

MILLENNIUM FARM TRUST

providing opportunities for those with learning difficulties



ANNUAL REVIEW

(Referring to year: April 2008- March 2009)

MFT... advancing “the education of those members of the general public who have learning difficulties and/or learning disabilities by offering opportunities for training, work experience, and work or employment in agriculture, horticulture and related subjects. Also to encourage such persons in the principles of good citizenship so that they can develop their physical, mental and spiritual capacities: enabling growth to full maturity as individuals and members of society and improve their conditions of life in the county of Suffolk and surrounding areas”.

Millennium Farm Trust Ltd is the registered name of the limited company - Company No. 03567659 and

Millennium Farm Trust the registered name of the charity - Charity Registration No. 1070145. The charity is more usually known as M.F.T.

The charity trustees are:

David Cook – Company Secretary and volunteer support worker (retired 31st December 2008)

Pat Higgins appointed January 2007 as finance officer

Bernadette Shrubshall – Chairwoman and volunteer support worker

The company directors are David Cook, Pat Higgins and Bernadette Shrubshall .

The Constitution states that there will be no more than ten and no less than three Trustees of Millennium Farm Trust unless otherwise determined by a General Meeting.

Trustees can be appointed by the existing board of Trustees, this appointment can then be ratified at the next General meeting. A nomination for a Trustee can be submitted to the Charity between 14- 35 days before an AGM or an extraordinary general meeting. All candidates must be eligible (Charity Commission regulations) to be a Trustee and must also be willing. One third of the Trustees must retire at each AGM by rotation ; however if they are willing to stand and there are no other candidates, they can be reappointed at the AGM.

Legal and Administrative Information:

The registered address of Millennium Farm Trust is:

2 Oakey Field Road, Thurston, Bury St. Edmunds, Suffolk, IP31 3RX.

The bankers for Millennium Farm Trust are;

Lloyd's TSB, 7 Market Place, Stowmarket. Suffolk IP14 1DY.

And

Britannia Building Society, 58 Abbeygate Street, Bury St. Edmunds, Suffolk IP33 1LB

The solicitors for Millennium Farm Trust are:

Ashton Graham, Electric House, Lloyd's Avenue, Ipswich, IP1 3HZ

The payroll service and insurance brokerage is provided by:

Suffolk Acre, 2 Wharfedale House, Ipswich. Suffolk IP1 4JP.

The Treasurer for Millennium Farm Trust for the period:

This role was jointly performed by Pat Higgins and SAVO Finance department (Tom Bright and Shelagh Everitt)

The independent examiner of the accounts is:

Andrew Winearls, Whiting and Partners. Garland House, Garland Street, Bury St. Edmunds, Suffolk IP33 1DZ

The senior support worker for Millennium Farm Trust is:

Philip Mellor, 2 Masons Drive, Necton, Swaffham, Thetford. PE37 8EE.

The position of fundraising and development officer for Millennium Farm Trust remains vacant.

The publicity and marketing Officer is David Axton (retired August 2008). Subsequently: position vacant.

Training and advice on running the charity is provided mainly by:

Suffolk Association of Voluntary Organisations of Dickson House, 43a Woodbridge Road,

Ipswich, Suffolk IP4 5QN. And Volunteer Centre, 86 Whiting Street, Bury St. Edmunds, Suffolk IP33 1NX

Chris Storey, SB Surveyors , 1 Bank Buildings, Sudbury, Suffolk CO10 2SP

Additional advice and evaluation was sought from: Sandra Jarvis Resourceful Management Solutions Ltd, 38 Havelock Road, Great Yarmouth, Norfolk NR30 3HJ

OBJECTS OF THE CHARITY

The objects of the charity are to advance the education of those members of the general public who have learning difficulties and/or learning disabilities by offering opportunities for training, work experience, and work or employment in agriculture, horticulture and related subjects. Also to encourage such persons in the principles of good citizenship so that they can develop their physical, mental and spiritual capacities: enabling growth to full maturity as individuals and members of society and improve their conditions of life in the county of Suffolk and surrounding areas.

