



NUFFIELD  
Farming Scholarships



# NEW ENTRANTS AND YOUNG FARMERS

Making a start in farming;  
**A Bitesize Guide**

# INTRODUCTION

Each year, up to 25 people aged 25-45 are selected as scholars and sponsored by the Nuffield Farming Scholarships Trust to travel, research and report on subjects they are passionate about and which contribute to advancing farming, food, horticulture, forestry and ancillary industries.

These studies bring new thinking, technology or management approaches from across the globe to the UK. While many know of Nuffield Farming scholarships, few people in the industry are aware of the huge knowledge base of global reports, dating back to 2006, that can be accessed via the online Nuffield Farming library.

This Bitesize Guide, supported by the Elizabeth Creak Charitable Trust, Central Region Farmers Trust, Gloucestershire Agricultural House Foundation and the Royal Agricultural Society of England, gives an insight into the practical experiences and research freely available at:



<https://www.nuffieldscholar.org/reports>



## WHAT IS THIS GUIDE, AND HOW SHOULD I USE IT?

Getting started in farming has never been easy – and today, it can seem more challenging than ever. But, as Nuffield Farming Scholars and case studies in this Bitesize Guide show, it can be done.

This Bitesize Guide on ‘New entrants and young farmers – making a start in farming’ is designed to provide a range of ideas to help anyone who wants to get going in farming, from a look at the pros and cons of different methods of land tenure, to the mindset and support required.

It’s a broad topic, and this Bitesize Guide brings together key findings, discussions and ideas from relevant Nuffield Farming reports, all highlighted as ‘Talking points’ and ‘In practice’ sections, with ‘Putting it into action’ sections at the end. They’re designed to be short, thought-provoking extracts, and each one includes a TinyURL link and QR code to access the relevant Nuffield Farming report for more information, case studies and discussions.



# TALKING POINT 1:

## A Nuffield Scholar's story

Rona Amiss NSch 2010

It is undoubtedly difficult to get a start in farming if you do not have the benefit of a family farm behind you. It is expensive and getting more so, as it becomes increasingly difficult to borrow the money required and that itself assumes you find a farm in the first place. Tenancies are short, high risk and competition from established farmers is high. Hard work and little monetary reward should mean that farming holds little attraction for the bright and young, but I have met many exceptional new entrants who have overcome huge obstacles to be able to farm and are loving it.

Farming is not just about making a profit and my travels have reassured me that most of us farm for a range of reasons. The ownership and working of land often goes far deeper than just a career and I pay tribute to all the amazing and resilient farmers I have met on my travels.

By the age of three I had decided to become a farmer. My family lived in the country with a large garden but no farm. I had my first real farm job at 18 and this convinced me that I had been right and farming was the life for me. I completed a BSc (Hons) in Agriculture at Harper Adams where I met and married Nevil, northerner and aspiring farmer from inner city Sunderland, who had grown up without even a garden. After college we worked in a wide range of farm jobs acutely aware that to succeed we needed to learn many skills. Although not well paid, we saved hard, worked long hours and increased our capital worth, as well as attending courses in vocational skills that we thought might be useful.

We applied for and were offered a 180 acre hill farm on Exmoor on a five year FBT and a long term promise. With the collapse of the sheep prices and the indirect effects of foot and mouth in 2001 we diversified into poultry production, built an abattoir and a direct sales business. In 2005 the family had expanded to five children and when our tenancy wasn't extended, we moved to Higher Fingle Farm a 57-acre Devon County Council Farm.

With a growing family of aspiring farmers and a desire to progress, I set out on my Nuffield adventure to see what opportunities there are for new entrants and what could be created. My study became a fascinating tour of amazing businesses from tiny to substantial.



Rona Amiss



***I have met many exceptional new entrants who have overcome huge obstacles to be able to farm***



New entrants and opportunities in farming: <https://qrco.de/bgQSwe>



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Putting it into action

# TALKING POINT 2:

## Collaborative farming

Ifan Roberts NSch 2024

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Putting it into action



*During my study I visited and interviewed more than 40 dairy entrepreneurs across six countries. Collaborative farming models were widely used to retain and motivate key staff ('A players'), plan succession, and create entry routes for new farmers."*

Definition (from Teagasc): Collaborative farming is two or more farmers working together in a formal arrangement for mutual benefit.

### Benefits:

- **Economic:** lower capital requirement, shared risk, economies of scale.
- **Skills:** shared management and best practice.
- **Social:** more attractive and sustainable than the 'one-man farm' model.

Common collaborative arrangements (Ireland): Registered farm partnerships, contract heifer or calf rearing, share farming (dairy/crops).

Examples of models I observed internationally:

Model	Description	Key features	Risks/challenges
Contract farming agreement (CFA)	Landowner pays main farm costs; contractor receives a set fee for labour/machinery. Surplus is shared.	Stable contractor income; surplus incentivises efficiency.	Surplus depends on management and market.
Contract milking	Contractor manages herd; paid per kg of milk solids (NZ model).	Clear payment structure; stepping stone to sharemilking.	Limited equity growth; tight margins.
Lower-order sharemilking	Sharemilker provides labour/management; landowner owns herd and land.	Low capital entry point; pathway to higher equity.	Equity growth limited.
50/50 sharemilking	Sharemilker owns herd; landowner owns land; profits split equally.	Builds equity; aligns incentives.	Requires trust and strong agreements.
Equity partnership	Multiple parties co-invest in land/herd; profits shared by equity share.	Long-term equity building; succession planning.	Complex setup; risk of misalignment.
Cow leasing	Farmer leases cows, gradually building their own herd.	Low capital entry; flexible.	Relies on herd performance and fair terms.



*Provide clear progression pathways for new entrants*

In almost every business I visited, some form of collaborative farming was being used, whether to incentivise and retain key team members or to plan for family succession. These arrangements weren't just about equity or succession; they were about identifying and rewarding what Steve Jobs once referred to as A players.

Jobs described his goal at Apple as building a team made entirely of A players - people who were talented, driven, and aligned with the mission. When these individuals work together, he said, the team becomes self-policing. B and C players simply don't stick around because the culture doesn't tolerate mediocrity.

In my study, when I asked about inspiring the next generation, farmers emphasised the importance of:

- Giving young people opportunities regardless of background.
- Providing clear progression pathways.
- Exposing team members to the bigger picture.
- Sharing personal stories openly.
- Showing genuine care and appreciation.



