based visits.



Educatering (part of Goosemoor Foodservice) provides a complete school food and catering solution aiming to offer wholesome, healthy and locally sourced food for school meals. DFA meat is sold through Educatering and served as part of the school meals.

The Dartmoor Hill Farm Project was set up in 2003 to help ensure a viable future for Dartmoor farmers. They are actively involved in promoting and supporting the role that agriculture plays on Dartmoor. The Dartmoor Hill Farm Project carried out 10 farm environmental reports on Dartmoor farms alongside this project.



DUCHY *of* CORNWALL

The Duchy of Cornwall is a landed estate committed to empowering communities, championing its tenants, supporting mental health and tackling climate challenges through its net zero goal and environmental initiatives. The Duchy Estate includes a variety of landscapes that they look to protect and restore, including arable and livestock farms, residential and commercial properties, as well as forests, rivers and coastline.

Promoting Children in Plymouth aims to eradicate the social injustice, ill health and misery caused by poverty in Plymouth. It brings together the public, private and third sectors to ensure that, as a city acting in unison, Plymouth remains dedicated to making a difference throughout a young person's early life.



Delivery Outputs and Outcomes



Visit Days and Activities

Each farm in this project is unique, having its own landscape, buildings, animals and farmers, so while each visit took on a similar theme, they were all quite different.

The Early Visits

One of the earliest visits took place in April 2024 at Broadaford Farm near Widecombe in the Moor where there was all the excitement of new lambs being born. Three schools from the Moorsway Federation and a local youth group from Ashburton visited. Farmer Will was no stranger to hosting visits. He gave demonstrations on tagging, marking, castrating and tailing a lamb. The children helped move the sheep around from the pens into the communal mother and lamb area before they were moved back out to the fields. Lots of cuddling of lambs went on, and Will's visits proved to be a great success. Not only did Will host some great visits at the beginning of the project and enable farmers new to the project to gain experience about hosting visits, he has also been a valuable member of the steering committee and given lots of advice about hosting farm visits to others. The Broadaford farm visits were particularly beneficial to Shaugh Prior Primary where 49% of their children had SEN needs. Arrangements were made for one visiting child in a wheelchair to access the disabled facilities at Shallowford Farm and she was able to participate fully in the visit.

Some more early spring visits happened at Greenwell Farm where the school groups from Princetown and St Andrews Primary in Buckland spent the mornings in the lambing barn witnessing new life unfolding in front of their eyes. After much handwashing, they had a picnic followed by a stomp up onto the common moorland to learn all about the importance of sequestering carbon from the atmosphere into the peat bogs. Mat Cole demonstrated the depth of a peat bog compared to normal soil and why this is so important to Dartmoor, showcasing this unique dimension of the landscape. On the way back to the farm the children visited the remains of a Bronze Age house, which tied in brilliantly with the classes' history topic.

May saw the visit of 80 scouts and their leaders to Great Dunstone Farm near Widecombe in the Moor hosted by the Mann family. They visited for a night of camping, farming and fun activities. They enjoyed a farm walk, seeing the lambs frisking in the fields, Dartmoor ponies on the common and the farm's friendly cows. Although this was a little different to the other visits it was a big success in the way that it engaged with a different type of group than a school group. The Scouts visited over a weekend but through the project, there was a lot of focus on being in nature and learning where their food comes from.

The next visits were to Callisham Farm on the outskirts of Meavy, a new farm on the project, which Jaime Bowden farms with her husband Scott. The Church of England federated schools, Meavy Primary and Lady Modiford's Primary, visits were a great success. The sun shone for the Meavy children, which meant a walk around the farm and picnic on the hill were idyllic! Children got up close to the friendly native Dartmoor Greyface sheep, and the new piglets were a favourite for the children and teachers. The children learnt about how the woodland and streams add to the biodiversity of the farm. The children asked some really thoughtful questions about where food comes from and how farming works with nature. Farmers Scott and Jaime enjoyed engaging with the children and hosting the visit.

Lady Modiford's Primary School visit saw a bit of a different day of weather as rain came in later in the visit but this didn't dampen spirits and the children still enjoyed a farm tour, taking in the woodland, the streams, and visiting the animals. The only difference was that the picnic lunch was enjoyed inside the barn, which the host farmers had set up for the visits with display boards and seating. Again the piglets stole the show, but who doesn't love a piglet?!

An amazing article was written by Rosemary Best from Moor Links magazine about the visits and the partnerships involved in bringing the *Making Connections: Food on Your Fork, Nature on the Farm* project together. This went out to homes across Dartmoor. This, alongside a post shared on social media by The Dartmoor Hill Farm Project to spread the word about this great project that was happening across Dartmoor, encouraged schools got in touch after this excellent social media exposure.



Autumn into Winter

After the summer break, in September, Lower Godsworthy Farm in Peter Tavy hosted a visit from Lewtrenchard Primary School. This visit proved challenging from the start due to the remote and narrow access to the farm. Minibus transport was advised by the farmer to the engagement officer and passed on to the school, but this wasn't possible. Access was therefore gained via the main road from Princetown, the children along with their teachers took the short walk to the farm over the adjoining moorland where they were welcomed by farmers Colin and Megan. The inclement September weather saw heavy rain come in and the children dressed for an autumn day. Up to this point schools had been asked for numbers of children needing waterproofs in advance of every visit, but after this very wet occasion, the engagement officer attended every visit with a supply of waterproofs and wellies from East Shallowford Farm. On this visit, the combination of rain and children without weatherproof clothing meant that the farmers (who were completely new to hosting farm visits) could only do half of what they had planned and the trip finished a little early. Despite the poor weather and access issues, the children learnt a lot about life on a Dartmoor hill farm, and they certainly learnt about Dartmoor weather and the need to be prepared for rain. The children enjoyed fun activities in the barn, met some of the sheep and cows, and engaged with learning about where their food comes from, and how farming on Dartmoor operates in all seasons, and overall had lots of fun despite the very damp day.

