Michael Morpurgo and his wife Clare founded the charity Farms for City Children at Nethercott Farm, deep in Devon river country, back in 1976. We now have three farms: Treginnis Isaf on the beautiful Pembrokeshire coast opened in 1989 and Wick Court, in a bend of the River Severn in Gloucestershire, opened in 1998.

All year round, we offer groups of urban schoolchildren a unique first-hand experience of living and working on a real farm in the heart of the countryside. Their carefully structured, week-long stay offers many amazing new experiences - from close contact with animals, to marvelling at the night sky - and a real proximity to nature.

The children take full responsibility for the work they do, caring for the animals and the land. The experience stretches them physically, emotionally and intellectually in ways not possible in the classroom, building their confidence and nurturing a real sense of achievement. It is an intense opportunity with many links to the National Curriculum, including conservation, sustainability, food production and good citizenship.

“Farms For City Children provides the most challenging, stimulating educational experience available for children. It provides a purposeful, multi-faceted learning environment.

Class Teacher, Mansfield Green School, Birmingham

“Our children need to experience a life away from an estate. It gives them hope and a different perspective. It changes their lives with fantastic memories of an amazing experience when they felt safe, happy, excited and proud of themselves…”

Literacy Co-ordinator, Beacon Junior School, Falmouth

‘Taking the Shetland down to pasture’ (©Chris Chapman)

Print making with found objects at Nethercott
Healthy eating at Nethercott Farm

The children also come to learn about the origins of what they eat. They are directly involved with the full cycle of food production: from field and barn, to kitchen, stove and dining room. Time and again we witness how the farm experience and outdoor lifestyle, combined with a healthy diet and positive social interaction at mealtimes has a hugely beneficial effect on the children. It is a powerful mix.

‘Longing for tea’ (© Chris Chapman)

We want children to develop healthy eating practices that will become embedded for life. We use seasonal produce from our own gardens, or from local suppliers to provide appetising and varied, home-cooked meals – and we pride ourselves in catering for a great range of dietary requirements. For some children, regular shared mealtimes are a novelty in themselves. There is an immense satisfaction at having worked to produce the food on their table. Plus, of course, there is the chance to swap stories about their working day on the farm!

Nethercott is a typical commercial Devon mixed farm with a herd of milking cows, a large flock of breeding ewes, bullocks, poultry and donkeys. Crops include barley, hay and silage. Two years ago we introduced wiener pigs on the farm, which the children feed and look after. They know that the pigs go for slaughter at the butcher’s shop in the nearby market town, but they rarely, if ever, react in a squeamish way. Instead, valuable debate about meat eating and vegetarianism may ensue! For those who eat meat, the pork joints, sausages and ham are regularly served and much appreciated at the farm table.
‘Winter Warmers’ at Wick Court

Wick Court is a grade II* listed manor house with an intact, square-shaped moat. The farm specialises in local, rare and traditional breeds including Gloucester cattle, Gloucestershire Old Spot pigs, Cotswold sheep and many different kinds of poultry. Our farmer produces single and double Gloucester cheese on the farm. Wick Court also has a busy stable yard, where the children help care for a team of show ponies. During their stay, the children also work at a neighbouring commercial dairy farm, to illustrate the contrast in farming styles.

This year we introduced special ‘Winter Warmer’ stays at Wick Court, with an even greater emphasis on food production and cooking. The five days carefully balanced outdoor work with time for reflection, creativity and fun. The children churned butter and cheese from the farm milk and pressed apple juice from the traditional varieties in the farm orchard. They drew up their own menus based on a study of the farm produce, then prepared and presented their own dishes for a grand feast on the last night.
Treginnis Isaf

The slate roofed, whitewashed farmstead at Treginnis dates back to 1284. Situated on a stunning headland near St David’s, it is the most westerly farm in Wales. Treginnis is an organic farm, with some 900 sheep and a small herd of Dexter cattle.

In addition the children help look after a large variety of poultry, horses, donkeys, milking goats and a breeding herd of pigs. The original farm buildings were specially converted on behalf of Farms for City Children into an award-winning, cheerful and child-friendly living space.

We have redesigned our vegetable garden at Treginnis this year and introduced 30 raised beds, 29 of which are named after the schools visiting during the year. Our aim is to make the farm self-sufficient in staple vegetables such as potatoes, leeks and onions.

Treginnis is a traditional sheep farm, where visiting children may well be lucky enough to witness the birth of a lamb. They help bottle feed the orphan lambs as well. In addition, there is a wealth of plant, animal and marine life on the headland. The children will marvel at the strange cry of buzzards overhead and may well stumble upon seals in the quiet cove close to the farm…

pure magic in the making.

www.farmsforcitychildren.org