

Questions for sheep farmer educating in schools

About you

Are you an NSA member?

We are both NSA members who have yet to attend the Sheep event and are hoping to this year.

Are you happy for us to share your name and county of residence? YES

Andrew Dellbridge and Catherine Flaxman - Spixworth Norfolk.

Can you briefly explain your farming system – size of flock, size of farm, how long you have worked in the industry?

We run up to 100 ewes and currently have reduced numbers so we can concentrate on doing fewer better, with Catherine starting to breed Herdwicks and Andrew looking to continue keeping Hebrideans which is his primary focus as these are used in his Sheepdog training. The Hebrideans are crossed with North Country Cheviot Tup.

We graze a number of parcels of land across Norfolk from 5 acre meadows to large solar farms. We mob graze each parcel and look to work alongside the current land users and or take a lead role with using the sheep to improve the soil structure without stripping out the goodness. We conservation graze with other additional benefits to the land owners by incorporating items such as owl boxes.

Our focus is to three fold, produce quality grass fed lamb, breed a flock of pure Herdwicks and keep sheep so Andrew can follow his passion of training sheepdogs.

Catherine is a fourth generation farmer however Andrew is new to keeping stock having grown up in London, however he has had a successful career in Hunt Service where he reached the dizzy heights of being a professional Huntsman but part of the agricultural community.

We met when Andrew was selling some sheep with Catherine left with twice as many as she came for, the rest is history as they are now living together with them both very much living the dream as they run together DELLBRIDGE FARM PRODUCE. Producing Norfolk lamb for the table, eggs and honey from their hives.

About the visits

Do you discuss sheep farming in particular with the school children or general farming?

This is our second year working in partnership with FARMER TIME. FARMER TIME has us paired with a school and deliver video calls direct from the farm/sheep to the classroom. We discuss each part of the farming year every few weeks to the class and they previously left a resource box with the school which hold items such as sheep pellets, hay and even a flat cap so the class can smell and feel many items they show them from the farm.

We have been very lucky that companies have donated items such as whistle from LOGAN so the children can actually have a go in the classroom. We wish to make each session as interactive as possible.

How long have you been educating schools on farming?

This is our second year.

What made you realise that engaging with schools was important?

We love sheep, sheepdogs and farming, so wanted to share the experience with others. Sheep and farming has managed to bring us together as a couple so we wanted to firstly share the joy that can be found in the countryside and also equally important where good food comes from as very sympathetically rear sheep and enhance the countryside by doing so.

What typically happens during one of your school visits?

We will look at the yearly calendar of events such as shearing. Then plan to share this with school.

A lesson plan is agreed and this can just be a verbal agreement between us as a couple. Each session will start with an outline of what they will cover, then the main bulk of information followed by a conclusion with questions asked of the pupils to check their understand of the subject.

What are some common misconceptions children have about sheep or farming?

The paired school are year 3/4 so generally they haven't any ingrained thoughts but the questions they ask are often very broad and often surprise, such as why we paint the sheep with a number and what paint is used.

What key message do you hope students take away after meeting you?

It is hoped that when they are out and about don't just see a 'green' landscape but they see the livestock, land managers and farmers within. They don't just see a sheep but understand the care they receive from farmers. It is also hoped that some might consider a pathway in to farming in the future.

How do the children and staff respond to you and what you tell them about farming?

The school and pupils are always engaged and look to gain more information about farming sheep.

Have there been any standout moments for you, such as some feedback that has stayed with you, an interaction, or how you felt after the visit?

When they first working with the school, we where told one pupil was interested in being a farmer, at the end of their first year the pupils sent a mass of feedback from the school direct to A and C. with the vast majority now keen to be farmers.

What would you say to other sheep farmers who might be thinking about visiting schools?

You can organise visits but why not take your farm directly in to the classroom with video calls by signing up to FARMER TIME.

How easy was it for you to get involved in this wider education?

So easy, simply contact FARMERS TIME and they do the pairing, simple.

What have you gained from taking part in these visits?

We want to give something back to the next generation and share the positives of sheep farming, getting involved in a passionate community. The hope was to enrich lives of others with real tales from the farm.

What do you hope education on farming looks like going forward?

Keep it simple by using techniques such as video calls, small interventions can make big changes in how people view food production and farming.