

# Rushall Farm and Collings Hanger Farm



**School Food Matters** looked at two farms that have enjoyed strong school/farm links. Both farmers recognise the importance of farm visits and look forward to extending these links, to supply school kitchens.

**Rushall Farm** is a 963 acre farm in Berkshire. In 2000, Rushall began farming organically and is registered with the Soil Association. It farms arable, and their beef is grown for Marks & Spencer and their lamb for Tesco and Sainsbury's.

In 1983 farm manager, John Bishop set up The John Simonds Trust, an educational charity formed to promote a love and understanding of agriculture and the countryside. The Trust also encourages leadership, self-confidence and mutual respect in young people. The Trust now hosts 400 school visits each year to nursery, primary and secondary children. As a charity, Rushall is not looking for profit but aim to break-even each year. The Trust employs one full-time and 14 part-time staff to manage the school visits. Ask any of them and they will be able to give you fantastic anecdotal evidence of the importance of school/farm visits by demonstrating the dearth of knowledge about farming amongst secondary school students:

**"This isn't a proper cow, where are your proper cows? Proper cows are black and white."**

**"Is the electric fence for killing the sheep... do you just throw them at it?"**

Rushall is exploring the possibility of supplying lamb to schools. It is already able to give schools a tangible link to the farm by giving some students the opportunity to make candles from beeswax harvested from Rushall's own bees.

**Collings Hanger Farm** is a 365 acre family owned business in Buckinghamshire, which has been running since 1923 and has been registered organic since 2000. The farm grows wheat, beef and free range turkeys.

Farm owner, Virginia Deradour has been hosting school visits since the 1980s. She too has first hand experience of the gaps in children's understanding of farming:

**When asked what clover was, a group of secondary school children all answered "margarine."**

Virginia is able to give her visitors hands-on links with her farming by using wheat. The children are able to see the wheat growing in the field, work with some harvested wheat to tease out the ears of corn, use a small stone mill to grind the corn into flour, then use that flour to bake bread in Virginia's bread maker. The children experience the wonderful aroma of freshly baking bread and are able to take their loaf back to school with them – although most of it gets eaten on the coach home!

In future Virginia hopes to convert her 18th century barn into a community centre. This will not only be somewhere warm and cosy for the children to have lunch, but will also provide a kitchen, so that children can extend their farm visit with cooking.