M.F.T. came into existence and was co-founded by adults with learning disabilities seeking work and training opportunities in farming and conservation in Suffolk with the appropriate support to their needs. There was no provision and apart from M.F.T. there is still no other provider of supported training and work experience opportunities in farming in Suffolk for adults with learning disabilities.

ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE AND DECISION MAKING PROCESSES:

Monthly Trustee meetings are held to discuss policy, management, personnel and resource deployment, legal issues, health and safety, finance and development issues for the Trust as a whole. Consultation with specialists, umbrella voluntary bodies, other organisations involved with adults with learning disabilities or with supported farming and conservation work is actively undertaken by the Trustees and committee members.

The ordinary meetings are held every three months at varying locations in Suffolk most typically in the Stowmarket, Sudbury, Bury St. Edmunds, and Mildenhall areas. Reports from farmworkers, the senior support worker, and committee members are given. Fundraising, health and safety, transport, practical work, and publicity and marketing issues are discussed. Feedback from the carers of the farmworkers and also our farming hosts is considered. Updates on the national and county situation on topics such as Personal Budgets, Valuing People Now, rights and protection of vulnerable people, care assessment procedures and national learning disability topics are disseminated. The farmworkers are actively involved in these meetings. To facilitate participation and decision-making, discussion of topics is often encouraged prior to the meeting in small groups at the work place. Use is also made of audio or visual methods of communication for agendas and minutes of meetings. This is frequently reviewed to ensure MFT information and discussions are accessible to all members and participants. Responsibility for the farming activities, land use and outside contract work is undertaken by the senior support worker-farm manager. Woodwork projects and workshop activities are under the auspices of the workshop manager.

Only paid up members are entitled to vote at formal meetings of the Charity.

GENERAL DEVELOPMENTS DURING THE YEAR:

FARMWORKERS:

David Armsby, Sam Cook, Miriam Newell and Alex Quinn attended MFT regularly and Kevin Chapman plus Alan Bartrum attended on a few occasions. Philip Mellor and Ian Coles led the support teams. Doug Neupert worked one day a week at Rede. David Cook, Heather and Richard, Felicity Driver, and Bernadette Shrubshall all provided volunteer support at either Rede or Old Hall.

Work sites were Rede Hall Farm, Rede near Bury St. Edmunds and Old Hall, East Bergholt.

WORK EXPERIENCE AND TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES:

Land cultivation with farm machinery and by hand, vegetable planting, transplanting raspberry canes and making new raspberry posts, contract fencing work, contract plough restoration and construction of bird boxes, postboxes and bootjacks are some examples of work and training undertaken at Rede.

In April 2008 farmworker Sam Cook led an 18 mile sponsored walk from Bury to Clare. There was a large number of people supporting and participating in this event, which ultimately raised £881.

In July 2008 Sam Cook supported by marketing officer David Axton gave a presentation to Bury Abbey Round Table, which was well received. This later resulted in £1,500 donation (the largest ever given to a single charity by the group).

Farmworker Miriam Newell gave a presentation to the National Care Farming Initiative conference held at Beccles in December 2008 supported by farmworker Alex Quinn who proved very effective at talking to attendees in the break periods about MFT. These events were major personal achievements for all three farmworkers. During the winter 2008 and early spring 2009 MFT supported ex-farmworker Kevin Chapman to hold a sponsored swim at Bury Leisure Centre (April 2009). Kevin had enrolled in the swimming classes organised by Optua and Adult Services and progressed from being a non-swimmer to undertaking several lengths. David Armsby became a proficient fencer (especially with rabbit netting) and gained increasing confidence with the Suffolk Punches.

At Old Hall, East Bergholt, tractor driving with the trailer transporting hay bales for the Red Poll and Jersey cows, mucking out the cow yard, apple picking, feeding hay and potatoes to the cows, harvesting potatoes, hand milking the cows, moving cows to new pastures and coppicing are some of the tasks the farmworkers achieved.

