



8000 landowners still can't be wrong:

A report about the Fordhall Community Land Initiative 10 Years after its Formation

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Charlotte Hollins, Sophie Hopkins and Ben Hollins led the original campaign to save Fordhall Farm in 2006

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This report presents the findings from the 'Fordhall Project Customer/Supporter Survey 2016' which solicited the opinions of 419 individuals who were either customers or supporters of Fordhall.

SUMMARY

The questionnaire for this research was developed by Dr John Hegarty in consultation with Charlotte Hollins. The questions used were based on a previous report for Fordhall '*8000 landowners can't be wrong*', with new questions added to capture the customers and supporter's feelings 10 years after the campaign to save Fordhall Farm. Ethical approval for this study was obtained from Keele University Ethics Committee.

In summary, it is found that the vast majority of people are satisfied with their relationship with Fordhall, felt empowered by their involvement, and felt as connected to Fordhall now when they first became involved. Most participants expressed that their involvement with Fordhall had made them feel part of a wider community and would encourage them to support other community farm buy-outs in the future.

FORDHALL AND ME

A total of 419 participants completed the survey. Most respondents were aged 65 years and over (53%) followed by 50-64 year olds (27%), 31-50 year olds (13%), those answering on behalf of a family or group (6%) and those under 30 (1%). Respondents were mainly based in the UK, however notable exceptions included participants from Australia, Belgium, Canada, France, New Zealand, The Netherlands, Sweden and the USA. Individuals based overseas accounted for 2.63% of the total sample.

Overall, an overwhelming majority of people (96%) were satisfied with their relationship with Fordhall. The remaining 4% of respondents indicated they were 'neutral' on this topic, and no respondents to the survey indicated dissatisfaction with their association.

'I feel as connected to Fordhall now as I did when I first got involved'

A majority of customers/supports of Fordhall feel as connected now as when they first got involved (89%).

Many respondents also provided comments explaining how their relationship with Fordhall had developed. Many of these expressed amazement and delight at having played a part in helping Fordhall.

"My pride in what they have achieved has increased year on year as more and more is done, it has surpassed what I ever imagined to be possible."

"My feelings about Fordhall Farm were strong when I first got involved and are still strong now. I admired the courage and imagination at the start, and fully admire... (the) amazing progress."

"The more and longer I have been associated (with Fordhall) the more my admiration has grown and the more good I see come out of it."

"I used to feel just enthusiastic, now I feel a deep affection and strong sense of ownership – I say "my farm"!"

"I'm amazed how much you have achieved and so pleased with how much the farm is open to the public and with so many opportunities to visit and participate. I feel very proud that my small contribution helped to make that possible."



Supporters were asked in one sentence why Fordhall was important to them. Four main categories emerged:

1. PROTECTING FARMING AND AGRICULTURE

"I wanted to support a farm that aimed to combine local food production, wildlife conservation, opportunities for adults and children to visit and learn about farming"

"I love Fordhall because they champion sustainable agriculture and education for our future."

"It works in many ways to connect us all with the land and with food production"

"Without places like Fordhall Farm we will be reduced to living like machines totally divorced from our countryside and the food that it delivers"

2. HELPING A LOCAL/COMMUNITY INITIATIVE

"It's really nice to be a part of something so good and to know that I belong and would be welcome."

"Inspirational project delivering great cooperation and community involvement."

"It is living proof that community ownership can work."

3. THE WORK OF BEN/CHARLOTTE/ARTHUR HOLLINS

"I admire the way Charlotte and Ben have developed the business with such high principles and commitment to a sustainable and ethical way of farming."

"I was so impressed by Ben & Charlottes 'fight' to save Fordhall farm and inspired by their spirit, (their) story has been hugely inspirational- it crystallised everything I believe in."