The beginning of October saw a visit to Bowden Farm from St Georges Primary in Plymouth, where the children met the farm's dairy cows, still happily grazing out in the fields. Farmer Russel took the children on a tractor and trailer ride around the farm to see the sheep and watch the silage being cut for the cow's winter feed. The children had a great day learning about where their food comes from and the foods that are produced on the farm.



Also in October, 28 children from Shakespeare Primary visited Huccaby farm near Princetown. They had a lovely farm walk which took in the magnificent views of the countryside and the common where farmers Shirley and David graze their sheep, cattle and ponies. They learnt about a new hedge that had recently been planted and that the sheep's wool had a very important use protecting tree roots by insulating them and stopping weeds growing around the tree base and suffocating the tree. The children loved learning about poo and how dung beetles are very important for a rich and fertile soil.

Late in October farmers Helen and John from East Okement Farm, high up on the commons of Okehampton, hosted a visit from North Lew and Boasley Primary Schools. The two small schools, local to Okehampton, had of their own volition teamed up for a joint visit and shared transport. 31 children went along for the day, getting up close to goats, sheep and chickens, learning about the care that they receive every day, collecting eggs, and learning about soil and soil health. Discussions were held about the

weather station that is situated on the farm, as the farm is situated in such a high, remote place. The visit was a first for Helen but John was a big part of the Farm to City event, where he went along as a farmer volunteer for the week. The challenging terrain meant that the bus parked nearby at Sandpits car park and children walked into the farm over the moorland with its vast views.

The children from Denbury Primary school were very lucky to visit Hatchwell farm where they learnt about the sheep and cows. Farmer Sandra explained to the children about the cattle being reared on the farm then having a very short journey to the local abattoir where they are slaughtered for the farm's meat boxes. She explained the importance of low food miles and how this is good for the animals and the environment, and how each cow has its own unique herd number and passport which stays with it for its entire life. Farmer Sandra showed the children one of her new born calves, which the children named Ginger. This link made between the school and the farm has been really important as Sandra later sent a photo and gave the children updates, which they were thrilled about.

At the beginning of November on a very chilly Dartmoor day, the first half of Mountwise Primary's year 5 group visited Tor Royal Farm, a Duchy-owned farm run by Justine and David. The school arrived – after being warned of the 'two coats colder in Princetown' rule – well dressed and ready to embrace a day on the farm. They went on a walk along Drakes Leat, and learnt how Justine and her family managed to farm in such a harsh environment. Lunch was taken inside the large farmhouse dining room where everyone warmed up with their picnics before doing a quiz about Dartmoor and looking at some skulls that had been found out on the moorland. This fascinated the children as many would only see this kind of thing in a museum. Justine went on to host another exciting visit to the other half of the same year group from Mountwise in an even chillier February, but despite this the children loved learning about the history of the farm and enjoyed being immersed in its remote landscape.

A visit to Pudsham Farm by Ipplepen Primary School took place in November. This visit happened after being rescheduled a couple of times due to unavoidable circumstances at the school and farm. The children had a great time seeing the farm's beef cattle, talking about cattle. Farmer Sam talked about how the cows are reared for meat and looked after. A local beekeeper talked to the children about the importance of bees and how nature-friendly farming is so important. The group enjoyed a farm walk via some old stone barns where they talked about the history of one of the barns: how it was used in the old days, with people living up above and the cattle down below. The children had a very educational day learning about lots of different areas of farming, conservation and history.

During the month of December, when the schools were very busy embracing all the fun of Christmas, the engagement officer was still busy making new connections with schools to fill the remaining visits to farms. Time was spent booking dates between school and farms, helping farmers plan for the next visits, and learning from past feedback on what went well and how to take this forward to visits early in 2025.



Into Spring 2025

The first of the visits in 2025 took place in February at Tor Royal Farm when the second half of the year 5 group from Mountwise Primary in Plymouth visited. The day was very chilly but Justine's warm welcome made up for it, and the children fully embraced the day. Justine took the group on a walk along Drakes Leat and the lower side of the farm seeing Dartmoor ponies. They visited the cattle who were housed cosily in the shed. The children enjoyed feeding the cows before walking back to the farmhouse for handwashing and lunch. After lunch the children really enjoyed meeting Justine's riding ponies, the goats and chickens. This kind of interaction was a really important part of all of the visits, as this closer connection with animals was definitely a real and cherished memory for the children of their time spent on farms.

By now the farmers had all hosted at least one visit so were more confident about what activities to do and how the visits would run.

Barley Lane School from Exeter, which provides an inclusive education to boys with special educational needs, had an amazing visit to East Okement Farm where farmers Helen and John welcomed a small group of teenage boys. The boys had a great day getting stuck into farm tasks such as feeding the goats and sheep, meeting the working collie puppies and other farm dogs, handling the hens and going for an exciting farm walk down to the river. The boys also managed to fit in a bit of football before they went home. The boys were absolutely buzzing when they left and would love to visit again.



Huccaby Farm welcomed a small group of year 5 children from Marlborough Primary in Plymouth, where they had a farm walk and became very fond of the neighbour's horses. Farmers Shirley and Dave had already started lambing so there were lots of lambs to see and cuddle (with lots of essential handwashing afterwards). Calving had also started, so the children were able to safely get close to a baby calf and feel its soft coat.