MFT are very grateful to Old Hall for their long term support of the trust, to Ian Coles for his effective work as deputy senior support worker and to Heather and Richard who provide volunteer support for the MFT team at Old Hall.

We also undertook two sheep handling training days and one heavy horse training day.

STAFF TRAINING

During the year support staff participated in the sheep training and heavy horse training days. There was also a staff training day in November 2008 delivered by a member of the National Autistic Society on understanding autism and how to provide relevant support.

OTHER ACTIVITIES:

A Trustee and committee member attended the Suffolk County Council presentation on Personal Budgets in July 2008, a Trustee attended a funding seminar at Bury Volunteer Centre. Various committee members attended the meetings of the East Anglian Care Farming Group (subsidiary of the National Care Farming Initiative)

The website was extended to include a photo gallery and specific reports as well as an Events page.

RECRUITMENT:

Ritchie Tennant: practical horticultural help June 2008 (initially as a volunteer then paid post)

Tom Frost: volunteer with practical work at Rede, February 2008

Mike Jesky: part time paid support worker with remit for improving woodwork opportunities for the farmworkers.

Yuk Lun Wong: became MFT webmaster.

DEPARTURES:

David Axton as Publicity and Marketing officer in August 2008

Mr. Arthur Pearl MFT volunteer car driver passed away in September 2008.

Sam Cook farmworker and Vice chair in November 2008

David Cook as Trustee and Company Secretary in December 2008 but David remained a volunteer support worker

OTHER SUPPORT:

Suffolk Acre (payroll), Bury, Stowmarket, Sudbury and Newmarket Volunteer Centres, Optua, Savo, Suffolk Community Car service, Braintree community car Service and 3C Community Car Service have all provided support and /or advice to MFT.

Business support has included Clarkes of Walsham, Thomson and Morgan, Sainsbury's, SB Surveyors, Barclays Bank, Whitton and Frost and Whiting and Partners.

FINANCIAL REPORT

Income improved compared to the previous year with a total income of £32,401. Stowmarket Town Council donated £1,132 to MFT in April 2008 and later East Bergholt Parish council donated £150, a £1,500 donation by the Bury Abbey Round Table in November 2008 followed by £9,000 from the Henry Smith Charity and £3,000 from the Bailey Thomas charity in January 2009 greatly helped the cash flow income of MFT.

Placement fees generated £9,562. Earned income generated £270. St. Edmundsbury Borough Council awarded £1,000 for use in the 2009-10 financial year.

Many volunteers did not claim all or any of their expenses during this year thereby further benefiting the charity. Expenditure amounted to £24,626 of which £10,383 was spent on wages for three part time support staff with specialist skills in farming, horticulture and woodwork, £4,600 on workshop and land rent and £2,994 on travel costs to get farmworkers to the work placements and some reimbursement of volunteer travel costs.

The bank balance on the 31st March 2009 was £14,916 compared to £7,141 in 2008. £11,409 of the £14,916 was restricted funds.

SOCIAL ACCOUNTING

MFT provided 96 work and training days in 2008-9. Two days per week were provided which equates to MFT being operational 48 weeks. Also two external visits and two practice swimming sessions, plus 4 practice walk days took place. 191 farmworker work, vocational work and training days were taken up. The decrease in farmworker placement days reflects the position that two existing farmworkers were unable to secure external funding despite their wish to do so (and proven success.)

In the autumn of 2008 two further potential farmworkers visited referred by the County Transitions Team.

MFT hosted visits from other potential farmworkers and potential volunteers.

RECYCLING AND GREEN ISSUES

Lifts by staff and volunteers to other members of the team are encouraged and all community car journeys are as far as possible utilised to have the maximum number of passengers. When practical, the combined use of bus transport and then onward car transport was utilised.

Ink cartridges are recycled, envelopes reused and waste teabags, fruit peelings etc donated to our wormeries and compost heaps.

To reduce paper usage and costs, communication is by e-mail or phone whenever possible.