4. SUPPORTING THE UNDERDOG AND THE 'DAVID V GOLIATH' ELEMENT OF THE FIGHT TO SAVE FORDHALL

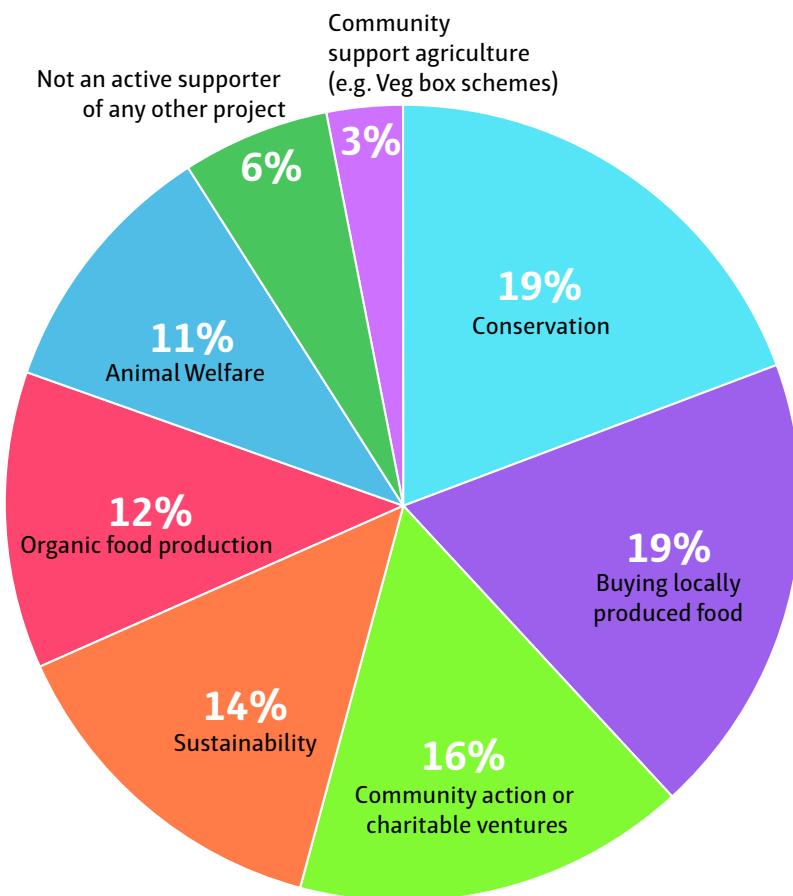
"Going against the flow of giant faceless organisations Fordhall Farm has shown that by grouping together individuals can still make a positive difference and help to preserve a little working corner of the countryside for the future"

"I want to support a small farm v a large company, a victory for the individuals against "big" business"

"I always dreamed of owning a patch of meadow and woodland sloping down to a winding brook, with a bunch of happy, healthy animals on it, that would remain there forever. By becoming a Fordhall landlord, I got precisely that – and more!"

FORDHALL'S LEGACY

Participants were asked what other organisations or movements that hold similar aims to Fordhall are they connected to. The results can be seen in the pie chart.



FORDHALL'S INFLUENCE ON THE WIDER COMMUNITY

The majority of participants (70%) indicated that their involvement with other organisations pre-dated their involvement with Fordhall. However, the remaining 30% of participants indicated that their involvement with Fordhall had resulted in them increasing, or in some cases initiating, support for other organisations with similar aims. For example, one supporter explains:

"With my awareness of, and support for Fordhall Farm Community Land Initiative, I offered to help when a farm local to (their home town) was considering becoming a community owned farm."



A positive 35% of participants indicated that their association with Fordhall had encouraged them to become more locally involved.



It appears that approximately a third of the people surveyed have gone on to either support an organisation or movement, or become more locally involved as a direct result of their involvement with Fordhall.

76% of participants believed that their involvement with Fordhall had made them feel part of a wider community of interest.

FORDHALL'S INFLUENCE ON SUPPORTERS ATTITUDES AND BELIEFS

Supporters were asked whether their involvement with Fordhall had changed their attitudes or beliefs about life and what was possible – did it make them feel more positive, even empowered?

Overwhelmingly, 86% of the people surveyed replied that they felt empowered by their involvement with Fordhall.



"Power to the people!" (Wolfie Smith c1974). Fordhall confirms that big isn't necessarily better and that people can and do make a difference - not as some trite, quasi-political soundbite, but in the real world."

Many echoed these sentiments, often citing inspiration and amazement:

"It restored my faith in what's possible if you work collectively."

"It's very inspirational. Shows if you have a dream you must pursue it despite the problems you encounter"

"One could not fail to be inspired, it is such a worthwhile project, run by a truly enthusiastic & dedicated group."

Alongside these general notions of inspiration, the Fordhall project appears to also have influenced some important and specific decisions in people's lives:

"Fordhall inspired my daughter to study agriculture."

"It encourages me to lend money/donate/buy shares/ in other community led organisations, rather than just putting my savings in a bank or building society."