Hatchwell Farm was visited by Chudleigh Knighton Primary, and as lambing at the farm hadn't started, the farmers Sandra and Cameron demonstrated lambing by using a toy sheep and toy lambs. This was really popular and the children were all able to get involved and gain a greater understanding of how a lamb is born. Sandra also had the children busy cleaning out her small stone sheds ready for lambing. The children loved this, working together in groups and getting the job done brilliantly! All the pregnant sheep had escaped from the pen so they had to be rounded up – again the whole class and teachers worked together to get the sheep back in. The children were very proud of themselves and felt a sense of being involved in real farming.

Back at Callisham Farm, farmers Scott and Jaime hosted three visits from each of the year 6 classes from Riverside Primary in Plymouth. They had a great few days herding sheep, feeding and petting the cows and sheep, and scratching the piglets. Time was spent exploring the farm, finding out about its rich flora and fauna and how this adds up to the rich biodiversity of the farm. One group paddled in the stream and another played on the bank and explored the woodland. The freedom, enjoyment and learning opportunities that all of the farm visits gave the children were really apparent.

With the full circle of the seasons, it was lambing time Greenwell Farm with two classes from Knowle Primary in Plymouth and two from Chaddlewood Primary in Plympton visiting. These were exciting visits with ewes busy having baby lambs throughout the visits. The children were able to witness new life coming into the world first hand. The lambing activity definitely added a sense of magic to the visits and would be something the children would remember forever. Farmer Mat did the walk up onto the common to demonstrate the depth of the peat bog and visit the Bronze age hut circle on the way back to the farm.

Russel at Bowden Farm hosted two great visits from St Mary's Primary, his local primary school in Buckfastleigh. The first was for the children of year 1 and 2, who really enjoyed their tractor ride around the farm and en route planting of some trees to form a new hedge. Russel explained that the hedge created habitats for many animals and birds. The second visit saw a repeat of activities but with greater depth and detail to engage the older year 2 and 3 class. All of the children had a great time seeing the dairy cows in the barn, herding the sheep and watching some new lambs skipping about on the farm. A walk included looking for flora and fauna in the hedgerows and listening to birdsong, which the children were very good at. While the *Making Connections: Food on Your Fork, Nature on the Farm* project had been chiefly aimed at year 5 and 6 children, we made an exception for this group, as the local primary school had been working on curriculum-related farming topics and already had a connection with their local farm.

The last of the visits were at Hatchwell Farm where the older year 5 and 6 children from Chudleigh Knighton visited, and at Greenwell Farm where Chaddlewood Primary finished their visits. The sun shone and the days finished on a really positive note. We were extremely lucky throughout the month of March as it remained dry for all visits thus making it a lot easier for the farmers, and much more enjoyable for the children and their teachers.



Key features of all the visits

All of the visits included a farm walk where the farmers showed the children around the farm talking about how nature is part of everything they do on the farm, how they work with nature to create and maintain rich habitats, and how they encourage wildlife to survive and to thrive.

The children were able to see how the farmers looked after their livestock on a day to day basis, joining in with some of the farm tasks such as feeding animals, moving sheep, tagging lambs, planting trees and cleaning out the sheep shed ready for lambing.

The children fully embraced all the tasks and went home from the visits feeling that they had learnt about farm life and had helped the farmer in some way that was very important to them.

The children brought a packed lunch with them so a picnic in the barn or field was a really nice way to bring everyone together mid-visit for a chat about what they had learnt during the morning, and allowed them to ask the farmer some questions. For some of the children, who were a little quieter and didn't want to ask anything in front of the group, this was a very important time as they could chat with the farmer directly, and really good conversations about farming, food and nature happened.

We were very conscious throughout all our visits of the need for hygiene on a farm, particularly before eating lunch, and were rigorous about handwashing. The handwash trailer mentioned earlier made this easy to manage on the farms without their own facilities, along with the Portaloo hire.





Impact

For some children this was a new experience for them – a first trip to Dartmoor and sometimes a first visit to a farm – and you could tell as soon as they stepped off the bus that they were a little apprehensive in new surroundings, with unfamiliar noises and the farmyard smells. By the end of the trip the children were completely at ease with being on a farm and the new environment, and this was so lovely to see. The farmers felt a great sense of reward that they had made a really positive impact on each child who visited their farm that day.

To see the children become so free and happy in a new environment has been the most rewarding part of the project. For the farmers, seeing the impact that they have made on the children in such a short space of time is a real incentive for them to want the project to continue and grow.

At the beginning of the *Making Connections: Food on Your Fork, Nature on the Farm* project, some of the farmers were apprehensive as many had never had visitors to the farm, let alone hosted a whole class of school children. They were uncertain of the potential risks to their visitors, and how these risks could be mitigated and worked around, so that they could provide a safe environment and welcome children and teachers onto their farms. But with the experience of the engagement officer – living on a farm and working in education – who carried out a pre-visit and all of the risk assessments, their minds were soon set to rest. After hosting a first visit with the support of the engagement officer, the feeling of pride for sharing what they do for a living and the impact it had on the children was a big confidence booster for most farmers, who went on to host many more visits over the year.



Towards the end of the project ten more visits were able to be offered, with other farmers keen to experience hosting a visit and getting involved. The CKSD (Collaborative Knowledge Share Days) had a great impact, not only for the host farmer moving forward but for the visiting farmers. The farmers' confidence over the year has grown immensely and they have become fully on-board with the project. It is noted however that two of the farmers felt that, although they successfully hosted their first visit, they did not want to host more visits, despite encouragement from the engagement officer. Reasons for this were explored, and it was established that they would always be welcome to rejoin a future project.