SPECIAL THANKYOUS:

Constant and committed support has been generously given by the drivers of Suffolk Community Car service especially Mr. Jim Burrows, also MFT volunteer drivers Mr. Pearl and Mr. Emeny who both helped with getting farmworkers to the farms and various shows. 3C community car service and Braintree Community car service provided invaluable transport for a farmworker living on the Suffolk Essex borders. The excellent support received from Suffolk Acre payroll service, consultancy, advice and practical support from Chris Storey, support from host farmers Chris and Nigel Oakley (Rede Hall Farm) and members of Old Hall Community (farm at East Bergholt) were all invaluable. Andrew Winearls of Whiting and Partners who kindly volunteered to inspect MFT accounts and has provided valuable advice.

Thomson and Morgan for generous donation of garlic bulbs and onion sets. , SB Surveyors for business advice, networking and producing the MFT newsletters, Bury Volunteer Centre for charity management advice , SAVO for financial record keeping advice and practical help with maintaining the bookkeeping.

CONCLUSION:

The impact of significant funding and support changes for all people with disabilities was being felt by many charitable service providers including MFT. Despite proven benefits and the need for supported vocational training work with the individuals passionate about farming, and in one case despite external support from a national charity, individuals with moderate learning disabilities who had already used MFT's services were often unable to return unless they could self finance. MFT Trustees, staff and committee members attended many meetings to help the individuals and their carers to try to find ways of returning to their chosen activity. Equally with the local farming college having virtually no farming opportunities on site or locally, the number of students having undertaken vocational farming courses in Suffolk or reasonable travelling distance was minimal. MFT established links with two special schools in Bury St. Edmunds and gave a presentation to students of the Priory School in January 2009. Links were maintained with the Transitions team who visited periodically and were well aware of the therapeutic benefits in addition to the skills enhancement opportunities that MFT offered. Adults with moderate learning difficulties / disabilities who were keen on farming were now unlikely to have the financial support to access vocational training and work experience opportunities especially if they were over 25 years of age.

Due to family commitments, personal health situations and other commitments several of the management team were restricted in the time they had available for MFT management and indeed two people retired. Pat Higgins in conjunction with SAVO managed the MFT accounts until such time as a Treasurer could be recruited. Both did an excellent job and by the end of the year the benefits of a two-part system (especially if illness or death should occur) was demonstrated and SAVO agreed to continue their role for the foreseeable future. This partnership has been a great success and makes good business sense.

The local volunteer centres were informed of our vacancies especially the urgent need for Trustees.

External professional help to evaluate our management needs and to help formulate a recovery plan was sought in Jan and February 2009 with Sandra Jarvis being engaged in March 2009.

The financial year ended with considerable support from local businesses, other voluntary bodies, grant funders and many supportive individuals. The care concerns, health concerns and increasing family commitments affected several of MFT's management and committee members with the consequence that fewer people had more to do and less time to network externally or learn new skills. The increasing importance of the National Care Farming Initiative at government level will we hope have a beneficial effect for all care farms. Equally government does appear to be tackling some very important learning disability topics with Valuing People Now (January 2009) and the second reading of the Autism Bill (February 2009) particularly important for adults with learning disabilities and adults with autism.

MFT remains committed to the enablement of people with learning disabilities. The challenge for 2008-9 is to ascertain which clientele can access MFT's farming opportunities and to find long term stable funding for the mature ones who cannot fund themselves.

Equally, encouraging people with management or business skills and from a broad sector of the community to become involved in the management of Millennium Farm Trust, building on the progress already achieved since practical work started in December 1999.

The farmworkers (adults with learning disabilities) have continued to progress in practical farming, woodworking and other rural tasks. Their level of competence, breadth of knowledge and confidence of working in a variety of situations in a mixed team has been witnessed and appreciated by people external to MFT.

Their continued success and development and giving other similar opportunities remains the core purpose of MFT. Further evidence is available on the charity's website www.m-f-t.org.uk

Bernadette Shrubshall
Chairwoman