*Ifan Roberts*

**“ In almost every business I visited, some form of collaborative farming was being used.”**



Inspiring the next generation of dairy entrepreneurs:  
<https://qrco.de/bgUfaA>



# TALKING POINT 3:

## Building a 'war chest'

Ifan Roberts NSch 2024



***Building a 'war chest' was a subject that came up regularly during my study. Often farmers wanted to talk about how they got started, from early ventures in childhood, to buying their first livestock, to affording their first owned farming operation."***

Nowadays it is common for our algorithms to feed us 'get rich quick' schemes without the need for any seed capital. This I believe is a complete fallacy.

If you want to start a venture, especially in dairy, I believe you need to build a pot of equity or 'war chest' as early in life as comfortably as possible. It doesn't have to be a lot, maybe a couple of thousand pounds.

The reason this is important is not only will it allow you to capitalise on an opportunity if one were to arise but also it shows the level of commitment you have towards achieving your goal that can be shown to potential stakeholders in your business. This can be achieved from the smallest of means.

Often in dairy farming you see young people complaining there are no opportunities in farming but are changing jobs five times in three years, are unreliable, are rude and unhelpful to colleagues and have a very negative outlook. To these I say what surprise is it but to receive mediocre returns for mediocre effort?

To young farmers who genuinely want to farm I say that with the average age of farmers sitting in the 50's+ all around the world if you 'ride for the brand' no matter what the position or status or inequality you possess you will get noticed. And good things will eventually come your way.



***I believe you need to build a pot of equity or 'war chest' as early in life as comfortably as possible."***



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Putting it into action

# Case study: Ted and Darby Pedroso, California, USA

Ted and Darby Pedroso met while studying at Cal Poly. Ted's family had lost their dairy farm when he was young and ever since, he was determined to build one of his own. A defining moment came late one evening while moving irrigation pipes on the farm where he worked. Looking back at the property, he asked himself, "Do I really want to spend the rest of my life doing this for someone else?"

From that point on Ted committed to saving every dollar he could to build a future dairy business. He gave himself a strict weekly personal budget of just \$75 to raise seed capital. He took on odd jobs, including selling bottle caps (even raising \$20 that way to take Darby on their first date), and running a breakfast burrito stand. After years of saving and searching in 2018 they were approached by a neighbouring farmer with a unique opportunity: a 1,000-cow facility previously used for dairying was now being used to rear heifers, but only at half capacity. The farmer offered to lease the other half to Ted and Darby. A collaborative relationship followed, where the couple could use the farmer's machinery in exchange for feeding their heifers.

Conventional wisdom said they would need at least \$600,000 to start a dairy. But by 2018, the couple had built \$80,000 in equity. That alongside a 3.25% interest loan from the Farm Service Agency (FSA) allowed them to buy 130 cows and start milking. The loan was structured to be repaid over seven years.

Starting small came with its own challenges. Milk buyers were reluctant to take them on due to their limited volume, until one older farmer, unknown to them, stood up at a local co-op meeting and said: "These people deserve a chance." Ted and Darby only heard about this second-hand. To this day, the farmer occasionally visits their farm quietly, without ever seeking recognition for his support. Other key supporters helped along the way. A generous feed rep gave them extended lines of credit during periods of high input prices, crucial in keeping the business afloat during leaner times.

Today, Ted and Darby are milking over 300 cows and are steadily working toward their long-term goal of reaching 500 and owning their own land. They embody a self-made ethos; driven, frugal, and values-led. Their motto: "If your word is no good, then what good are you?"



*Ted Pedroso (left)  
and Ifan Roberts*

**“ Ted committed to saving every dollar he could to build a future dairy business.”**



Inspiring the next generation of dairy entrepreneurs:  
<https://qrco.de/bgUfaA>



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Putting it into action

# TALKING POINT 4:

## Contract heifer rearing and leasing heifers

Gail Lewis NSch 2014



***Contract farming is used by dairy farmers for rearing dairy heifers and could offer an opportunity to new entrants.”***

The dairy farmer pays another farmer to rear his young stock away from the milking herd. The heifers are reared from calves to in-calf heifers ready to go back into the milking herd. The two parties to the agreement work together and the farmer gets a payment per head for rearing the dairy heifers: this could range from £1 to £1.40 per head per week (at the time of writing) dependent on the inputs provided by the farmer.

Strengths	Weaknesses
Provides a steady monthly cash flow for the heifer rearer	Relationships
Frees up labour for the farmer to focus on the dairy	Reliance on the price of milk to afford to contract-rear dairy heifers
Helps farms grow where space is limited for accommodation	Quality of contract rearer
Demands of buying and selling diminished for rearer	

### Lease of heifers

Financial pressures on an existing business may mean that they cannot purchase replacement heifers, particularly in a high input enterprise such as dairy. For the new entrant to agriculture, enough capital is, in some instances, difficult to acquire to purchase or rent land. It is possible for both parties to combine in a venture to benefit both, via a lease arrangement seen in both Ireland and Wales.



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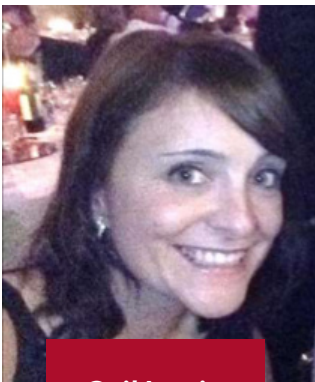
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Putting it into action



One party would purchase a number of heifers and lease them for a term to the other party; a fee would be paid to the owner of the heifers and, at the end of the term, the same number of heifers would be returned to the owner. By this time the rearer either has a valuable asset to sell or, if in the meantime they have been able to secure land themselves, a herd of cattle for their own business. The owner of the livestock would gain a return on investment in the region of 15-18%.



*Gail Lewis*



Sustainable land tenure for the farmer and the next generation:  
<https://qrco.de/bgQTFw>



## TALKING POINT 5:

# Opportunities for growth and land ownership

Ifan Roberts NSch 2024

On a number of occasions on my travels I saw how the original joint venture (JV) could develop into equity partnership or farm ownership for the contractor. Sometimes this was achieved by the contractor alone using profit from the JV to acquire assets that became large enough to make a down payment on a farm. More commonly I saw that when the JV's worked at their best, with all partners fully aligned, they would progress into larger investments together.

