



STUDENTS
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SUSTAINABILITY
UNITED KINGDOM



Fun, Learning
and Achievement



How Farming Can Cool The Planet

July 2023 to June 2024

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A Collaborative youth project between SOS-UK, FLAME and NFYFC

This project was originally funded to run March 2022 to June 2023 but it was so successful that we were awarded a year of continuation funding from Farming The Future. So, between July 2023 and June 2024 we have continued to bring together students, young farmers and FLAME members.

They've shared their views and ideas on food, farming, climate and nature at various events and farm visits. This has provided a unique opportunity for these young adults with different experiences and outlooks to share their stories and learn from each other.

Project partners

1. Students Organising for Sustainability (SOS-UK)
2. National Federation of Young Farmers' Clubs (NFYFC)
3. Youth branch of the Landworkers' Alliance (FLAME)

Key activities and outputs

The activities we planned during the continuation funding were in response to the feedback we received from participants during our project over the previous 18 months.

The five key activities are detailed below as well as links to the outputs that were produced as a result of the activities. As this project is all about giving a platform for youth voices we've also included quite a lot of quotes from participants at various events.

1) Tolhurst Organic farm visit (17 Sept 23)

Tolhurst Organic farm was a really interesting farm to visit as they are one of the longest running organic farms in the country; they've been organically certified since 1976.

They were also the first farm in the world to be certified Stockfree Organic. This means they don't use any animal by-products or animal manures on the farm.

The farm produces the same amount of carbon as the average household and yet supplies food to 400 families through their box scheme.

Eleven people joined this farm visit in which we spent the morning having an in depth farm tour, then a delicious lunch featuring loads of produce from the farm, and finally a Q&A session with Tolly (Iain Tolhurst).

At the end of the day we did some activities with them to find out what the group had gained from visiting the farm.

We asked the group to share something that they'll take away and do as a result of the farm visit and these were some of their responses...

"Attempt to make our own seed compost at work"

"Buy more produce from local farmers where possible"

"Benefits of larger scale organic agriculture, and that organic growing needs financial support!"

"I'll buy more organic fruit and never from a supermarket."

"Green manure, woodchip in leys"

We also asked them to tell us something they enjoyed about the farm visit...

"Everything - so much great info!"

"Lunch was amazing and great to eat the food we just talked about"

"All the wildlife around the farm was a pleasant surprise"

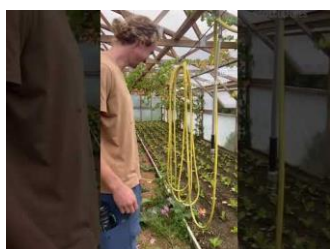
"Hearing directly from Tolly and Sparrow"

"The farm tour and the talk from Iain Tolhurst"

"Meeting new people exploring a new place"

"The variety of insects around the farm made me really happy!"

Prizes were offered to those that submitted the best short videos highlighting their experience, these were the winners:



2) FarmED: ‘Joint Ventures and Enterprise Stacking’ (19 Oct 23)

This event was organised by FarmED and promoted to young adults in the How Farming Can Cool The Planet project partnership.

The event provided the opportunity to learn about diversifying a farming enterprise, helped new entrants looking for land or underutilised land that needs managing, and shared matching business models, opportunities and agreements that work for both parties.



Speakers:

- Alison Rickett from 3Keel highlighting the all-industry publication, *Business Models to Unlock Future Farming Potential*.
- Tom Cackett from Savills providing expertise in organic farming, regenerative farming, environmental stewardship, re-wilding, direct retailing and deer farming.
- Tim May from Kingsclere Estate and his work with new entrants, enterprise development and the annual ‘Pitch Up’ competition.

Tours:

- The Micro dairy with Hallam: a first generation farmer, running a calf at foot dairy at FarmED, or
- The Kitchen Garden with Emma - a Community Supported Agriculture Scheme. Veg boxes at a fixed price for 130 customers all year round with seasonally grown, zero waste, no-dig produce.

Participants were given a digital handbook to assist with business planning and unlocking innovation. Positive feedback on the content, resources, and networking opportunities was shared with FarmED but as this was an event we supported people to go to rather than organised ourselves we didn’t collect our own feedback.

3) Oxford Real Farming Conference (3-5 Jan 24)

This year was the 15th anniversary of ORFC, and with 3500 attendees and 400 speakers over 2 days and across 9 venues in central Oxford, it is now recognised as the world’s largest gathering of the agroecological movement.