New Connections

New connections have been made between Shallowford Farm and PCiP, which has been a great success with over 300 children from Plymouth visiting Dartmoor farms over the past year, and two school classes staying at East Shallowford Farm for residentials for three to five days at a time. This kind of stay has a huge beneficial impact on each child's life experience and provides memories that will last a lifetime.

Women in Farming

There has been a strong influence of women in farming throughout the project with women farmers hosting many of the visits. They have made new connections between themselves through hosting visits, helping other farmers host their visits, sharing advice and ideas. The women in farming breakfasts held monthly at Tor Royal farm hosted by Justine have been a great place to network and make new connections for staff at Shallowford.

Lessons Learned

There have been many lessons learned over the past year and many barriers that have needed to be overcome.

1

Communication with schools and planning time

Due to the initial difficulties with recruitment of the engagement officer position, the initial connection between farms and schools started before the risk assessments of the new farms had been conducted. We have learnt in this project that when contacting schools to invite them for a visit, we needed to have farms and dates ready to offer, to enable the schools to plan early.

We have learnt that schools plan for school trips in the previous term, other than in exceptional cases where they have managed to organise a class visit within a few weeks. In most cases, teachers plan their out of school time up to six months in advance, so in some cases time and plans had already been allocated when they received our invitation for a fully funded visit.

2

Plannings trips with the seasons

In planning the timing of the visits, we carefully considered the seasons, and what each season could bring to a visit to a farm. The visits which took place through the winter months were very beneficial as the animals were often in the barns for the winter and the children especially like getting close to the animals, which made this possible. However the extra challenges of the weather, transport to farms, and wet-weather clothing made it more difficult on the whole. We managed to avoid all of December and January, as the expectation that the weather could be particularly poor and that schools would be super busy with Christmas and new year settling back in, was just too difficult to plan around. This was a good decision!

At the beginning and end of the project we were able to visit farms during the lambing season, and the experience that this provided was a highlight of the project.

Summer and autumn were great times to explore farms, and enjoy nature walks, but the animals were out on the moor, so not so accessible.

3

Access to farms

Access to some of the Dartmoor farms was challenging for coaches, and this was one of the factors which needed addressing early on. Each visit needed considerable planning and an understanding of the area, together with good communication between the engagement officer,

farmer, coach company and teacher, so that all were aware of the access and the correct sized coach could be booked. As the year went along we built up a rapport with the coach drivers and companies too, which also helped a lot. The drivers would turn up at a farm and say cheerfully "Oh no, not you again!"

4

Cost of transport

That the fully funded trip included the transport was imperative as schools are not going on as many trips, due to not being able to afford the transport. On average, the cost of each day's transport was £400, with the cheapest coach travel being £180. On one visit, the children were able to walk from the school to the farm, and on another trip the Scout group had organised parents for the transport.

There were also a limited number of coach companies available, and there were several trips where schools had to reschedule due to not being able to book a coach. The engagement officer was pivotal in helping schools identify and book coaches, and again, planning well in advance was pivotal.

5

School staff time

For schools, the high teacher and adult ratios needed for off-site visits proved challenging due to staff cuts, more parents working and therefore not being able to offer their time to help, and school staff covering many different roles. This was particularly difficult in small schools, where staff are needed to cover many different roles during the day, making it hard for schools to have sufficient teaching staff to enable visits.



6

Weather-proof clothing

Given the school visits were to farms, we recommended all children should wear wellies and waterproofs to protect their clothing and add a level of biosecurity. However, as anticipated, we found that many children do not have wellies or waterproofs as in their normal day-to-day lives they just don't need them. Many parents cannot afford the extra expense for something that would be seldom used. Also, there were some children who just didn't want to wear them because they weren't cool or very comfortable. East Shallowford Farm came to the rescue with their big supply of wellies to lend out for visits. Some of the children who had been on residential at Shallowford had worn the waterproofs before, so this helped to break down this barrier. The engagement officer would offer wellies and waterproofs in the initial email and then email the school again, a few days in advance, to find out if any of the children needed them and which sizes. These were then taken along to each visit for the children to use. This proved a very valuable resource and many children took up the offer, which enhanced their experience. Luckily throughout the whole project we had only had a few visits where rain came in and the activities had to be tweaked a little but this didn't dampen the children or teachers spirits, and luck was very much with us throughout the year.

7

Communication, communication, communication

The extra communication needed throughout the visit from start to finish by the engagement officer, farmer and teacher became more and more apparent. The farmer and teacher communication became much easier to organise as the project went on, and was imperative for the smooth running of any visit.

Farmer and coach driver communication became a really important part of a successful visit as no one knows the access to their farm as well as the farmer, so this was essential.



Legacy

We are determined that this is just the start of something much bigger for the future. It has become the norm that children do not spend enough time outdoors in nature. Instead screens and the inside of the classroom for learning are becoming every day for many children, and this is very damaging for development and wellbeing.

The *Making Connections: Food on Your Fork, Nature on the Farm* project has been a huge success for all. Not only have many school children across Devon benefitted from getting outside, learning about where their food comes from and being able to access farm life, but the farmers too have learnt new skills, met new people and engaged with the public about how food is produced, and how they work with nature in everything they do on the farm. We are hoping that after getting children out onto farms this will open up new opportunities that they never knew existed. These could be in possible future career opportunities, or advanced education in the agricultural sector when they are older, getting out and about on Dartmoor, and seeing the world through different eyes than they did before.