Any number of comments could have been used in this section to exemplify how Fordhall has inspired so many of its supporters and customers, with so many of them providing positive testimonies regarding the beneficial influence Fordhall has had. While it appears a third of people surveyed indicate Fordhall influenced their behaviour (in terms of increasing involvement with their local community or other organisations), 86% of Fordhall supporters surveyed appear to have gained a more positive attitude/belief thanks to their involvement with the initiative.

SUPPORTER INVOLVEMENT WITH FUTURE PROJECTS

The final question in this section concerns whether participants would involve themselves with another community farm buy-out. The answer given to this question is likely to reflect both their past and current experience with Fordhall (would they go through it all again and make the same contribution?) but also Fordhall's influence on their future behaviour (having experienced a farm buy-out is it worthwhile repeating somewhere else?). The answer provided by the participants is conclusive, with 98% of people happy to consider supporting another buy-out. This figure comprises of 58% of people who state they are 'very likely' to support another farm buy-out, and 40% who state they would 'possibly' support it depending on the specific details. Only 2% of participants (<10 people), stated they were unlikely to support another farm buy-out.

98% of Fordhall supporters would support another community farm buy out after their experience with Fordhall.



10 YEARS LATER: THE RESULTS

A COMPARISON OF THIS PAPER TO PREVIOUS REPORTS

There are a number of similarities and differences between this paper and previous reports that have been published about Fordhall. 10 years ago in the 2006 autumn edition of the *Friends of Fordhall Newsletter*, details of the supporters of Fordhall were published. It reported that of the 7566 individuals who had either purchased shares, given donations, or made loans, around 2.6% of them were from outside of the UK. 10 years later, this report found 2.63% of the total sample were from overseas. This gives a good indication that this report is representative in terms of the proportion of nationalities that completed the survey.

The 2007 online survey of Fordhall supporters (the '8000 shareholders can't be wrong' report) indicated that 95% of people surveyed were shareholders, compared to 88% in the current survey. This may be explained by some people donating their shares back to the FCLI and/or choosing to support Fordhall in other ways. The share of people who are contributing through other means appears to have increased: the percentage of people who have subscribed to become a 'friend' is now 49% (up from 20% reported in 2007), while the percentage of people who have donated is now 36% (up from 12% reported in 2007). This does not indicate that the overall contribution has increased, but that the variety of means people are choosing to make a contribution has expanded, with a number of people contributing in more than one way.

The report made in 2007 identifies themes as to why people contributed to Fordhall such as: 'Preserving the Fordhall Heritage', 'Charlotte and Ben', 'Personal Involvement', 'To be able to visit the farm', and 'Support for local sustainable farming'. In this report, participants were asked why Fordhall was important to them, with some of the reasons given appearing to link to these previous themes. For example, 'the work of Ben/Charlotte/Arthur Hollins' and 'Protecting Farming and Agriculture' were frequent answers as to why Fordhall was important to participants. These clearly map on to some of the reasons identified for why people contributed to Fordhall in the earlier report. It appears what has changed is the 'pro-self' outlook highlighted by some participants in 2007 as to why they purchased shares (so I can visit the farm, so I own some land), has given way to a more 'pro-social' stance (community focussed, 'it's nice to be part of something'). Very few comments made by participants in the questionnaire mentioned benefits to the themselves, instead a focus on what could be achieved by working together seems to have 'stuck' as the take-home message.

A question in the 2007 report asked about empowerment, but in the context of 'changing the current state of farming'. 59% of those surveyed stated their feelings had not changed. This contrasts sharply with the findings of this report, in which 86% of people stated they felt empowered by their involvement with Fordhall. A key difference between the reports is that in this questionnaire participants were not directed to think of empowerment in terms of changing the current state of farming, but were left to perceive this how they wished. It may be that Fordhall has empowered people in a different way than originally expected in 2007. Certainly the comments provided in this report do not necessarily talk of the changing state of farming, but instead speak in more general terms, often applying the Fordhall story to broader life e.g. the Fordhall story makes people think 'anything is possible'.