We had six young adults (2 from each of our organisations) successfully apply to us for free tickets to attend the two day event. Unfortunately one of the students was unwell and couldn’t attend but the other five made the most of every minute they were there!

The highlight of the visit for How Farming Can Cool The Planet was the podcast that was recorded while we were there and features the diverse range of young voices that attended with us, from farmers to inner city students.

Devon young farmer and rural podcaster Dan Grist, did an incredible job interviewing all the participants in such a friendly relaxed way they were all happy to share their personal values and experiences with him, and with each other, via this podcast that has been shared widely:



NFYFC also did a write up of the event called 'Eye opening' experience challenges thinking on food and farming' that this has been shared on their website.

We asked the group to share the main thing they'll take away as a result of going to ORFC and these were some of their responses...

"Knowledge and connections, topics I've learned about old and new and alternative perspectives"

"How to craft a story around the issues that I care about, how to make it engaging and relatable and get other people beyond ORFC to care."

"The main thing I'll take away is my conversations with Arooj [one of the other How Farming Can Cool The Planet participants]. I learnt a lot about a religion and culture that I knew very little about. The mix of backgrounds amongst the group led to many fascinating conversations."

"Specifically, getting involved in the ORFC and the 'How Farming Can Cool the Planet' project was important to me because as we look to make these grand changes to the maladaptive economic and social structures that drive us towards a cliff edge, we find that one of the most regular, bonding and globally shared practices we have is eating together."

This is some of the feedback we received about how ORFC benefitted the participants personally...

"It's been amazing meeting people who are so passionate about food + farming and learning about this whole other ecosystem"

"This conference really helped me iron out the past five years of political education I've received and solidify an understanding of the steps we must take in order to transform our political, economic and social systems. "

"Great for networking, meeting new people, sharing ideas, feeling regenerated in my work, understanding my community. Really useful as I am currently looking for work to meet people at ORFC. great to meet everyone involved in the project too."

"ORFC24 has been really beneficial personally - it's helped me to network with other professionals within the industry, especially in communications."

"Other than making fantastic connections, getting a million links/resources to research and tonnes of new books to read, I really learnt just how powerful that feeling of being empowered by an empathetic community of solidarity can be."

"I was chatting to people from wildly different backgrounds and many with differing political leanings; however, finding a lot of common purpose between us and all with the intention of mitigating food poverty and reversing the climate crisis; 'this is what democracy looks like' (as the chant goes)."

"I don't know what my future holds, however, it is essential that I work in some capacity towards building a cooler, more regenerative planet for all. Getting to go to this conference has really been a game changer for me personally; I really have a feeling this will shape the rest of my life."

4) Low Carbon Agriculture 2024 (6 March 24)

Seven How Farming Can Cool The Planet participants were given the opportunity to seek out the latest advice and technology at the Low Carbon Agriculture 2024 event at the NAEC, Stoneleigh Park.

Low Carbon
Agriculture 2024

6-7 March 2024 | NAEC, Stoneleigh



It is the only event focused exclusively on low-carbon practices, technology, and energy solutions to achieve a profitable and sustainable farming future.

Our group were able to hear from experts, connect with farmers, see the latest technology and innovations, and find out how to manage land and soil sustainably

A prospective parliamentary candidate was invited to join the group's discussion over lunch to hear first-hand from young people about their thoughts on low carbon agriculture and farming policy. Further details are in the [write up](#) NFYFC wrote for their website.

We asked the group to share what their vision for a low carbon agriculture future would like and these were some of their responses...

"Sustainable soil management"

"Encourage maintenance of hedgerows and woodlands"

"Subsidies that consider the long term affects/sustainability and is it financially sustainable beyond the end date of subsidies?"

"More engagement with policymakers."

"Investigation of novel/new technologies in a practical farm setting."

"Freedom within funding schemes for innovative ideas."

"Would like to see more policymakers & MP's out on farm, rather than making decisions from offices."

"Re-frame carbon to other co-benefits"

"Have conversations with local MP's!"

"Balance between food production + environmentalism"

"AD + biogas, reducing imports"

"Financial opportunity and stability"

"Knowledge exchange"

"Connecting young farmers with students, and other young people"

"Local food justice - healthy food at a fair price for all people"

"Give young people a 'seat at the table'."

"Traceability and transparency within production and supply to show advantages of eating British."

"Realistic goal setting by policymakers"

"Improving resource efficiency."

5) Groundswell (26-28 June 24)

This was the 9th Groundswell event and the biggest yet with nearly 8000 people attending the 2 day regenerative agriculture festival at Lannock Manor Farm in Hertfordshire.



