

SUMMER
2026



DISCOVER FARMING

NEWS FOR SCHOOLS

THE CLASSROOM @ WASHINGPOOL FARM

Local Primary and Secondary Schools are invited to visit the Discover Farming Classroom to learn and experience what is involved in bringing the food they eat to the table as well as gain an understanding of why farming and agriculture is so important to the local economy and environment.

NEWS FROM KATIE VINING, DISCOVER FARMING'S EDUCATION CO-ORDINATOR



THINGS HAVE REALLY PICKED UP AT THE CLASSROOM FOR SPRING 2026!

After a chilly start, across the country not just at Washingpool Farm, seedlings have taken off. Beetroot is thriving in the poly-tunnels along with peas, radish, salad leaves and beans. All the potatoes from last year's harvest have been sold at the farm shop and this year's crop has been planted in the fields. Sweetcorn, different varieties of lettuce, sunflowers and cosmos have been planted out in the growing fields at the front of the farm site. It's such a busy time for growers.

We have been lucky enough to see our very, very new calves and talk about how we look after the animals. Pupils have fed the pigs and chickens and learnt more about the huge importance of bees for a healthy environment. Many of the groups tried their hand at cooking either carrot or beetroot soup. Cooking at the classroom reinforces fresh, locally grown produce and the children have really enjoy harvesting their own food and then giving the finished 'meal' a try. Some were pleasantly surprised! Some just enjoyed the pink mouth that resulted from eating the beetroot soup!

School visits to the classroom

It had been a busy time at the Discover Farming classroom as well with nine schools visiting since March and 8 more classes expected in the second half of the summer term.

Thank you to classes from St. Mary's, Beaminster, Symondsbury, Loders, Winterbourne Abbas, Sticklands, Broadwindsor, and Thorner's for joining me at the classroom and asking lots of questions about the animals and what's growing.



Teacher comments:

St. Mary's, Beaminster "As for feedback, honestly the trip was so brilliant! In fact, I've recommended you to another Year 1 teacher ... as I can't fault the day one bit – apart from that we would've loved more time ... The children were so engaged with each part of the day and it fits beautifully with our science topic! You were amazing as well and pitched the info well."

Hardwill Cooking Barn

Erected in double quick time the Hardwill Cooking Barn has already been a fantastic addition to the classroom. Having a covered space to cook up fresh seasonal food is amazing. Peter Hardwill, Melpash President, came along to see how the children were using the space on the Chef on a Farm Day. Thank you Peter, what an amazing gift for our Discover Farming classroom. Another fantastic Chef on a Farm Day, thank you once again to Andy Tyrell from Soulshine for cooking up a storm!



VISITS TO THE DISCOVER FARMING CLASSROOM AT WASHINGPOOL FARM

All schools located within a 12-mile radius of Melpash Village Church will continue to receive free visits. If you would like to bring your class on a visit then please email katie@discoverfarming.co.uk to book a suitable date.



NEW OUTDOOR COOKING SHED FOR THE DISCOVER FARMING CLASSROOM AT WASHINGPOOL FARM

The Melplash Agricultural Society’s education arm, Discover Farming is celebrating an exciting new addition to the Discover Farming Classroom at Washingpool Farm – an outdoor cooking shed. The new structure has been kindly donated by the 2026 Society President Peter Hardwill. It was supplied and built by the P H Hardwill team.



At the recent “Chef on the Farm” event, the new Cooking Shed was christened and put to good use. Twenty-four Year 5/6 pupils from Beaminster St Mary’s Academy participated under the guidance of Soulshine Restaurant Chef Patron, Andy Tyrell. Throughout the day, the children made flatbreads, picked nettles for nettle and potato soup, harvested salad ingredients from the Washingpool Farm polytunnels, prepared and cooked kofta kebabs, made various salads from collected ingredients as well as making a rhubarb crumble. All these dishes made up the feast they enjoyed together at the end of the day.

