



- **Above:** Setting up nature trails is one idea being used in the campaign to project community farm ideals
- **Right:** Arthur Hollins developed home produced milk products including yogice, yogtails and soft cheeses

“He travelled the country giving lectures on his ideas, and there was even a play written about him, *Arthur’s Plough*, about a machine he invented and patented to replace the plough,” Ben and Charlotte’s mother, Connie, recalls.

Arthur was into diversification in a big way, with an on-farm butcher, farm shop and restaurant augmented by a swimming pool and tennis court.

Re-stocking

Like many an innovator, Arthur never grew rich on the back of his exploits and, until his death early in 2005, spent his last decade fighting legal battles with the landlords over successive notices to quit.

Stock numbers plummeted, buildings fell into disrepair, but his last months were cheered by the knowledge that his children had now embarked on an action plan for saving the farm.

A short-term lease has been drawn up to give the Hollins’s time to raise the £800,000, but if they fail they will have to leave the farm. The siblings have restocked with native breeds such as Aberdeen Angus and Hereford cattle, Gloucestershire Old Spot, Large White and Tamworth pigs, and Suffolk sheep. Produce is sold in a re-opened farm shop.

The role of Greg and Martin and the Land Trust project has been vital. “We had zero cash and they have paid out fees and set up a legal structure,” says Charlotte. “They are using us as a blueprint to roll out to other community farm projects.”

That blueprint involves raising part of the money through gifts and part through not-for-profit shares costing £50 each. It illustrates well how “community” reflects both the immediate geographical sense of the

word and the wider one that simply supports the ethos behind it. Shares purchases, for instance, have come from as far afield as Japan and Australia.

Educational

The campaign is a flagship for everything that community farming should represent, including the setting up of educational facilities, with the aim of drawing inner city groups to learn about the countryside and farming. Nature trails are already in place – the farm is described by the Shropshire Wildlife Trust as a haven for wildlife, with several endangered *Red List* birds present. There are also plans for buildings to be rented out to complementary enterprises.

In fact, it’s all that Arthur Hollins stood for being revived, emphasises Charlotte. “Everything will reflect on what he wanted to achieve. Dad had school trips coming here, but he never had facilities for them to stay, and the restaurant was set up in the farmhouse.”

Many of Ben and Charlotte’s university and college contemporaries have enlisted for volunteer work on events surrounding the campaign. Sophie Hopkins gave up a paid job to work full-time for nothing on project management, leading the volunteer working



weekends and fund-raising events.

Greg says the Fordhall case has raised the profile of community farms “fantastically”, but says they still face a tall order to raise the money. If they are successful, it will mean one of the biggest goals of his overall project will have been achieved. But there’s still one policy change that is required in English law if community land farms are truly to flourish, he says.

“In Scotland, if land is coming onto the market, locals have six months to come up with the cash to buy the land by law – they can even pre-empt the issue by saying they are interested in it if ever it came on to the market.

“In England, county farms, which are public assets, are being broken up and sold off to private owners. It would be preferable if owners were at least obliged to give local communities a say in their future.”

For more information contact Fordhall Farm on 01630 638696, see www.fordhallfarm.com or www.communitylandtrust.org.uk/farmland

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