It's all about 'aiding farmers and those curious about regenerative agriculture to discover more, and to build relationships with likeminded people'.

Seventeen young people joined our final project event at Groundswell and gave a wide variety of reasons for wanting to attend conference discussions, demonstrations, and exhibits, including career enhancement, changing future farming practice, and practical examples of farming for degrees and PhDs.

The organisers of the event provide a clear description of their interpretation of regenerative farming for visitors:

"Regenerative Agriculture is quite simple: it is any form of farming, i.e. the production of food or fibre, which at the same time improves the environment. This primarily means regenerating the soil. It's a direction of travel, not an absolute. Five principles:

- 1) Don't disturb the soil
- 2) Keep the soil surface covered
- 3) Keep living roots in the soil
- 4) Grow a diverse range of crops
- 5) Bring grazing animals back to the land"

The project event offered young people the chance to meet up with the group at various times during the day, ensure some positive networking and sharing experiences, enjoying great food and socialising.

Groove Armada's Andy Cato contributed a double purpose of exhibiting and discussing his Wild Farmed wheat and bread enterprise as well as performing a set for everyone to enjoy in the evening.

With the help of some communications expertise from We Design the group were encouraged to share how Groundswell had inspired them. Talking with each other and summarising their thoughts by writing them on individual boards stimulated positive messages about food production and farming being part of the climate change solution. Very much a key component of our project's aims!

As a result we have been able to share the following via all our partnership's social network channels.

A short 1.5min video...



A selection of images and social media assets are saved on [Dropbox](#), they comprise of:

- Instagram stories (Portrait with a branded front and back image)
- Instagram Post (Portrait with a branded front and back image)
- Twitter Image (2 Landscape branded image)
- Photography (High Resolution Edited Images)

Examples of social media posts that have been shared: [NFYFC on Facebook](#), [LWA/FLAME on Instagram](#), and [SOS-UK on LinkedIn](#).

Prizes were also offered to those participants that submitted the best short videos highlighting their experience, these were the winners:



Some feedback we received about how Groundswell benefitted the participants personally...

“Opened new lines of conversation/new work systems to implement on the farm”

“Very beneficial- lots of organisations i hadn’t heard of which has given me more opportunities career wise”

“It has been really beneficial, for both personal interest and meeting like minded people (already planning on meeting some of the people I met!), for finding out about new organisations. And to also help with my PhD research”

“It’s been really useful to understand where nature conservation fits in with regenerative farming, and to get to know a bit more about the practical skills, like hedge laying for example , involved in making a farm more nature friendly”

“It’s been great to learn a bit more about why we are using regen practices at home, why we are seeing benefits and getting ideas for what else we can do to be better farmers”

“It’s really opened my eyes to how farming can be beneficial to the environment but also what changes I can make in my own business and the confidence to implement them”

“I found the talks very informative and attending the event had broadened my knowledge of regenerative agriculture. I also found it a very inspiring and positive environment.”

“I was able to immerse myself in an industry that I have little prior experience in, especially by talking to people at the variety of stalls. This also helped me gain confidence in myself as well as develop some ideas for future careers. Talking to other young people through the SOS-UK/FLAME/Young Farmers was also very beneficial - I was able to talk about theories that I have learnt at uni and hear about how they are used in practice”

We asked the group to share the main thing they'll take away as a result of going to Groundswell and this was some of their responses...

"Question everything, not as a sceptical but to understand it more"

"We need to keep collaborating and listening to each other, especially farmers with their knowledge. Also that policy is an important tool for change but change can also happen from the bottom up"

"That there are farmers who want to make their land better for nature and who aim to create healthy products that are better for humans as a consequence. Everything is connected!"

"There are so many good farmers doing regen and there's so much knowledge out there, if I want to research an idea, there is someone out there who has probably tried it or has lots of relevant knowledge."

"Regenerative farming is resilient. You don't have to get it perfect first time. Learn from mistakes and make changes."

"To further educate myself on soil health and how this is so central to the success of regenerative practices"

"The sense of cooperation and friendliness within the agricultural community."

Project impact

As can be seen from the videos, podcast, photos, and quotes shared above, the How Farming The Planet Project has undoubtedly met its aim of giving young people from our three organisations a platform to share their views and ideas on food, farming, climate and nature.

The variety of events and farm visits has provided a unique opportunity for these young adults with different experiences and outlooks to share their stories, learn from each other, and as a result make more informed choices and decisions whether that's in their studies, on their farms, or in their advocacy for a more just food system.