The ability to pilot this project and test new ideas has enabled us to develop the project into a second phase with a renewed focus on nature and funded via a grant from the NLHF Sowing Seeds. We will be able to offer more fully funded school visits to our Dartmoor farms and hope to get more schools and farmers on board.

We asked the children to tell us what they will remember from their farm experience

The children's feedback on the *Making Connections: Food on Your Fork, Nature on the Farm* project has been mostly really positive. There have been the general "the farm smells" or "it's really mucky" but these comments were very few and far between.

In conclusion, here are the children's and teachers' thoughts in their own words:

I loved it, but just wasn't sure when big animals came up to me if they would be friendly, but it was so good.

How to do stuff, how things work.

The fact that the farm is passed down and how nice you two were.

I will remember feeding the cows, stroking the pigs, trying to feed the sheep and all the fun times.

My favourite cow was 158. I named her Milky Bar.

Seeing the little lamb and pigs. Thank you for letting us come to your farm. I loved it!

Thank you for an amazing trip.

Seeing the children with the lambs! Their faces were ecstatic when holding them. Some children, who were nervous, even stroked the lamb. It was a very sweet moment.

They loved everything. Meeting and greeting the animals, the walk and meeting the family.

Everything! My favourite trip!

One child who has additional needs had the biggest smile on their face and didn't want to let the lamb go!

It was a fantastic opportunity for our children! They absolutely loved the whole trip. We were lucky to have such fantastic weather that day as well.

It exceeded all expectations!

Dartmoor Hill Farm Project



Dartmoor
HILL FARM
PROJECT

Objective

This element of the project was compiled by the Dartmoor Hill Farm Project (DHFP), working alongside ten farmers whose businesses reflected a cross section of the DFA membership: in terms of scale, location and approach. It sought to expand upon the combined effort of the DFA with multiple outcomes; to build greater awareness of the wider environmental benefits delivered by their members, to collate key information about the value of farming supporting educational activity and to contribute to a positive overview of activity and impacts as part of the DFA 'brand' within the public domain.

For the farmers, it provided an opportunity to reflect on the current position of the farm more holistically; not just production and land management, but environmental assets or less tangible values such as how these farms support the landscape, identity and heritage of Dartmoor. With agricultural policy placing greater emphasis on environmental goods rather than production, the aim was to help qualify and quantify current provision and future opportunities, linked to the current Agri Environment Scheme offers. The resulting information provided an objective, light touch review for each of the farms who took part, to highlight some of their unique positives delivered towards good environmental management – and insight into collectively what this may represent for DFA as a whole.

The Dartmoor landscape represents strong opportunities to illustrate and advocate the positive links between traditional, extensive farming practices and principles of environmentally supportive approaches which provide confidence, local sourcing and traceability for their consumer audience.



Summary

With a broad range of livestock farms engaged, there were no expectations as to the final output figures, however, some of the 'top' numbers that emerged were quite significant. The approach aimed to capture common features that all farms would consistently have present to ensure they were relatable, and which fundamentally reflect a working, Dartmoor farm.

Some of these elements are illustrated here as headline figures and further expanded in the following sections – all of which has been extracted from the ten individual reports generated with and for the farmers.

5 DFA top facts from 10 example farms

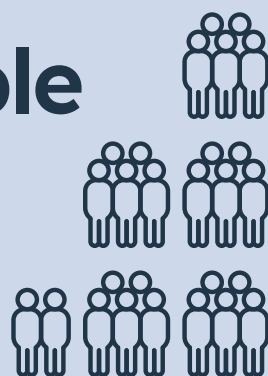
**1,894 hectares
& 14 Commons**

Total area of land managed; owned, tenanted & short term rental.
Plus Common Grazing rights on 14 different Commons on Dartmoor.

Employs

27 People

On farm the businesses employ 27 people (inc. owners)
10 out of 10 farms also have jobs off the farm



Total of

**8,264
livestock**



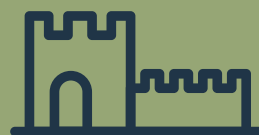
5,820 breeding ewes | 2,360 Cattle | 82 Ponies | 2 Pigs
8 out of 10 kept 2 or more species

**182 kms
of Boundaries**

Total linear length of boundaries is 182kms.
Includes hedges & drystone walls both internal and external.



36



Historic features

A total of 36 historic features from official records are maintained on farm.
Including: 6 Scheduled Ancient Monuments

Approach and Data

Available information and data were gathered and assessed, initially by DHFP including digital (GIS) mapping and publicly available records behind key themes that were replicated across each farm, e.g. Government datasets for Priority Habitats, river catchments or Historic records, which were overlaid with individual farm SBIs (Single Business Identifiers). These were used in discussion with the farmers as a basis and ground truthed or expanded upon in the field when visited. Other first-hand or anecdotal evidence was provided by the farms, supplemented by photographs.

As an audit and assessment, it sought to consider the broader values of the group contributing to their overall 'worth' for the DFA brand and themselves individually in terms of sustainability, by aligning with the 10 Goals (as identified below) in the UK Government Environmental Improvement Plan, which are referenced throughout the reports aiming to illustrate the positives delivered for society as part of livestock farming in the uplands. These were chosen as useful and familiar themes that consumers can relate to and will help support the wider marketing messages and communications from DFA and this project.