After an enjoyable visit to the ‘Chef on the Farm’ event, the Society President, Peter Hardwill said: *“Melplash Agricultural Society supports education, countryside activities, and enjoyment, and all three were on display at the Discover Farming classroom’s ‘Chef on the Farm Day’ at Washingpool Farm. Children from St Mary’s School in Beaminster were welcomed by the team and joined by Andy Tyrell of Soulshine in Bridport for a ‘Chef on the Farm’ experience. His enthusiasm captivated the children as he introduced familiar foods as well as those that grow in the hedgerows. They picked stinging nettles, lettuce, and radishes, tasted the leaves, and then made a delicious soup using Brenda the Blender! It was a wonderful example of learning in action.”*



The Discover Farming Education Co-ordinator, Katie Vining said: *“The new cooking shed will be an important asset to the Discover Farming classroom. Growing, harvesting and eating local, healthy produce has such a beneficial impact on the pupils who use the classroom. An outdoor kitchen space will inspire children to prepare and enjoy nutritious food. The new space will allow us to offer this even when the weather is against us! I am so grateful to Peter for supporting the Discover Farming Classroom and the learning opportunities we provide to schools.”*



NETTLE & POTATO SOUP

A vibrant green tasty soup

INGREDIENTS

- ½ a large shopping bag of stinging nettle tops
- 50g butter
- 1 large onion peeled and finely chopped
- 1 litre vegetable or chicken stock
- 1 large potato, peeled and cut into cubes
- Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper
- A few drops of extra-virgin olive oil



METHOD

Wearing rubber gloves, sort through the nettles, discarding anything you don’t like the look of and any thick stalks. Wash the nettles and drain in a colander. Melt the butter in a large saucepan, add the onion and cook gently for 5-7 minutes until softened. Add the stock, nettles and potato. Bring to a simmer and cook gently until the potato is soft, about 15 minutes. Remove from the heat. Using a blender, purée the soup and then season with salt and pepper to taste. Ladle into bowls and dress with a few drops of olive oil.



INTERVIEW WITH JOSEPH DARE, AGED 8, WHO LIVES ON THE FAMILY FARM AND ALREADY DREAMS OF BECOMING A FARMER. HE LOVES SPENDING TIME WITH HIS SHEEP AND LEARNING HOW TO CARE FOR THEM.

How many sheep do you have?
I have 76 sheep, 35 ewes and 41 lambs.

What breed are they?
They are Suffolk and Zwartbles.

What do you like about your sheep?
I have loved sheep since Daddy gave me Rosie when I was two years old. She was two as well. I like how fluffy and friendly they are, and how they follow me around. They love cuddles, just like me, especially the orphan lambs. I like feeding them and watching them in the field.

How do you help look after them?
I check them every day to make sure they are healthy and happy. If there is not much grass, I give them extra food and always make sure they have lots of water. I like to play with them too. When they are pregnant, I give them molasses.

I hear your sheep have had quite a few lambs this year. How many have they had, and how have you been looking after them?
This year, I have had 41 lambs. I have bottle-fed the orphan lambs and given some of them names including Philip, Tim, Gumba, and Minty. We also had newborn twins today, which was a big surprise. At first, we thought there was only one, but then we realised there were two. The second lamb was the wrong way round, so Daddy and Mummy had to help pull him out. He is much smaller than his brother, I have named him Steve and his brother George.



You have taken your sheep to the Melplash Show. How do you prepare for the competition?
I have taken Rosie to the Melplash Show twice. She has always been my favourite because she is so friendly. Last year, I took Rosie’s daughter, but she was not as well behaved. To get ready, I practise leading the sheep around the farm, and Daddy and Mummy help me wash and clip them. On the day, the sheep need to look their best, and so do I. I wear a white coat, shirt and tie, and a cap. I compete in the child handler classes, and so far, I have won a third place, a highly recommended, and a special rosette.