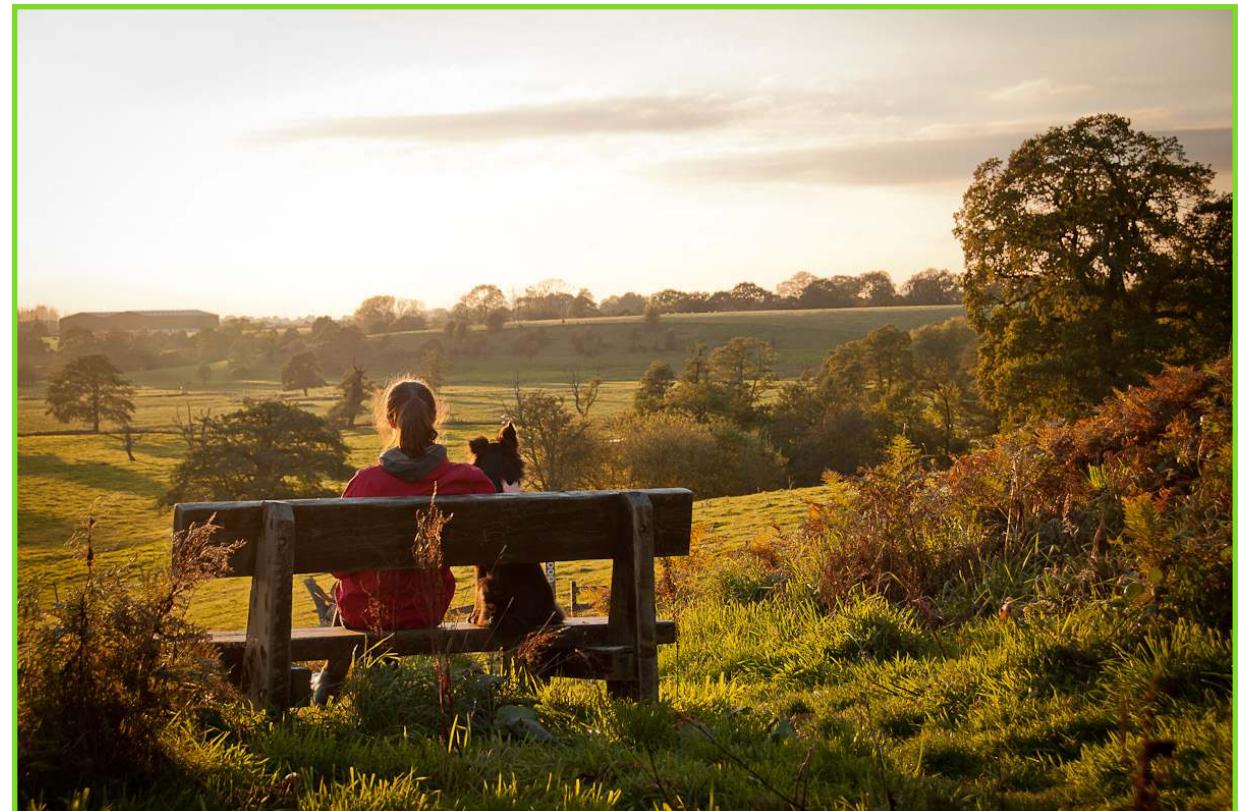


The Fordhall story makes people think 'anything is possible'.

Ten years after the formation of the FCLI, satisfaction amongst supporters and customers has actually increased, albeit marginally. Overall, the 95% satisfaction rate reported in the 2007 report has increased to 96% found in this report. Finally, the 2007 report asked whether participants would support another community farm buy-out, the exact same question was posed to the 2016 sample. In 2007, 97% of participants said they would consider supporting another buy-out, this figure has actually increased to 98% in 2016. Furthermore, the amount of people stating that they would be 'very likely' to support a buy-out has also increased, from 47% in 2007, to 58% in 2016.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Overall many of the findings in this report are similar to those discussed in the '8000 shareholders can't be wrong' report, especially regarding the positive relationship people have with Fordhall (as discussed in the '*Fordhall and Me*' section of this paper). However, this report also details how being involved with Fordhall has had an encouraging impact on the attitudes and beliefs of its supporters/customers, and how this has impacted upon their involvement with other like-minded organisations, movements and communities (as discussed in the '*Fordhall's Legacy*' section of this paper). For an initiative to receive similar ratings of satisfaction, connection and engagement after this period of time is an achievement in itself, but in many cases the analysis shows these have actually increased further. Moreover, an emerging sense of Fordhall's positive impact on people's attitudes, beliefs and behaviours suggests 10 years on it is creating and maintaining an ongoing legacy that has far-reaching societal benefits. *10 years on, 8000 shareholders still can't be wrong.*



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