This was usually achieved because the contractor would demonstrate the ability to deliver consistently positive results through good technical performance over a long period of time, winning the confidence of their farm owner. This gave the farm owner confidence to support the contractor to help them reach their long-term financial goals. This was a huge advantage to the contractor because it would give them sufficient resource to purchase the right farm and the backing to make the farm work.

In some cases, I saw how the farm owner would go a step further and offer their contractor a 'vendor finance' deal to purchase their farm upon their retirement. This allowed the contractor to become the owner of the farm before having the collateral to make the entire down payment. In this case the farm owner became the bank for the new entrant, allowing them to buy the farm over time.

This was advantageous to the owner, especially in areas that were less desirable to live in through realising the true value of their farms. They would also have the satisfaction of seeing what was their holding continue as a working entity and not broken up into smaller parcels.

In other cases, this sort of arrangement led to a large joint venture between the owner and the contractor. For example, instead of the contractor going and purchasing a 150-cow dairy by themselves, they could combine powers with their farm owner to have an equity partnership on a 600-cow dairy farm, allowing them to spread their skills over a larger scale business and giving them economies of scale.

**“ ...When the JV's worked at their best, with all partners fully aligned, they would progress into larger investments together.”**



Inspiring the next generation of dairy entrepreneurs:  
<https://qrco.de/bgUfaA>



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Putting it into action

# In practice: Equity partnerships and syndications

Gail Lewis NSch 2014



***Equity farming is a term commonly used to describe farming arrangements that do not require all the owners of the property to be farming the land.”***

The use of equity partners and syndications has led to a decrease in the number of actual farmers in both New Zealand and Australia. Equity partnerships have greater capital, sourced from the various investors, to invest into a farming business to purchase livestock and land.

An equity partnership can be difficult to manage and governance is vital, and therefore many are managed by a third party. An example of this is the company ‘My Farm’ in New Zealand. ‘My Farm’ facilitates the syndication by finding a property which is on the market and undertaking a full business appraisal and generating a proposed business plan. All this information is then collated into a memorandum of information which can then be passed to prospective investors.

Once enough investors are gathered and the purchase price of the farm is achieved, ‘My Farm’ acts in a management role. For undertaking this role ‘My Farm’ receives a management fee. Investors could be existing farmers who wish to expand, young and new entrants to agriculture unable to purchase property on their own or, indeed, those parties just interested in investing their money and gaining a high return on their investment.

The above is an example of how a large syndicate would operate: smaller, unmanaged syndicates also provide an opportunity to develop a viable farming business. Nicola Shadbolt and Shane Carroll in New Zealand run an expanding farm syndicate where they have focussed closely on ensuring that their equity partners hold similar values, goals and ambitions to themselves. The syndicate run by the pair works closely with investors and has a high return on the investments. Smaller syndicates are run on a closer, more hands-on approach and are very much like a family farm.



***Equity partnerships provide a viable path for new entrants into agriculture as most require a manager on-farm.”***



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Putting it into action

There has been a considerable trend towards equity partnerships and syndication in Australia and New Zealand in recent years. Brett Gould, solicitor, stated this could be because of the following reasons:

- Rapid inflation in land and stock values
- Economies of scale and rationalisation of resources facilitated by available capital
- Diversification of investment
- Opportunity to use new ‘off farm’ capital and for a greater number of people to share in the success of farming
- Ability to access increase in stock, land and share values
- The average rate of return is higher than for individuals alone.

Equity partnerships provide a viable path for new entrants into agriculture as most require a manager on-farm who will receive an annual salary or indeed can receive a salary plus a share in the syndicate. This would allow them to have a vote upon decisions made, providing them with ‘skin in the game’. (i.e. able to put in a 110% effort). A board of directors would then manage the company formed.

Strengths	Weaknesses
Provides opportunity for young farmer to manage farm	Relationships
Economies of scale achievable due to number of investors	If no governance and formal agreement drawn up, disputes can arise
Sharing of knowledge and experience	Difficult if shareholder wishes to leave, meaning the remaining members of the syndicate have to purchase high value shares
Provides flexibility of ownership and funding structure	
Provides limited liability for the Investors	
Tax efficient	

 Sustainable land tenure for the farmer and the next generation:  
<https://qrco.de/bgQTFw>



# In practice: Private equity - the Area One Farms model

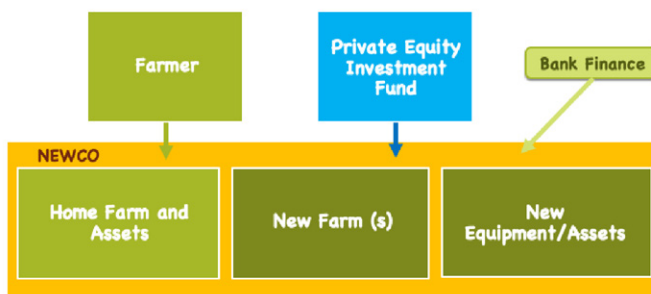
Angus Selby NSch 2018

Joelle Faulkner is a remarkable woman. An old university friend and colleague, a Rhodes Scholar, and the daughter of a dairy farmer from Ontario. Joelle started Area One Farms about six years ago, initially with some high net worth capital from a prominent Canadian media figure, and has steadily built her business from there. She now manages >\$200m worth of farming investments in Canada across about 10 investments. She has tailored a business model to the specifics of the Canadian farming sector which uses an integrated equity approach to create alignment.

Joelle's model is targeted at younger expansionist farmers who have an owned farm base but are either subscale or want to grow their business. Under her model these farmers will go through a heavy screening process to establish track record, asset quality etc (basically convince her that they are top quartile farmers). They will also identify and propose acquisition opportunities nearby (usually from older farmers that are looking to exit) and together with Area One they will acquire these farms into a newco. The home farm will also be independently valued and integrated into the new company and the whole mix operated as a single entity with full alignment.

Joelle will provide support at a governance, financing and reporting level while the farmers will focus on the farming operations. The basic agreement is to operate on this basis for at least 10 years. At the 10-year juncture the farming partner has the opportunity to take back the home farm (at an independent valuation) and call for a wind-up sale of the other farms, or they can ask for a rolling five-year extension. Area One also has the option to suggest an extension of the agreement if the partnership is working or they can also choose to wind up the JV and return the home farm (at independent valuation) and sell the new farms if they desire. If the farmer misses clear targets repeatedly (measured versus local average yields) within the 10-year period this can trigger a right for Area One to accelerate the unwinding of the business before the 10-year juncture.