The 10 Environmental Goals



Thriving plants
and wildlife



Clean air



Clean and
plentiful water



Managing
exposure to
chemicals and
pesticides



Maximise our
resources,
minimise our
waste



Using resources
from nature
sustainably



Mitigating and
adapting to
climate change



Reduced risk
of harm from
environmental
hazards



Enhancing
biosecurity



Enhanced beauty,
heritage, and
engagement
with the natural
environment



Each report summarised findings across six aggregated and relevant themes, to ensure the reports were consistent and illustrated these in an initial high-level overview chart (as above), which aimed to demonstrate varying scales of provision for environmental assets. These are simple “low to high” scales as viewed objectively from the findings.

Although of value to society, few of these assets may yet be quantified or directly rewarded – part of this pilot exercise was to begin to identify and seek to quantify their scale and generate awareness of these goods and services that farming contributes to society – both individually and as part of the Dartmoor Farmers Association, what this may represent collectively.

Within each section, references were made to further reading or resources that evidenced data, quoted case studies or underpinned fundamental scientific principles.



Results/Findings

These are broken out below to reflect the six different themes identified in the farm reports and from there, highlighting some of the key points. Broader background information was collected to assist with setting the scene, but not necessarily fully listed here.

Nb. Figures are rounded up to the nearest whole number and some are based on estimated measurements from farmer input or digital mapping.

Field and Moor

The total area of land managed between the ten farms was **1,894 hectares** (or 4,680 acres), of which 1,018 ha or 54% was owned and the balance rented or a mixture of agreements such as grass keep.

Unsurprisingly, a very high proportion of ground (**96%**) is managed as permanent pasture with less than 4% overall managed for arable or other crops.

In addition, 8 out of 10 have Commons Grazing Rights which were in place across a total of **14 different Commons** – these are an important element sustaining the farm business.

Whether rough grazing, low input or improved; grassland provides a list of positive environmental attributes including the fact that continuous cover reduces the risk of soil erosion, supports biodiversity and pollinators from a rich sward of plant species and the rooting structure helps with infiltration of rainfall to reduce surface run off. Permanent pasture means minimal disturbance to soils and better resilience to weather extremes such as drought (Plantlife).



Soils

Each farm had its broad soil type identified using the Cranfield 'Soilscape' dataset which is a simplified guide distilled from the numerous geographic soil associations. These highlight a number of key characteristics, e.g. its texture, levels of fertility, capacity for carbon and supporting land cover. The most common Soilscape found across the ten farms was "Freely draining acid loamy soils over rock" and accurately suggests it supports "Steep acid upland pastures dry heath and moor: bracken gorse and oak woodlands" (Cranfield).

The majority of farmers had both a nutrient and soil management plan in place (**8 and 7 out of 10 respectively**); which combine to ensure this fundamental resource is protected, both for financial efficiency and environmental protection. Good soil and nutrient management support productivity as optimal grass growth to raise livestock, whilst ensuring the soil can accommodate rainfall to avoid run off, allows nutrients to be fully available for uptake by plants and not lost into the environment, sequesters and stores Carbon, and hosts a diverse range of fauna including worms and micro-organisms. It has been estimated that 25% of our biodiversity exists in our soils (Soil Association).

Facing potential increases in extreme weather events and climate change, the ability to maintain healthy soils are extremely important not only to support food production, but for their ability to sequester Carbon. As 96% of the farmed area considered is under permanent pasture – the risk of weathering or erosion is mitigated, while roots help improve structure.

Water

Dartmoor is the source of a number of important rivers, their headwaters on the high ground join a multitude of springs and streams which tumble to the coast – across moors and through farmland. Incredibly important, these supply drinking water for the population of the southwest as well as individually on farm, for livestock and for crops.

An estimate was mapped on each farm to understand the length of rivers and streams that crossed or bordered their land. The total linear length of these watercourses, of all sizes, was **26.4 kilometres** (or 16.4 miles) ... roughly the same as following the River Dart from Totnes downstream all the way into the bay beyond Dartmouth. This length is made up of both single and double riverbank ownership, so the



management of this by the farmers is important to protect water quality but also the freshwater habitat and species that live here; fish, birds, invertebrates and more.

Upland river systems respond rapidly to weather events; 'flashy' by nature they rise and fall to accommodate Dartmoor's notoriously high rainfall. Managing adjacent land within a river catchment helps to balance the river base flows to reduce impact of flood events and maintain regular flow during drier seasons.

Habitats

Within the mosaic of fields, a range of habitats contribute to the overall provision of habitats and the species they support for shelter and food.

These often represent refuge for wildlife, due to limited disturbance from humans and urbanisation – and in certain cases the habitat may support species uniquely endemic to Dartmoor where important populations remain.

Based on Natural England data for Priority Habitats, there were **23 records** listed across these farms with the most prolific being deciduous woodland which totalled approximately **31 hectares** (76 acres), which was rarely managed as woodland and constituted small pockets or field corners. Overall, total woodland was estimated at **58 hectares** including areas not recorded as priority habitat and **13 hectares** were coniferous. At a time when there is a push to plant new woodland – existing, established areas should not be overlooked for their contribution to nature, habitat or carbon sequestration.

The benefits to livestock farmers have also been illustrated via the Pontbren project in Wales, providing shelter, foraging, shade and micro-climate – all of which may become more important for climate resilience (Woodland Trust).

Other Priority Habitats present include upland heath, blanket bog, dry acid grassland, lowland meadows, purple moor grass and rush pasture. These figures do not consider land managed on Commons, or similarly where land adjacent to farms may represent connectivity for nature and may also hold designations. The value of upland habitats is recognised for both flora and fauna, which collectively form part of the iconic landscape of Dartmoor which is managed through traditional farming practices, e.g. Upland heath, which comprises dwarf shrub species such as heathers, bilberry and gorse or wetter areas with mosses, sphagnums or cotton grass – particularly important for a range of bird species and invertebrates; notably the Cuckoo, Marsh Fritillary Butterfly or Blue Ground Beetle (DNPA).



