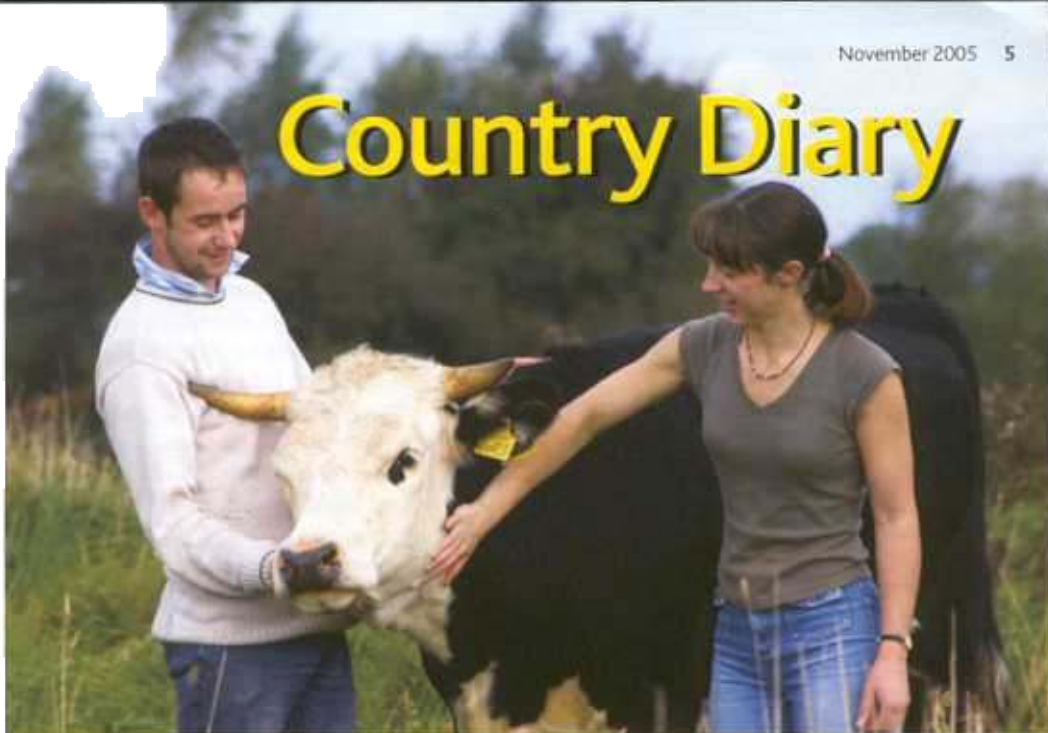


Country Diary



Fight to save Fordhall

A light-hearted look at countryside people, places, events and good ideas

Organic investment... Ben and Charlotte Hollins – and Hereford cow

ARE YOU in a mood to do some armchair campaigning to save a tiny corner of our countryside? Then here's an idea that might have some attraction. Two young Shropshire farmers have launched a national appeal to save their pioneering family farm from developers. Ben and Charlotte Hollins, both in their early twenties, have until next July to raise £800,000.

Their late father, Arthur Hollins, was one of the few farmers who remained organic after the Second World War. He spent his life researching soil fertility at Fordhall Farm near Market Drayton and was one of the pioneers of yoghurt production

in this country. Now the farm risks being turned into a factory.

To save it, our two twenty-something tenant farmers (a very rare breed!) have set up a community land trust and they are selling shares in the farm at £50 each. If the project is successful, the trust will take over ownership of the farm. Investors will never make a dividend in cash, for the trust will be a non-profit organisation, but they will have a say in the farm's future.

"You'll be investing in everything the farm represents," says Charlotte Hollins, "and standing up for something you believe in. We're saying there should be a future for family

farms growing organic local produce, farming in a way that encourages wildlife and supplying local food that keeps us and the environment healthy.”

There are plans to open the farm up to community visitors and walkers and build an education centre for schools and anyone interested in the future of farming. Students and volunteers will be welcome on work experience and new work spaces will provide a home for small land-based ‘social enterprises’.

The Hollins family also hope the

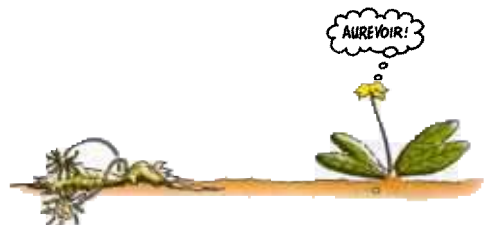
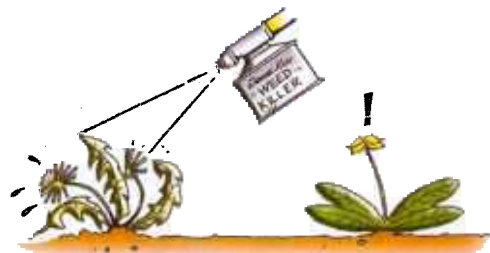
community trust will act as a model for other young farmers struggling to gain a foothold on the land. Greg Pillely, a national expert on community supported agriculture, said schemes like this would ensure young farmers and their communities could gain permanently affordable access to farms. “Many have the skills and motivation but little capital. At the same time, the demand for good locally grown food increases and people want to re-connect with local farms and build sustainable rural communities.”

Well, the project gets my vote. I’ve agreed with a lifelong friend that we will buy one share each instead of giving Christmas presents. Given that I usually receive a present associated with food, the whole thing will no doubt be good for my health too!

Charlotte Hollins or Sophie Hopkins, the project manager, can be contacted on 01630 638696. Details of how to buy shares is on the project’s website: www.fordhallorganicfarm.co.uk. Or email savingfordhall@hotmail.co.uk

roots *Ted Andrews*

BONJOUR! JE SUIS A DANDELION.
I EXPECT YOU'RE WONDERING
'OW I CAME BY ZAT NAME
NES PAS? WELL ZE FRENCH
FOR TEETH IS 'DENTE' AND MY
LEAVES ARE SHAPED LIKE ZE
TEETH OF A LION... PUT ZE TWO
TOGEZZER AND YOU 'AVE IT!
DENTE LION!



Highland pearls

Strictly not for consumption are the freshwater pearl mussels being reintroduced secretly into two rivers in the Cairngorms National Park. The mussels are still under threat from illegal pearl fishers. They were given full legal protection here in 1998. Dr Phil Boon of Scottish Natural Heritage says: “Freshwater pearl mussels are one of Scotland’s most endangered species, yet we still have around half the world’s population. It’s great news that this project is showing early signs of success.”

Foal of joy

Many readers have written to me