What do you hope to do when you are older?
I hope I can have my own farm. I want to work hard and take care of all the animals. I want to be a farmer because I like being outside, I love animals and looking after them, just like my daddy. I will definitely have sheep, and I would also like pigs and hens. I am not sure about cows, although Daddy would like me to have them too. In the future, I think I will use drones to check the sheep in the fields and, although I would like to drive the tractors, I expect to have self-driving tractors that do all the work around the farm while I control them remotely. I would also open a farm shop to sell my pork, sausages, bacon butties, lamb, eggs and vegetables and flowers from the garden. If I keep cows I might make ice cream too.

SCHOLARSHIP FOR 2026 OPEN FOR APPLICANTS

The Melplash Agricultural Scholarship Scheme supports West Dorset students aged 16 and over who live within a 12-mile radius of Melplash village church and intend to pursue a career in agriculture, horticulture or related fields. Funding of up to £3,000 per year is available and may continue for the duration of the course, subject to a satisfactory annual report from the student’s college or university. **Applications are now open and close on 1st July 2026. For more information and an application form, visit www.melplashshow.co.uk**

Shortlisted applicants will be asked to provide academic and personal references and attend an interview in early summer, so funding can be arranged for the next academic year. The successful candidates will receive the Scholarship Award at the annual Melplash Agricultural Show on 27th August 2026.

CAREERS IN AGRICULTURE

An update from the Discover Farming Committee, Chairman, Will Bowditch *“The Discover Farming team is looking forward to their first career’s event on 24th June at Wey Valley School in Weymouth. We are ready and booked in to events in Bridport and Crewkerne and at Coastland College Fresher’s Fair. We are working with Coastland College (Kingston Maurward) as they refine their T level syllabus and start offering apprenticeships again this autumn. The college continues to run the popular BTEC Level one, two and three certificates and diplomas in agriculture. The Merger between Weymouth College and Kingston Maurward looks to be a great benefit for our young future farmers.”*

WHAT'S IN THE PIPELINE?

Discover Farming at Melplash Show

Thursday 27th August 2026

Children aged 16 and under can attend the Melplash Show free of charge. Younger visitors can enjoy a range of hands-on farm-to-food activities in the Discover Farming Marquees including milking a cow and making butter.

Teenagers are encouraged to visit the Young Farmers Marquee to meet with members of the local Young Farmers clubs, learn what they do and find out how to get involved. They will be joined by the Discover Farming careers team and local agriculture colleges who will be there to share information about the exciting career opportunities and the courses available.



Expert Day

Wednesday 30th September 2026

If your school is interested in attending the next Expert Day in 2026, then please drop me an email katie@discoverfarming.co.uk

DISCOVER FARMING WORDSEARCH

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FRUIT
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COWS
CARROT
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VEGETABLE
TRACTOR
KALE
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Play this puzzle online at: <https://thewordsearch.com/puzzle/9717437>



Beetroot

Beetroots are sweet, earthy root vegetables that grow entirely underground. They are packed with vitamins that help build strong muscles, keep your blood healthy, and boost energy levels for play. Growing here in the poly tunnels and seeds are just pushing through outside now the soil has warmed up.

Radish

Radishes are super-fast growing root vegetables related to broccoli, cabbage, and mustard. They grow mostly underground in a wide variety of colours and shapes, and are loved for their bright, crunchy, and sometimes spicy flavour. They plant a lot of radishes at Washingpool Farm in succession.

Salad leaves

Very popular in the farm shop and super easy to grow. Salad leaves are packed with water, fibre and vitamins. They were eaten as far back as ancient Greece. Christopher Columbus took lettuce seeds on his voyages.

Cows

The herd at Washingpool is Devon Ruby Red and it is a beef herd. They have a deep red covering, are good mothers and a really attractive cow!



The Discover Farming Classroom at Washingpool Farm (DT6 5HP) is situated just outside of Bridport on the B3162 heading towards Salway Ash. The Classroom is part of the educational programme set up and operated by the Melplash Agricultural Society to help educate children about food, farming and the environment. (Charity No 1130201)

www.discoverfarming.co.uk



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