Boundaries

Livestock farms need robust boundaries to assist with stock management and animal welfare. The rocky tors and landscape of Dartmoor have provided plenty of materials in the form of granite, which has been used over generations to build and maintain the network of hedges and walls that form these mosaics across the hills and valley contours. These generally take the form of Devon hedges and banks, or dry-stone walls on the higher ground immediately bordering open moor.



182 kms
of hedges and
wall boundaries

The complexity of a Devon hedge is so much more than a row of shrubs, consisting of an earth core, often with some stone facing, vegetation &/or turf on top as well as shrubs and mature trees. Combined with a diverse herb layer including wildflowers, grasses, mosses or ferns – the biodiversity value of a true hedge is extensive. Hedges provide networks connecting nature through safe highways between habitat; they intercept and store water reducing run off, trap sediment as a result and protect water quality, represent a carbon store within its earth and woody content, and may contain notable historic or culturally significant features too – reflecting ancient field systems and local character. Dry stone walls are important for reptiles, birds and insects and are good indicators for air quality too from the extent and variety of lichens they support (NHM).

The boundaries across the ten farms were estimated using digital datasets to reflect their importance, collectively the total linear length was **182 kilometres** (or 113 miles). This combined both internal (76 kms) and external (106 kms) boundaries, which surmised that internally both sides were managed but not externally – this may vary elsewhere, e.g. Roadsides or footpaths vs. neighbouring owners and hence be underestimated.

182 kms is about the same as the distance from Princetown to Southampton as the crow flies!

Cultural and Historic

The traditional farms of Dartmoor reflect the continued work, skills and generational stewardship that has been embedded in the livelihoods of the families that live here. Dartmoor has extensive and well documented evidence of early settlements from Neolithic (from 4000 BC), and more so into Bronze and Medieval periods (DNPA).

Using digital Historic Records, each of the ten farms were assessed which revealed:

- **36 individual official records** (within the main farmstead), almost equally split between buildings or in-field monuments, comprising
 - 6 Scheduled Ancient Monuments
 - 30 Historic Environment records
 - 7 out of 10 farms were also managing land in Premier Archaeological Landscape (PAL)

Outside of these official records were numerous other features, the whole of which serve to remind us of the legacy of previous generations, their care for the land and the intangible value they may represent. Land is managed sensitively on these parcels to ensure these features remain for future generations and continue to tell their own story.

Other notable points relevant to the farms were the inter-generational practical and social skills,





5.4km

public footpaths & bridleways

knowledge and traditions that are passed on – or the value of those closeknit communities who work together and represent the social fabric of these rural and generally remote, landscapes. These skills and stories are often elusive to capture but reflect a wealth of knowledge that has been refined from generations of farmers who have developed bloodlines in livestock best suited to local conditions, kept traditions alive and know every corner of their land.

While not all the same farms may have engaged with the educational visits carried out as part of this FiPL funded programme (four have) across the DFA membership, three had existing public-facing activities such as open days, e.g. Lambing Live which has run for some time, or diversifications including hospitality with on-farm accommodation (see following section re; the Farm Business). The feeling was that this option may now be at saturation point even if they wished to follow this route, there may be issues to obtain Planning approval within a Protected Landscape, or the financial outlay does not represent a viable model.

Public access is however relevant, and half of the farms have either footpaths, bridleways or other rights of way on their farm which are maintained and managed for use.

These are estimated at a total **5.4 kilometres** directly on the farms, but it is noteworthy that this connects with the larger open access areas of the moor and connectivity with major routes such as the Dartmoor Way or the Two Moors Way.

Farm Businesses; Economics and Resilience

The most important element for farmers; the economics, facts and figures around the farm business enterprise. This aimed to capture not only a snapshot of the assets in terms of livestock, but the input from the family and how the business may be adapting or diversifying.

Across 10 farms:



5,820
breeding ewes



2,360
cattle



82
ponies



Livestock numbers* demonstrated

- All 10 farms reared cattle
- 8 out of 10 reared sheep
- 5 out of 10 kept Ponies
- Only 1 out of 10 kept pigs (at that time)

(*Nb. Stock numbers based on input from farmers, e.g. 'Breeding ewes' and 'Cattle' as overview figures, does not account for total sheep inc. lambs but as indication for report).

The farms were from random selection and engagement, with a mix of scale from 24 to over 500 hectares in terms of area managed, therefore the associated level of labour, input or potential for adding value or diversification would also clearly vary. Despite these supporting **27 people** directly employed across the ten farms – every one of the ten farms already has members of the family taking off farm jobs to supplement the business, and the majority already have diversified in addition to that while a further two are considering new ideas.

In terms of multiple species grazing

- All 10 farms reared cattle
- 8 out of 10 reared sheep
- 5 out of 10 kept Ponies
- Only 1 out of 10 kept pigs (at that time)

The Farm Business

Off-farm jobs
10 out of 10

Current
diversifications
6 out of 10

Considering
diversification
2 out of 10

These additional incomes have been developed on top of any existing Government Agri Environment Schemes (AES) such as Countryside Stewardship (CS) or the more recent Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) offers, which are designed to support the farming industry and incentivise broader environmental work in parallel with traditional farm production: Every one of the ten farms who took part have some level of current scheme in place, but midway through this project both the capital grant and then SFI2024 schemes were withdrawn without notice; negating opportunities for farms to review or consider changes or additions, and therefore has not been expanded upon within the reports.