## Private Equity Structure



Area One Farms model



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Putting it into action

My opinion: It is an interesting model which provides young farmers with an opportunity to grow and operate a bigger, more efficient business. If they outperform they have the chance to benefit from seasonal performance and longer term asset value growth. They also have the extension options.

And unlike most conventional shared equity structures they have the option to pull the home assets out of the partnership if they desire - and are protected on the home assets even in a termination scenario. I found this approach to be very innovative but it requires some heavy lifting to get agreements and structures in place although these would get easier with practice.

Equity structures always worry me for when things go wrong, but Joelle appears to have thought this through with clear mechanisms to deal with these scenarios that give her optionality but also provide the partners with the comfort of protection on their home assets, except in cases of criminal activity. By Joelle's own admission they are still in relatively early stages and have not yet run through a full cycle with any of their partners but the logic and structure seem to be working so far.

Is there applicability for this model in the UK? Probably, is my initial view and it's certainly a clever and innovative model to watch. But it would require patient capital and someone with Joelle's patience and expertise to gather momentum. It is probably more suited to High Net Worth capital than conventional institutional capital which instinctively would be reluctant to give away negative control rights or devolve exit/unwind provisions to a minority shareholder.



Angus Selby



*I found this approach to be very innovative but it requires some heavy lifting”*



Can institutional investment capital provide opportunities for family farmers and young farmers into UK agriculture? <https://qrco.de/bgQTRk>



## TALKING POINT 6:

# Creating a unique selling point as a tenant – getting noticed by the landlord

Robbie Moore NSch 2016



***Creating a different mind-set and a different outlook is important, as it is a competitive world.”***

For a tenant farmer, contractor or occupier of farmland wishing to remain within an agreement or tender for a new one, it is important to have a market advantage. A farming business must be willing to give as high a priority to being a good custodian of land and being good with people, to that of being commercially-minded and driven by profit.

My visit to the Arns family who farm in the Rio Grande Du Sol State in Brazil was a case in point. The family rents their farm as an equipped holding from a neighbour under a fixed term of 10 years. They farm 2,700 hectares of predominantly soya but also included maize, wheat and grass within the rotation, which included both winter and summer cropping.

While they acknowledged that they perhaps wouldn't be able to offer the highest rent when their tenancy comes up for renewing, they instead focused on what they believed to be their unique selling point. Their advantage and uniqueness is in the integrity of their equal consideration to all three of these 'bottom-line' elements – environmental and social considerations as well as profitability. Not just being singly focussed on economic efficiency.

If that integrity is ever compromised for the sake of financial mindedness, the uniqueness is lost and the market advantage is gone. This is what the Arns family hoped would get them over the line when the time came to renewing their lease. I think that both landowners and those occupying farmland can learn a lot from this and should most definitely consider encompassing the triple bottom line in their outlook for true success.



***The Arns family with Robbie Moore***



***If that integrity is ever compromised for the sake of financial mindedness, the uniqueness is lost and the market advantage is gone”***



Addressing the Perceived Failings of Short-Term Land Occupation:

<https://qrco.de/bgQTUs>



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Putting it into action

# In practice: Ben Allomes, Hawkes Bay, NZ

Michael Blanche NSch 2010

I met Ben Allomes almost by chance. We spoke about my study for perhaps 15 minutes but as a knowledge return per minute he was probably the best value. One of his theories – ‘The Graph’ (see p21) – has become a major aspect to the business strategy section of this report.

He was a former Sharemilker of the Year and only 31. Maybe it was the enthusiasm and free spirited way with which Ben conveyed it, but in no time he had told me some of the core issues I needed to include in this report.

He and his wife Nicky started straight from university with no money. One of the first things they did was write down goals and a strategic plan. He still refers to it. The main target was \$1 million of equity in 10 years ... they did it in 7! He embraced debt and got excited by it. He was adamant that the only way to progress from a standing start was to be in the top 5% of operators.

He had no qualms in gaining recognition. He was in no way arrogant, rather he saw this as an essential part of progression and creating opportunity. He entered the Sharemilker of the Year competition every second year after starting until he won it seven years later.

He had exceptional clarity of thought. He would simply look at a challenge then find a solution. He was always looking for ways to achieve his goals and his goals were always defined. He embraced innovation to achieve this.

He shared Andy Morris’s attitude to detail. The first 80% is important – cow health and nutrition were non-negotiable – but chasing the last 20% kick started the law of diminishing returns.

**“ One of the first things Ben and Nicky did was write down goals and a strategic plan. He still refers to it.”**



The farming ladder: <https://qrco.de/bgOTXQ>



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Putting it into action

# In practice: Equity partnership, New Zealand

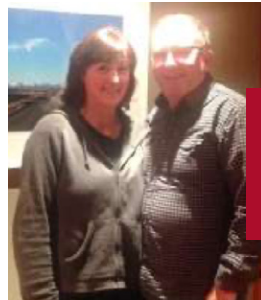
Gail Lewis NSch 2014

Matt and Julie Ross together with Neil and Julie Hamilton had an amazing relationship. It was truly inspirational how they had worked together to achieve their goals of farm ownership and helping the next generation into agriculture.

Neil had seen the ability of Matt when the latter had worked on his dairy farm as a young man. Matt progressed to be employed as a farm worker, followed by being given the opportunity to rear his own livestock and then followed by a share farmer position. The couples had worked together in an equity partnership, allowing them to expand the dairy herd and purchase additional farm land. Each couple said to me that, for such an agreement to work, there must be complete trust, pooling of skills, communication, shared goals, similar philosophies, patience and principles.



**Matt and Julie Ross**



**Neil and Julie Hamilton**

Graham and Sue Evans and their son Rhys reside in South Otago. Graham and Sue had moved from Wales some 25 years ago, seeking a future in the agricultural industry which they could build upon. They felt Wales did not provide them with any opportunity to own a farm themselves. Graham and Sue began by share milking and working extremely hard to generate a cash flow to enable them to reach their goal of farm ownership.

They did not particularly like dairy cows, but it was a means to their end goal of having a beef and sheep unit. Graham thought outside the box to generate an income to achieve his goal. While share milking, rather than purchasing young dairy heifer replacements - which were expensive as a result of demand - he began purchasing older milking cows which would provide him with an increased number of cattle for the dairy herd far sooner, at a lower purchase cost.



