

always the centre of communities and that's been lost over the generations. People are only going to eat more healthy food if they can see it grown for themselves."

When Arthur Hollins started out as a fourteen-year-old farmer, he approved of chemical fertilizers as his father had done before him. Slowly, however, he discovered that spraying ever more chemicals on his fields did not continue to increase the yield, while wild woodland and pasture fertilized by cow muck seemed more productive. So began Arthur Hollins' lifelong research into soils and natural fertility.

Philip Conford, author of *The Origins of the Organic Movement*, takes up the story: "Fordhall's most successful period was from the mid-1940s until 1975, when his first wife May died. His second wife Connie attributes his extraordinary energy to his home-grown diet. During this productive time, Hollins converted the farm to organic, established a nationwide business both making and marketing organic yoghurt, ran a country club and restaurant and invented the 'pulse-seeder'.

Where to find Fordhall

Fordhall Farm lies on the outskirts of Market Drayton in Shropshire. Directions are on their website: www.fordhallfarm.com
To buy shares in Fordhall's community land trust, phone 01630 638696 or email project@fordhallfarm.com

You can also buy their beef, lamb and pork by mail order. Details on the website



"This machine avoided damage to the soil which he believed was caused by the plough. Arthur Hollins' success with pasture was such that the cattle were robust enough to stay outdoors all year round, a policy his family still follow."

Fordhall has now been pesticide-free for more than sixty years. "My dad was very eccentric and entrepreneurial," says Charlotte, "and tried always to think of new things to do on the farm. He was always working on it and improving it. It was only in the last few years of his life, he felt: 'I've got it right now'."

With Charlotte and Ben Hollins, the whole family struggle begins again. They are building up their stock of free-range cattle, sheep and pigs. For now the farm shop pays the rent and bills. All their meat is slaughtered and butchered locally. With the help of volunteers, the Hollins have also set up a nature trail and a picnic area.

"We think things are turning round. Every time there's a food scare on TV we have a rush in the shop, though it doesn't last. The first step is for people to buy local and organic comes next.

"Buying direct from farmers is the way to go. The inflated price of organic food in the supermarkets doesn't come back to the farmer. At the same time, the amount of money everyone spends on junk is startling. People simply eat too much of the wrong stuff."

In these days of great uncertainty for British agriculture, perhaps Charlotte and Ben Hollins will emerge as the Right Stuff! Certainly, they offer a sense of hope. At Fordhall, the farm manager and the leader and manager of the community land appeal are all under twenty-five. I can't imagine that they won't stay on the land. ■

'Reconnecting people with the land and food'
... the Hollins are also bidding to save Fordhall as a working farm

