

Densholme Care Farm

East Yorkshire

Key facts

Densholme Care Farm is run on a voluntary basis by a charismatic farmer, Denys Fell, who in 2018 won the Northern Farmer's 'Outstanding Achievement' award for his development of the care farm. Denys has always believed in the power of the environment to enrich people's lives, and he saw bringing vulnerable members of the community to farms as a way to help farmers facing rural stress and depression.

Densholme Care Farm meets the care farming Code of Practice

Our story

There are two threads to the care farm's origins, explains Rachael Fell-Chambers – whose father, Denys Fell, runs the care farm. *"My father got a phone call one day, asking whether he had a bit of land on which people with post-traumatic stress disorder could grow vegetables,"* she says. Soon, the group were coming every week. Then the farm started receiving approaches from other organisations as well, such as MIND. *"We rapidly needed to get some policies and procedures in place,"* says Rachael, Voluntary Strategic Director.

The other thread was her father's passion for sharing his farm with others, knowing the benefits that the natural environment can have for people. So, when the Rural Stress Initiative started in 2000, he saw care farming as a way for stressed and depressed farmers – having suffered from the latter himself – to feel a little better about their lives. It was serendipity, he likes to say.

Ten or so years later, the care farm's vision and mission are wonderfully straightforward; to become an invaluable asset to the health and education sectors, by sharing the farm with those who may benefit.



What we do

Until recently the care farm was running nearly every working day, but it became too much for Denys (nearly 70 years old) to manage in addition to his 270-acre arable and livestock farm. Since 2018, the care farm has therefore been restricted to just one day a week (Fridays). It is overseen by four volunteer directors, three paid staff and a bank of sessional workers who are called on when required.

The 15 places (and a waiting list) are mostly adults with either physical or learning disabilities, but also some young people in Alternative Provision. They pay £40 for a 10–3pm day, which is funded by a mixture of commissioned services, out of Personal Budgets, by parents and carers, or by private means.

Activities offered for service users include: animal husbandry, horticulture and orchard management

(Denys also has some fruit and nut trees, potatoes and cut flowers), fencing and tree planting, pond digging, care and dipping. *“People who have had mental health issues all their life will list off the benefits – and wish they had known, years earlier, of the restorative power of being around nature,”* says Rachael.

On other days there are lots of educational visits, supported by the Higher Level Stewardship scheme. Groups attending include: school groups, women who have experienced domestic violence, asylum seekers, various charities, and similar service users as those who come to the care farm.



Achievements and challenges

The thing visitors always comment on, says Rachael, is the camaraderie they feel when coming here. *“It’s a safe place, where people are free to be themselves, and can engage with the natural environment.”*

Her father is at the root of most things and is seen as a role model to the service users – even a kind of Father Christmas. And in recognition of his commitment, in 2018 he won an Outstanding Achievement Award and the Northern Farmer of the Year Award for his diversification into, and commitment to - care farming. Densholme Farm hosts the annual Hornsea Rotary Club 1/3 marathon which Denys has run for the last 12 years. He is also currently in training for the Chicago marathon.

As for the challenges - keeping on top of policies and procedures is time consuming, says Rachael. *“But it is a learning exercise, and it keeps staff and clients safe.”* Another challenge is ensuring our staff are managed effectively and running the rest of the farm – especially given her father is nearly 70.

Rachael has two tips for other care farms:

Build a diverse team, with a variety of skills and experience. For a well-running team, she says, it’s good to have a mixture of styles and personalities.

And be willing to give anything a go. Densholme has a farm choir, for example, which is proving popular.

What people say about us

“I’ve been coming to the farm for a few months now. I learn new skills every week and have made new friends; having people to chat to is wicked. We all do ace teamwork, there is an awesome atmosphere. Coming here brings my confidence out and brings me out of my shell, which is lovely. I love meeting everyone and we are all here to help each other anytime.”

Cheryl

“My experiences at Densholme have been great. So far, every job we do is great, but it can be physical. I enjoy working as part of a team and meeting new people.”

Kyle

“I like meeting new people and joining in with different activities. I enjoy working and chatting with people. I enjoy cleaning out the chickens and building fences. I also like planting herbs and plants, but I don’t like weeding much. I like being outdoors.”

David

“I’ve only been coming to the farm for about 4 weeks. The place I would go before was more like school work and I was stuck inside all day - so I like the farm more than that. I enjoy getting outside and being in the fresh air.”

Adrian

“Coming to the farm helps to sort me out if I am having a bad or rubbish day. I’ve worked towards a OCN Certificate and am really proud of my new skills. We did woodcarving recently for the lovely new sensory garden. It was a nice relaxed chilled out class. I’d love to do woodcarving again.”

Cheryl

“I have met new people and made new friends at the farm. It also helps me get out of the house”

Service user

“Coming here helps me keep busy and get fit” “I love coming to the farm to learn new things”

Service user

“I like choosing what I like to do every day” “Being in the farm choir is great! I like singing on the manure heap!”

Service user

For more details

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Social Farms & Gardens, in partnership with Thrive, are delivering the Growing Care Farming project. See www.farmgarden.org.uk/GCF for more details.