**Graham, Sue and Rhys Evans**



**Graham thought outside the box to generate an income to achieve his goal."**



Sustainable land tenure for the farmer and the next generation:  
<https://qrco.de/bgQTEw>



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Putting it into action

# In practice: Cherry Valley Community Supported Agriculture, USA

Rona Amiss NSch 2010

Cherry Valley Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), run by Heidi Secord, has around 80 customers who pay \$600 in January and start collecting their vegetables in May through to October. In September when produce was abundant they were receiving around \$40 a week in squash, garlic, potatoes, carrots, tomatoes, peppers and other wonderful fresh veg. The farm was also able to sell surplus produce at a local farmers' market and attended a number of garlic festivals each year to sell the high value garlic crop.


The customers that I talked to thought that paying early in the year guaranteed that they would get the produce and they were keen for the farm to continue operating. In 2009 early tomato blight had destroyed the crop, but in 2010 abundant tomatoes meant the customers could take home basket loads. Although many were disappointed in 2009, they understood that the value of the CSA was being able to share in the bad times as well as the good, reconnecting people with the reality of food production.

During my time in the States I saw many variations on the CSA themes which included buying clubs (paying \$40 a year for the privilege of buying from the farm stand) internet buying clubs and chicken shares. All had a fantastic level of commitment from the customer to support the young farmer to make a living.

Like any farming, margins were tiny and the work was hard. Heidi, in common with many new entrants, had a passion for farming and was living her dream. From a non-farming family, she finished a business degree then worked for the Peace Corps in Mali. On returning to the States in the late 1990s she decided that she wanted to farm and set about getting experience working for growers. Seeing 47 acres owned by Stroudsburg township not being utilised she approached them in 2005 with a business plan and managed to rent the land on a 10-year lease for \$1 a year.

Through determination and hard graft she has cleared and fenced 5 acres to produce the vegetables. That leaves the other 42 acres of woodland and scrubby overgrown land that has so much potential but needs so much more than 10 years to do it in. In the UK Heidi would have been able to apply for an environmental grant to help maintain the biodiversity and provide educational access. But in the States that support is not available so each step will be only be taken when the money allows.

**“ All had a fantastic level of commitment from the customer to support the young farmer to make a living.”**

 New entrants and opportunities in farming:  
<https://qrco.de/bgQSwe>



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Putting it into action

# In practice: Preston Fernandes: California, USA

Ifan Roberts NSch 2024

After completing his studies at Cal Poly, Preston Fernandes initially worked for World Wide Sires while his older brother helped manage their family farm. Keen to carve his own path, Preston launched a heifer-rearing business in 2019 with the support of a Beginning Farmer Loan from the Farm Service Agency – a programme designed to support first-generation farmers.

As the business evolved, Preston became determined to establish his own dairy enterprise. In California dairy farms are typically rented by the ‘cow space’ (or ‘cow hole’) with prices ranging from US\$11–12 per space for older or poorly maintained units to US\$17–18 for premium facilities.

Preston and his brother spotted a clear opportunity: rather than compete for top-end units they gained a reputation for reviving neglected dairies. In his words they became known locally as the “slum lords” - taking over rundown sites that others had abandoned, restoring them to functionality with their own team, cows, and management. These farms were often located in areas where tight water regulations made land use changes impossible, leaving the dairies ripe for revival.

They also made smart use of flexible financing tools to grow the business:

- Vendor finance (‘seller carry’) allowed them to purchase entire herds with a small down payment and repay the balance directly via deductions from their milk cheque. For example, they once acquired a 600-cow herd with just a 19% deposit.
- Lease-to-own agreements (e.g. a five-year lease with purchase option) allowed them to invest early capital into restoring infrastructure rather than sinking it into land acquisition. This structure also provided tax advantages for vendors.

Now in their early 30s Preston and his brother operate across six sites milking over 6,000 cows. Their team includes an operations manager, two senior herdsman, and a large milking crew along with a dedicated calving and transition unit. All replacement heifers are reared off-site under contract until four months of age.

This story exemplifies how strategic thinking, practical experience, and creative financing can turn low-value assets into a scalable, high-performing dairy business.

**“ ....They became known locally as the ‘slum lords’ - taking over rundown sites that others had abandoned, restoring them to functionality.”**



Inspiring the next generation of dairy entrepreneurs:  
<https://qrco.de/bgUfaA>



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Putting it into action

## In practice: Trust, openness and transparency

Robbie Moore NSch 2016



***In Uruguay, I met with Carlos Diaz whose family farms about an hour's drive just north of Montevideo."***

Their farm is 560 hectares of predominately arable, growing soya, sorghum, maize and producing alfalfa. They also have a small beef enterprise. The family rents about half of the land which they farm on an annual basis from a single landlord. Yet despite strong demand from other farmers within the area, the landlord has been prepared to renew the lease on an annual basis to them for the last eight years. I was told that a good working relationship with their landlord has been absolutely key. But what made this relationship work?

Both parties initially shared their aspirations and long-term objectives with one another regardless of the fact that on paper, the parties had only signed up to a one-year agreement. The landlord had aspirations around improvements to soil fertility, and openly shared his desire to realise the capital gain in the future. The Diaz family shared their aspiration of bringing their son into the business, and to develop their beef herd. Both parties then understood one another's end game, and in the meantime could focus on the delivery of good results that would slowly contribute to each other's aspirations being realised.

The relationship was solidified around trust, openness and transparency. When results were good, the Diaz family openly shared information with their landlord regarding their margins they had achieved, even if it resulted in the rent being slightly increased. But when times were tough, and results were poor, the landlord understood and responded with some leniency. Both parties were committed to their 'business' relationship. The tenant was prepared to invest in the holding in the knowledge that he would be compensated fairly should the agreement come to an end, even if this was in a year's time.

Carlos commented that the parties had developed an understanding. It was clear that the relationship was far beyond that of a 'traditional' landlord/ tenant model of simply paying the rent to the landlord and receiving land in return. It was more like a co-operative business relationship, without it stating so on paper.



