

The City Kids Fight Back!

In recent history (by that, I mean in the last 80 years), British people have had a somewhat fragmented relationship with the land and connections to food. We have had times when the ordinary 'towny' has had to don a pair of wellies, grab a spade and 'Dig for Victory'. Working class families were 'growing their own' in post-war Britain, gently guided by the oven-gloved hand of the Ministry of Food. There were common land co-operatives in the middle of cities where folks worked together to produce food. But for most of us, these were merely the punctuations in our historical connections with the land and food production.

Certainly my generation of thirty-something city-dwellers have relied on 'the others' to produce our food. It magically and conveniently appears in our shops and we can thoughtlessly gather all that we need to survive for a month in an hour of trolley-pushing mayhem. And who can blame us? Not only have we lost (if we ever truly found) our connection with the land and how our food is produced, but we city kids have been made to feel that it is not our place to trouble our crime-filled little heads with what goes on in the countryside. How can we re-connect if we don't understand what we are re-connecting to? This is where education and exposure to the countryside play a crucial role in helping people understand and appreciate the land, the people who work it and issues surrounding farming and farming methods. So how did I come to re-connect?

After qualifying as a teacher and teaching in Birmingham's inner-city primary schools for a number of years, I decided to hang up my shoes, pack away my skirts and kiss my nails goodbye. I took over the management of a semi-rural educational children's farm where to this day, I am responsible for all of the teaching, animal husbandry, administration and finance on site. I enjoy my job immensely and love to see inner-city children getting so much out of visiting the farm. Through a farm experience, the next generation are beginning to understand where their food comes from and why farming is important. My job has given me an amazing amount of confidence also, and the opportunity to learn new skills and appreciate the rural environment. As a result of this experience, I have decided that...wait for it... I am going into farming!

My goal is to start up a small-scale, free-range, rare-breed pig farm. I despise the way pigs (and other animals) are farmed in both this country and abroad and I am also acutely aware of the need to bring more attention to this issue. To do this, people must experience the difference between the poor-quality, cruelly farmed, bland 'cardboard' they buy in the supermarkets and the type of meat that comes from an animal that has been raised in its natural habitat, at a natural pace and with a healthy, natural diet. This is what I am passionate about doing. I would also like to continue my work with inner-city children so would love to open up my pig farm to school and community groups so that from an early age, children know about where their food comes from and how

we need to be more environmentally and ethically aware with respect to our farming methods.

However – I am facing one crucial problem. As a non-land owner, I need to be able to rent land for my pigs to live on. Farms and fields surround me but can I find anyone who is willing to let me rent land for pigs? Absolutely not. All I need is 5 or 10 acres (not even prime grazing land) but despite rolling, empty fields and woodland areas, nobody is willing to help, despite me waving cash under their noses! I am someone who wants to add to my local community. I want to show that it is possible to make farming work – not only financially (because this is key to saving farming in this country), but ethically. I have done all the sums, calculated my expenses, worked out a business plan and I know I can make an acceptable living doing this. I also know that this type of small-scale, localised farming is part of the solution to feeding the population. Small-scale, British farming helps to reduce the dependence we have on imported, inferior products and also helps to lessen the stranglehold that foreign Governments have on British food security.

There just seems to be so much potential if only we could SHARE THE LAND. People benefit, animals benefit, the environment benefits and the economy, long-term, benefits. So I am calling on farmers and other land-owners to give us city kids a chance! I know I am not the only one who would like the opportunity to make good use of the land (maybe we don't all want to be pig farmers), but I know that many people would like to grow fruit and veg or raise some chickens for meat and eggs.

So if any land owners in my area are reading this and want to support a new, exciting enterprise that will benefit the whole community, educate people, and act as a beacon of hope and inspiration to other 'realists and dreamers' then drop me and e-mail now!

Please contact Becky Lynch at boxeybrown@yahoo.co.uk or check out the school farm that I run at www.chapmans.bham.org.uk.