Despite this, in each report per farm a final review suggested a brief SWOT (Strengths / Weaknesses / Opportunities / Threats) reflection offered as an objective view. Common positives included levels of current investment and infrastructure, knowledge and open mindedness for new ideas, family and community links to enable collaboration.

Whilst the limitations included restrictions of current or unknown future schemes (despite significant work having gone into developing these actions), lack of tenure or uncertainty for those with tenancy agreements, and external threats such as disease impacting animal welfare, movements and therefore sales.

Overall the farmers, without exception, had ambition and passion for the livestock sector and ideas that they aim to take forward in the medium term, as well as supporting the next generation within their families to continue in the future.



Overview of findings

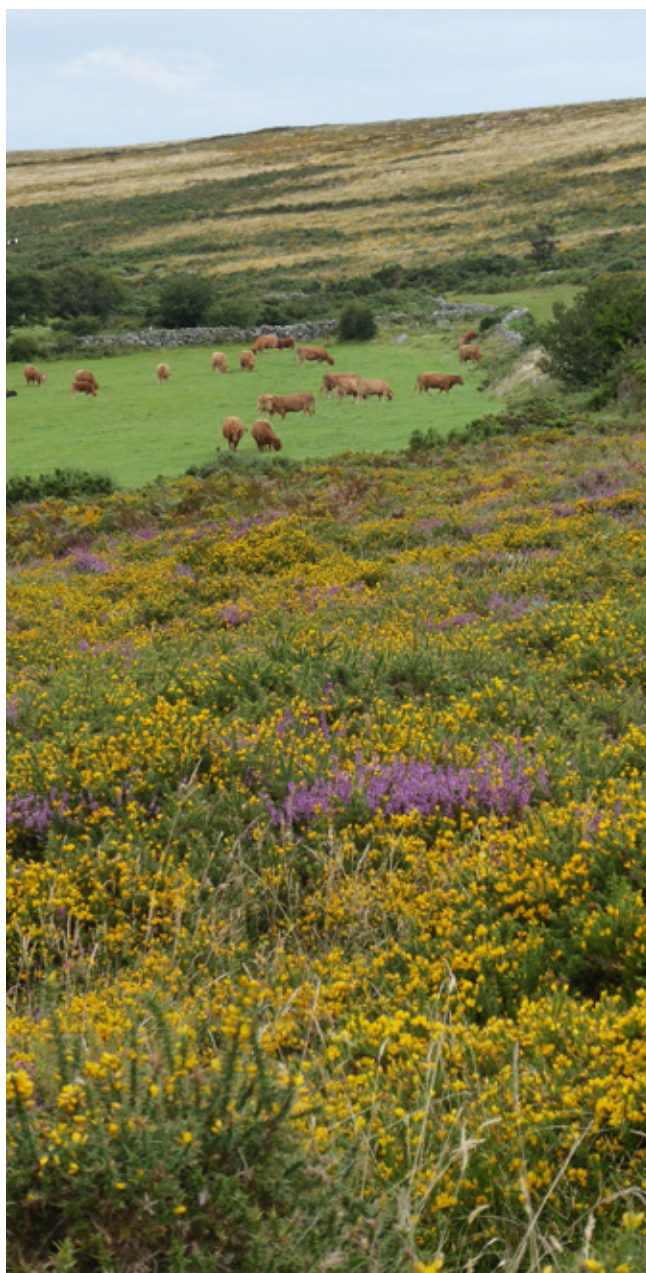
A key part of the ambition for this DFA work was to identify and highlight the uniquely individual features of member farms, but also collectively to try to quantify what this represented overall in terms of environmental assets as well as the usual 'livestock & deadstock' valuations of a farm business. These less obvious values contribute to the continued management of what makes Dartmoor an iconic landscape, through good farming practices and working within the community.

Given the shift that the Agricultural Transition represents, it is increasingly important to prioritise the resilience of any farm business; both economically, environmentally and socially – to capitalise on what may be available to complement existing practice on farm or consider alternatives if feasible. As the main schemes have temporarily been withdrawn, it was not possible to elaborate on these as originally intended as part of the reports. It was clear that for some, the situation has put a brake on their farm business, with historic agreements that no longer represent true value nor offer any alternative route, despite their willingness and having invested in preparatory work – hopefully this can be realised in due course.

The environmental reports were effectively telling the farmer what they already had, this was not news. However, it was offered hopefully to present a different perspective both on an individual and collective level. The DFA has over 100 members; to extrapolate some of the key findings from this – 10% across the whole reveals a much bigger potential impact – and this could be integrated into their wider marketing. (e.g. For illustration only):

- 1,894 ha total managed area becomes 18,940 ha (or almost 20% of the Dartmoor National Park area)
- 182 kms of boundary becomes 1,820 kms (further than Lands' End to the Shetland Isles)
- 58 ha woodland becomes 580 ha woodland (or ~ 580 International rugby pitches)
- 26.4 kms of river & stream becomes 264 kms (longer than the whole of the river Wye)

The ability for these figures to be achieved may be tenuous across the entire DFA membership due to variations in farm scale, geography or engagement – but there are real opportunities to build on the positive messages that they suggest as a collaboration of farmers and one which supports the very landscape they manage. Not least, it underpins the story of the DFA and the families within that community that produce high quality food: these environmental features are already present, potentially overlooked, but should be part of the identity that is the DFA collectively and considered key assets.



Acknowledgement

Dartmoor Hill Farm Project would like to thank all the DFA farmers who participated in the data collection, visits and chats that made this possible. Your endless hard work and tenacity are part of what makes upland farming and Dartmoor so unique.



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Shallowford Farm
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