***Both parties then understood one another's end game, and in the meantime could focus on the delivery of good results."***



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Putting it into action

# TALKING POINT 7:

## The Ben Allomes Theory

Michael Blanche NSch 2010

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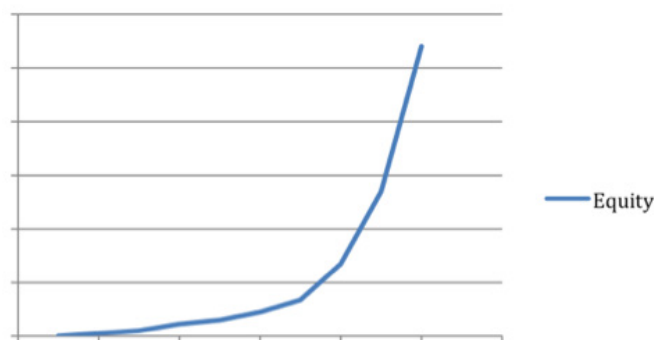
***One of the New Zealand farmers I met on my Nuffield showed me something that warranted a special place in my report.”***

I call it The Graph because .... it's a graph! It shows what Ben Allomes (see p16) believes to be the typical tracking of equity in a new farming business over time (N.B.: x axis is time; y is money):

It may not look it, but the business is still growing as significantly in percentage terms at the start as it is at the end. You still have to grow your business significantly all the way through, it's just all relative.

Ben suggested that many new entrants give up round the middle of the graph because they feel they aren't getting anywhere: just before real total equity growth kicks in.

**Equity of a First Generation Farmer**



Ben's theory was that the first third of the graph involved gaining and implementing skills. I thought I knew a reasonable amount about farming when I started this study. I think most of us are confident in our knowledge. Yet on my travels, what excited me was how much I didn't know.

The second third is gaining and benefitting from contacts. This means meeting people, impressing people, proving to people you are worth investing in. It took me a while to get my head round this. My default setting is to keep quiet with my head below the parapet. This is fine if you have a continuation model to follow, but under growth conditions it is essential to be at the front of people's minds and hence at the front of the queue for opportunity.

The final third is seeing tremendous equity growth. It can't happen without the first two.



***Many new entrants give up round the middle of the graph because they feel they aren't getting anywhere.”***



The farming ladder: <https://qrco.de/bgQTXO>



# TALKING POINT 8:

## Lessons learned in the UK

Rona Amiss NSch 2010

I started out thinking that to be a new entrant in the UK was hard, if not impossible, but I found plenty of new farmers to visit who were carrying out all sorts of innovative market-focussed farming. Most are still striving to progress, have a huge range of talents from practical farm skills, and food processing to social media, and most are desperately short of capital and opportunity.

### FROM A HUGE RANGE OF BUSINESSES I WENT TO VISIT, HERE ARE THE LESSONS I LEARNED IN THE UK:

- There are lots of people wanting to farm, although many of them are lacking the skills required.
- New entrants are running amazing innovative businesses against the odds.
- New entrants are focussed on what the customer wants and using a huge varieties of skills to deliver it.
- Training is available and new entrants are using the opportunities to gain skills in food manufacturing and a wide range of business disciplines.
- The farming ladder starts with very small steps.
- The opportunities are limited and only exceptional operators do progress.
- Tenancy sector still seems the main route to farming for a new entrant.
- New entrants are short of time, capital and opportunity.
- A strong team, could be wife or husband or a wider network, is essential to keep the new entrant sane.
- Any help is always appreciated, especially if it is practical.
- New entrants have got some very high profile supporters, who want to see things change.
- Landowners are starting to recognise the need for a change.
- Share farming is an opportunity but it must be based on trust and common goals.
- Nobody gets anything for nothing; successful new entrants work very hard.



New entrants and opportunities in farming: <https://qrco.de/bgQSwe>



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Putting it into action



Action that can be taken immediately (Do now)

## Putting it into action: What you need to know...

Rona Amiss NSch 2010

Farming is not just about making a profit, and my travels have reassured me that most of us farm for a range of reasons. The ownership and working of land often goes far deeper than just a career and I pay tribute to all the amazing and resilient farmers I have met on my travels.

These recommendations for new entrants – alongside other recommendations for the farming industry and landowners, landlords and land agents - are a platform for further discussion, collaboration and action, so what are you waiting for...

1. Risks are high but the UK Welfare State means you are unlikely to starve.
2. To be successful applying for a tenancy or business opportunity you really need to be the best. Competition is high and you need to focus on how a potential landlord will see you and your ability. Market yourself!
3. Practical skills are essential. You are unlikely to survive by just being good at business plans and social media. Look out for free or subsidised courses to gain qualifications you may need and look at some basic food skills courses to give you an extra edge.
4. Business planning skills are not optional. Take up the offer of any courses and get plenty of advice, but at the end of the day it's your plan so you need to write it.
5. First rung of the mythical ladder is not the tenancy. Start a small business even in the back garden but keep detailed accounts and figures that you can use in the future.
6. Be mobile; opportunities are never on your doorstep and they certainly won't come to you. Networking and contacting land agents to let them know that you are out there is a good start.
7. Land agents have different objectives they need to deliver, find what they are and see how you can match them. Farming is not just about profit (although you will need to make some) and the highest rents. Sometimes a new entrant can deliver environmental and social objectives that an established farmer will struggle to achieve.

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8. Demonstrate that you have a good support network, be it your husband, wife, family or mentor. Landlords are frightened by anything they perceive as risk. Most first-generation farmers will tell you that things can get tough and a support network is essential to survival and sanity.
9. Nobody is going to give you anything, so stop waiting for the perfect acreage and large tractor. Some of the best businesses are started on the most unlikely pieces of land.
10. An easy life is not optional, but if you like a challenge .....



*Rona Amiss's support network  
(L to R): Nevil with Elsa, Alfred,  
Dora, Percy and Harold*



New entrants and opportunities in farming: <https://qrco.de/bgQSwe>





Action that can be taken immediately (Do now)

## Putting it into action: More of what you need to know

Ifan Roberts NSch 2024

### New entrants

- There is not a shortage of supply in viable opportunity worldwide but more a shortage of capable new entrants who are willing to move to the opportunity and effectively execute it.
- Lots of fantastic new entrants are swiftly becoming a great story for the industry. It's important that others who wish to do the same reach out to these and learn from them.

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Get as good as you can at the day job. Make yourselves an attractive prospect. Make yourself invaluable to whatever organisation you are attached to.
- Continuous learning
- Build a 'war chest'
- Network as much as possible
- Your brand is your superpower
- Don't sweat the small stuff
- For the best operators, the opportunities find them. Remember that luck is where the point of preparation meets the point of opportunity.
- To be successful in this industry you need to be 'long-term' passionate about dairy farming.



