



Two Shropshire farmers in their early twenties are plotting a quiet revolution in British agriculture. **Bill Taylor** went to meet them

**HISTORY** HAS a way of repeating itself at Fordhall Farm. In 1929, the organic pioneer Arthur Hollins took over the farm at the age of fourteen when his father died. The family was in debt and eviction seemed a real possibility, but Arthur fought successfully to establish Fordhall as a showpiece of holistic, sustainable agriculture. He died last year at the age of eighty-nine.

Now his youngest children Charlotte and Ben, aged 23 and 21, are in the midst of a campaign to save Fordhall from developers who want to turn part of the land into an industrial estate. They have until July to raise £800,000. If anything, the stakes are higher this time. The Fordhall campaign has become a test case for the future of British agriculture.

Charlotte and Ben Hollins have launched an international appeal to sell shares in Fordhall at £50 each. If they raise enough to buy the farm,

Farming co-operative ... 'new entrants can't buy farms any more,' says Charlotte Hollins. 'This is a way of taking the land value out of the equation'. Top left, Ben and Charlotte with their father Arthur, 'eccentric and entrepreneurial' who pioneered organic farming since before World War Two

it will be owned by a Community Land Trust on behalf of the shareholders. Charlotte and Ben will then rent the farm from this co-operative trust. It is the first scheme of its kind in the UK.

As well as ensuring the survival of the holistic farming principles that Arthur Hollins fought so hard to establish, this model of community-owned farms is seen as one of the few ways that young farmers of the future will be able to afford a foothold on the land. If it succeeds, it will indeed her-

ald a quiet revolution in agriculture.

"This project is unique," says Charlotte, "a model for the rest of the country. New entrants to agriculture can't buy farms any more. This is a way of taking the land value out of the equation. Our chances are pretty good. Everything we're doing is right with public opinion. It works now or it doesn't work at all. We need people to put their money where their mouth is."

Some big names in the environmental world have given their support already,

# Raising the stakes