Impact of the project on NFYFC members

The project has highlighted the positive impact of collaborative working: funding, ideas, opportunities, discussion, ironing out misconceptions, knowledge exchange, and using different platforms to share messages.

It has also provided the opportunity for communication to a wide-ranging audience, and with that, the opportunity to play a part in changing a narrative: farming being part of the solution for tackling the climate emergency as well as food production and creating environmental benefits. Walking the walk as well as talking the talk!

One of the most positive impacts was the creation of the podcast at ORFC. When asked to comment on the rationale of making a podcast, Devon's Federation of Young Farmers' Clubs' chair for 2023-24, Dan, responded:

"I think it's so important that farmers and the agricultural industry know how to communicate. If we are going to make our food systems more sustainable, if we're going to shorten food supply chains, then farmers and the industry need to know what consumers want," says Dan. "Consumers need to have a better understanding of where their food comes from, this is what I am passionate about."

Dan Grist, Rural podcaster and Devon YFC County Chair

Impact of the project on FLAME members

FLAME members benefitted by having the resourcing to attend events that they wouldn't otherwise have attended, and to do so alongside other young people with a shared interest in food, farming, and climate but with different perspectives.

FLAME members were particularly keen to attend ORFC and Groundswell, so it was great to be able to provide these opportunities. FLAME has a very limited budget, so the project has opened up many opportunities that would not otherwise have been on offer.

Doing the visits alongside young farmers and students brought a range of perspectives for FLAME members who often have an interest in working the land, campaigning for change, and academia, but tend to be approaching this from the viewpoint of agroecology.

This led to many fruitful and interesting discussions and sharing with others who have different views and lived experiences. For example, at ORFC a fascinating discussion about different cultural slaughter techniques and at Groundswell sharing learnings about dung beetles and their role in farming, inspired by the dung beetle safari which was a great hit!

The opportunity to be involved in the podcast and video has also provided an opportunity for FLAME members to share their views on what they think needs to change about the food and farming system in the future.

"I was able to immerse myself in an industry that I have little prior experience in, especially by talking to people at the variety of stalls. This also helped me gain confidence in myself as well as develop some ideas for future careers; for instance, I networked with farm managers from my local area. Talking to other young people through the SOS-UK/FLAME/Young Farmers was also very beneficial - I was able to talk about theories that I have learnt at uni and hear about how they are used in practice (namely about blackgrass management)."

Nathan Hodgetts, FLAME/SOS-UK

Impact of the project on students

There have been a wide range of students that have attended the How Farming Can Cool The Planet project this year. Some of the young farmers and some of the FLAME members are also students but we have proactively tried to engage with students who may not be very familiar with different farming techniques, or who may never have actually visited a farm, or have met a farmer.

Students that have participated have been studying a variety of topics from undergraduates study politics and economics to PhD students studying very specific agricultural practices but from a desk and lab. It's so important for them to be able to place what they're studying within the bigger interconnected picture of the food system. Visiting farms, speaking to farmers, and listening to different speakers is the only real way of achieving this impact.

"This has been a really enlivening and rewarding experience, and I will do all I can to try and go to the next ORFC. Please keep this opportunity open for students in the future; the impact of this event will have uncalculable ripple effects for future generations; seriously, good discussions were had here."

Food justice and addressing inequities in the food system

The negative impacts of sustainability inaction disproportionately affect underrepresented groups globally and in the UK.

We have taken great care to enable any young person to feel they could be part of the project if they wanted to be. For example, we have made every effort to be inclusive with our comms, paid travel expenses, made different communication platforms available, always asked participants if they have any needs they would like us to be aware of so they can get the most from any experience, fully supported those that have shared specific needs with us, and offered bursaries to help with any financial barriers to taking part such as work or caring commitments.

Working in a collaborative partnership

The collaboration in this project has been particularly successful - for the young people involved and for the staff, who now have an established and productive working partnership as well as becoming great work colleagues and friends. We are confident from our evaluation of events and first-hand experience that this has been replicated amongst the many young people that we have worked with and brought together.

We are now confident to extend this effective, working collaboration with additional partners to explore future project work. Our events have enabled learning, knowledge exchange, information gathering and productive conversations with peers, industry experts, farmers and growers.

Summary of challenges

- Very few in this continuation year of the project as an effective working relationship had been established in year one with a clear understanding of workloads and preferred working patterns.
- Even distribution of work and opportunities.
- Playing to our individual strengths.
- Innovation - making everything work whilst incorporating young people into the deliverables.
- Capacity.