***Luck is where the point of preparation meets the point of opportunity.***



Inspiring the next generation of dairy entrepreneurs:  
<https://qrco.de/bgUfaA>



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## Actions that require some planning (start planning)

# Putting it into action: The rules of first generation farming club

Michael Blanche NSch 2010

### Rule 1. It's up to you and no one else

“What's to be is within me”: Get obsessed with the system, blame others, grow massive chips on both shoulders at your peril. Focusing on the things you can control is key.

### Rule 2. Be patient and persistent

Walt Disney went to 139 financial institutions before being successful in getting a loan  
“Q: How do you eat an elephant? A: One forkful at a time” Set your goal and commence eating.

### Rule 3. It's all about head

You either need to choose a system with high turnover of product and therefore cash in order to keep working capital requirements down OR have a very low input system with a very low cost structure to achieve the same goal. Being traditional won't work. You need to develop a growth business model, not a continuation business model.

### Rule 4. It's all about heart

This means resilience, determination and endurance of hardship. How deep can you dig to get to where you want to be? You will be hit and sometimes you will lose. Most that made it were hit hard and lost big but they kept going. “Always look forward, if you look back you'll trip up.”

### Rule 5. Cash, cash, cash

All those who made it had a consistent source of cash that enabled them to reinvest and thus produce capital growth. Examples included: trading livestock, all forms of contracting, off farm employment, intensive livestock (dairy, pigs, chickens). You need to know that for every hour you work you can achieve a decent margin.

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Putting it into action

**Rule 6. Innovate and adapt**

Respond to the challenges in front of you. Think outside the box. If there are no opportunities, think of ways, sell yourself in different ways, approach people, be cheeky, be bold, be resourceful, create your own opportunities.

Create systems that are simple yet clever. Seek new ideas, implement these well. “Trust yourself when all men doubt you but allow for their doubting too.”

**Rule 7. Property or production?**

You can do both, but most did it predominantly one way. In the UK unless you have significant capital, you’ll have to do it through production and maybe invest in property thereafter. To grow a business through production you need to be in the top 5% of producers ... it’s the only way, it should be your only focus.



*Michael Blanche and family*



The farming ladder: <https://qrco.de/bgQTXO>





## Long-term options to consider (Think ahead)

There are great opportunities for aspiring and new entrants to help develop ideas and business skills, and to provide support. The organisations and courses below (the list is not exhaustive or in any particular order) all seek to help, and welcome applications:

### Farm Advisory Service – Scottish new entrant programme

The FAS New Entrants to Farming Programme in Scotland offers activities and advice for potential and aspiring new entrants, ensuring people are aware of the opportunities that exist and have the skills set and knowledge for success. It also includes a network of new entrant groups across Scotland, helping individuals develop their business.

<https://www.fas.scot/rural-business/new-entrants/>

### Scottish Land Matching Service

Established in October 2019, the Scottish Land Matching Service is a free service offering independent advice and facilitation to anyone considering options for joint ventures in farming and crofting. It is available to anyone either seeking an opportunity to embark on a joint venture or those looking to offer an opportunity on their farm or croft.

<https://slms.scot/>

### Farming Connect – Wales

Farming Connect can match farmers and landowners who are looking to step back from the industry with new entrants looking for a way into farming. It guides people on both sides through the key steps. The package of support offers a matching service, mentoring, business planning and legal advice to provide guidance at every stage of establishing a joint venture.

<https://businesswales.gov.wales/farmingconnect/business/start-farm>

### Landmatch England

Launching in late 2025, this new land-matching service for England aims to be a place where farmers and growers can connect with landowners to unlock opportunities and bring new food and farming enterprises to life. The platform seeks to make it easier to find the right land, start sustainable projects and grow ventures that strengthen both communities and the land local to them.

<https://landmatchengland.org.uk/>

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### **Abunda – land matching service**

This online platform and related services facilitates introductions and partnerships between landowners, land-seekers, and collaborators. It integrates personality traits and conflict management into its matching process to ensure a better level of success ensuring personalities get on, and also offers templates, tools and resources for effective farm business planning.

<https://abunda.farm/>

### **Soil Association – The Land Trust**

The Land Trust was founded in 2007 by the coming together of three parties: Land Heritage, the Paget Estate and the Soil Association. It safeguards legacies of productive land, preventing it being lost from farming and growing, and aims to provide opportunities for people to enter farming, often for the first time.

<https://www.soilassociation.org/the-land-trust/looking-for-land/>

### **The Earth Trust – Farm Step**

Launched in 2009, Oxfordshire-based Farm Step provides an opportunity for people who might otherwise be locked out of farming by land price and availability to ‘step up’ onto the first stage of farming. Farm Step tenants operate independently of the Earth Trust, but are offered land with favourable tenancy agreement terms, and to work alongside other like-minded green businesses.

[https://earthtrust.org.uk/what\\_we\\_do/farm-step-programme/](https://earthtrust.org.uk/what_we_do/farm-step-programme/)

### **Royal Countryside Fund**

The Royal Countryside Fund works to support the life cycle of family farms through succession, progression and new entrants into farming, particularly young people in their early years as their business grows. It has a new support initiative helping young people and new entrants enter, and succeed in, the agricultural industry, as well as offering training and support to farmers in specific areas.

<https://www.royalcountrysidefund.org.uk/how-we-help/young-people/>

### **AHDB – small scale pig keeping**

Keeping pigs is one of the most popular ways to enter the farming sector, and the pig industry is made up of a variety of systems, with herds ranging from a handful of sows to thousands. This AHDB information page offers information and guidance aimed specifically at small-scale pig production, including useful links to legal and technical information, webinars and helpful organisations.

<https://ahdb.org.uk/small-scale-pig-keeping>

### **Farm Advisory Service – new entrants guide to keeping cattle**

This guide, from Scotland’s Farm Advisory Service, covers everything from choosing the breed of cattle, the classification of stock you decide to keep (over-winter stores or having a small suckler herd), production system, housing, feeding and handling.

<https://www.fas.scot/downloads/guide-to-keeping-cattle/>

### **National Sheep Association – Next Generation**

The NSA’s guide to starting your own flock covers everything from a checklist for initial planning to legal requirements. It includes information on sourcing grazing land and stock, choosing breeds, to feeding, health and welfare and dealing with deadstock.

<https://nationalsheep.org.uk/next-generation/starting-your-own-flock/>

### **Community Supported Agriculture**

With a mission to help create a CSA (Community Supported Agriculture Project) within reach of every neighbourhood of the UK, this organisation’s website offers help and support for anyone interested in setting up, improving or joining a CSA. The site features case studies and latest funding opportunities, alongside dates for training and a mentoring service for start-ups and existing CSAs.

<https://communitysupportedagriculture.org.uk/>

### **Smart Farming Guide – NFYFC and Savills**

This website, which also provides a useful guide for running YFC Business Development Competitions, offers plenty of advice and information on setting up and running a successful business, and includes links to other helpful resources.

<http://yfcsmartfarming.org.uk/>

### **GroCycle – setting up a market garden**

This online guide covers the basic steps you need to start your own market garden, regardless of what your starting point is. It provides guidance on how to decide what to grow, where to grow it, how much of it you should grow, and how to market and sell it.

<https://grocycle.com/starting-a-market-garden/>

### **The Institute of Agriculture and Horticulture**

TIAH provides tailored advice and practical tools to help develop skills and lifelong learning. It is a gateway to advice, support, and training, offering access to topical online learning and insights personalised for your professional development. It offers free membership for new entrants, with access to member-only tools to support your personal growth.

<https://tiah.org/students-and-new-entrants>

### **CLA – Farming Business Models Handbook**

This free-to-download CLA handbook provides up-to-date, practical advice on business models that could improve productivity and profitability. It provides independent information and analysis for a range of situations, including for new entrants and ‘farming entrepreneurs’ looking for land or premises, as well as for people seeking to leave the industry.

<https://www.cla.org.uk/news/business-models-to-unlock-future-farming-potential/>

### **Oxbury New Gen**

Oxbury Bank has a specific offering for new entrants (18-40 years old) with relevant practical experience who have set up a new business within the last three years. The business plan must have agriculture as the core business activity, and applicants must not be earning an economic wage from your own farm. Funding can be up to 100%, and borrowers can also access advice.

<https://www.oxbury.com/lending/oxbury-new-gen/>

### **Business support via gov.uk**

The Government’s business pages signpost local advice and free support, including help with starting a business, running and growing a business and investing and expanding in the UK. Depending on where your business is located, free advice is also available by phone, email or webchat.

<https://www.gov.uk/get-business-support>

### **Yorkshire Agricultural Society – Future Farmers of Yorkshire**

Future Farmers of Yorkshire has 1,000 members who meet regularly to share ideas, debate and expand their knowledge. As part of its offering, it is organising Pathways to Farm Entry, two days of skills training to help people apply for farm tenancy opportunities and to look at other ways into farming such as share farming and contracting.

<https://yas.co.uk/future-farmers-pathways-to-farm-entry/>

### **Addington Fund – New Entrant Grant Scheme**

This supports new entrants aged 18-40 and who have started farming in the last two years. It offers support for initiatives that deliver real benefits to those farming businesses, such as healthy livestock management, sustainable soil care, preventing future issues that could affect long-term viability and exceptional projects or innovative ideas.

<https://www.addingtonfund.org.uk/new-entrant-scheme>

### **Farmstart Network**

Run by the Landworkers' Alliance and other organisations, this provides an opportunity for people to test their farming and growing ideas in a protected environment, while building knowledge, skills, confidence and experience to progress to their own farm or market garden. All Farmstarts provide access to land and equipment, routes to market and business support, training or mentoring.

<https://landworkersalliance.org.uk/farm-start-network/>

### **Institute of Agricultural Management – Farm Management Skills Programme**

This comprehensive course can be booked as a full course of two, four-day units or as individual days. It covers a range of topics, including self-development, motivating others, influencing for success, plus presenting and communicating with confidence. The second block includes finance and money, agreements, managing risk and future farming.

<https://www.iagrm.com/events/farm-management-skills-programme/>

### **Defra – previous work**

The previous Government had set up an industry group and pilot scheme for new entrants. Its aim was to see what works in terms of increasing the chances of new and recent entrants accessing the land and finance they need to develop innovative new land-based businesses, however there is little focus on progressing this at present.

<https://defrafarming.blog.gov.uk/category/payments-for-entering-farming/>

### **Nuffield Farming Scholarships Trust – Scholarships**

NFST aims to inspire passion in people and develop their potential to lead positive change in farming and food. It awards about 25 life-changing scholarships each year that unlock individual potential and broaden horizons through study and travel overseas, with a view to developing the farming and agricultural industries. More than 1,000 Nuffield Farming Scholars have completed their studies and travel.

<https://www.nuffieldscholar.org/>

### **Nuffield Farming Scholarship Trust - Next-Gen Scholars**

The Next-Gen Scholarships are focussed on young people aged 18-24 as part of Nuffield Farming Scholarships Trust's initiative to develop young talent. They aim to help young people establish themselves in agriculture, using the Nuffield Farming network to link successful applicants directly to farmers. The initiative is currently a pilot scheme and has expanded across the UK in its second year.

<https://www.nuffieldscholar.org/scholarships/nuffield-farming-next-gen-scholarship>

# SPONSORS



## Central Region Farmers Trust

Central Region Farmers Trust's mission is to provide funding for education that benefits agriculture and horticulture in the central region. It strives to support farmers in adopting sustainable farming practices and enhancing their skills for a thriving agricultural sector.

[www.centralregionfarmerstrust.org](http://www.centralregionfarmerstrust.org)



## Gloucestershire Agricultural House Foundation

Helping Agriculture in Gloucestershire by supporting the education, development and needs of people in the industry.



## Elizabeth Creak Charitable Trust

The Elizabeth Creak Charitable Trust is a grant giving body that invests in people who will advance healthy, fair and sustainable UK food production. Grants finance projects that help farmers innovate to survive and thrive while scholarships support and encourage individuals to innovate sustainable practices in farming.

[www.elizabethcreak.co.uk](http://www.elizabethcreak.co.uk)



## Royal Agricultural Society of England (RASE)

The Royal Agricultural Society of England (RASE) is an independent charity and membership organisation dedicated to supporting the progression of knowledge and innovation within the agricultural community.

[www.rase.org.uk](http://www.rase.org.uk)

# IN SUMMARY

This Bitesize Guide, from the Nuffield Farming Scholarships Trust and RASE, provides a snapshot of the breadth and depth of reports available at



<https://www.nuffieldscholar.org/reports>



The website also features reports from global Nuffield Farming Scholars, including Australia, New Zealand, USA and Brazil. The reports are a rich source of inspiration, case studies and thought-provoking recommendations for farming, food, horticulture, forestry and ancillary industries.

Please get in touch at [info@rase.org.uk](mailto:info@rase.org.uk) if you have questions, comments or feedback.



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