Summary of positives

- We continued to break down misconceptions by discussion and sharing information - harnessing the power of communication.
- The project name 'How Farming Can Cool the Planet' is now a recognised project brand for offering learning and networking opportunities.
- The experience of meeting different young people, engaging in diverse opportunities, going on visits, taking part in meetings and discussions enthused the young people and the partners involved.
- Genuine and positive working relationships between the three partner organisations.
- Positive opportunities for understanding different perspectives and cultures.
- Events have afforded learning and social opportunities and to further develop networks.
- Introductions to industry experts.
- Support to attend events that would not have been affordable without the project support.
- Being responsive to what young people asked for in deciding what visits and events to attend.
- Successful comms to enable youth voices to be heard - it was particularly lovely to work with a young farmer on the podcast produced.

- Young people produced their own comms as part of the ‘video competition’ we did after several of the visits. This provided more space for them to share their experiences and views.
- Talking about food, farming and climate with young people with such different perspectives could have been a recipe for disaster! We are proud of how we managed to create a respectful space for discussion and for people to explore their differences in a positive way.

“Thank you so much for this awesome opportunity, really grateful to have joined and for the support of the team, Tilly and Sarah and Anya have been absolutely incredible and looked after us so well 💖💖”

“Really appreciated the opportunity to produce the podcast alongside an excellent group of people. I felt really supported by the staff team and it was an absolute privilege to be involved. Thank you!”

Project challenges and lessons learnt

We had established a positive and productive working relationship for the second year of work and it was easy to establish a plan and to implement this work, having learnt lessons from the year before. The power of continuity and established working partnerships is powerful and has instilled confidence for future work. Young people have also been empowered: by having opportunities for their voices to be heard as well as the opportunities for learning and information gathering offered.

The importance of having an open space for young people to spend time together talking about what they were learning was a key lesson we learned through the project. We often used eating together as a positive way of doing that, and this worked well and provided some of the space for the most rich conversation.

It’s sometimes hard at events to get the right balance between providing structure and joint activities for those who don’t know each other and providing agency for people to go off and do their own thing. At Groundswell, we could have done with a bit more time together, perhaps particularly at the beginning and in the evening.

Unexpected positive outcomes

- Professional and communication skills and capabilities of young people.
- Acceptance of different viewpoints.
- Not entirely unexpected, but always learning opportunities from young people!
- Professional enjoyment and satisfaction from collaborative projects.
- Young people using the comms to help them with their professional work.
- Providing professional photos for young people that they can use for professional profiles etc (this was just a nice additional thing we were able to provide as part of our photography for the Groundswell event).
- Paying a professional podcaster who was also a young farmer to produce the podcast.

Future plans and opportunities

Short-term ‘Exploring Collaborations’ project funded by Farming the Future

The aim of this project is to explore how to bring together, amplify and articulate diverse youth voices to influence policy around a just transition in food and farming. The development grant will give the collaborators (NFYFC, SOS-UK, FLAME, Nature Friendly Farming Network and Sustain) time to optimise working together effectively and if successful, to bid for a future project as a larger collaboration of five partners.

We have also had discussions about how our partnership could influence curriculums for university and college agricultural courses. We plan to arrange a meeting with SOS-UK's education team who's work is embedding sustainability into curriculums, for example through Responsible Futures, Teach the Future, ESD Changemakers, and SDG mapping.

Communications shared during the project

All five activities detailed above, along with the outputs created, such as the videos and podcast have been shared via social media by all project partners. In addition:

NFYFC

NFYFC and its many members as well as the NFYFC Youth Forum have been made aware of the ongoing project work and took part in sustainability/farming events. This work has been continually highlighted in NFYFC comms and at NFYFC Council meetings.

Information is included in the 2023 NFYFC Annual Report and shared at NFYFC Council meetings, within e-newsletters (for example, within the YFC AGRI Newsletter), the YFC membership newsletter BUZZ which is sent out monthly and on the NFYFC website features.

NFYFC Social media records comprise:

- NFYFC makes 150k impressions across social media channels.
- 50.7k followers on Facebook
- 13.3k followers on Instagram
- 14.3k followers on X (Twitter)
- 1,103 followers on TikTok
- 1,494 followers on LinkedIn

SOS-UK

Our How Farming Can Cool The Planet webpage has been updated with links to the project outputs and reports.

All opportunities and outputs have been shared via our main SOS-UK newsletter (14,080 recipients) and our smaller Food & Farming newsletter.

FLAME

Opportunities and outcomes have been shared by both FLAME and LWA in newsletters and on social media channels.

If you would like more information about anything in this report please get in touch

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