

Keeping farm animals - what do we need to know?

Rearing farm animals provides such a lot of interest, learning, and other opportunities, both for visitors to your project and those caring for the animals on a day to day basis. However, you must make sure you take the necessary steps to maintain both animal and human health.

Following the basics set out here and talking with others already rearing farm animals will help you to meet these requirements and set you on a fulfilling and worthwhile journey. Contact FCFCG to find out contact details for other projects keeping animals in your area or for further advice.

Site issues

To be suitable for keeping animals, your site needs to at least be situated on uncontaminated land, be securely fenced and be appropriately supervised.

How do we make the site secure for animals, equipment, staff, volunteers and the public?

The level of site security you need depends very much on the way in which you intend to operate your site, such as the level of direct contact that the public can have with animals, what equipment you have and whether your site is open access. As with a community garden, potential hazards should be addressed through risk assessment (see **'Health and safety'** below).

All animals will need to be securely fenced, and you should consider a second line of defence in case an animal gets past the first, e.g. it escapes from its pen. Additional fencing requirements are need to ensure animals cannot stary into eating areas.

Do we need to register as an agricultural holding?

Yes, if you keep farm animals such as sheep, goats, cattle, pigs or deer. You can register with a local office or one of the following Departments:

- ▶ England - Rural Payments Agency (RPA) Customer Service Centre on 0345 603 7777 Scotland - Scottish Government Rural Payment and Inspection Division (SGRPID) Office
- ▶ Northern Ireland - Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD)
- ▶ Wales - Welsh Government Customer Contact Centre on 0300 062 5004 This process will also register you with your

local animal health office and ensure that you receive automatic notification of disease risks and changes to government regulations.

Health and safety

A great deal of what constitutes good practice in health and safety is based around 'risk assessment', i.e. that you have considered the various risks to which people are exposed on your site, that you have taken steps to minimise these risks and, where possible, you have removed the risk altogether. If you choose to keep livestock, you will need to consider what risks they bring with them.

Bear in mind that different breeds of the same type of animal will often have different behavioural characteristics. If your group lacks experience of animal husbandry then you could ask FCFCG, local farmers, breed specialists or other city farms for advice.

Plenty of signs are needed to remind people to wash their hands, as well as seasonal notices such as to warn pregnant women to stay away from lambing areas. Advice on reducing the risk of visitors contracting any disease is found in the essential reading Preventing or controlling ill health from animal contact at visitor attractions. It is good practice to include simple graphics on your signs, to help ensure that everyone understands their meaning (see further information for details of the 'Clean Hands Zone' toolkit available from FCFCG).

How do we minimise the risks of infectious disease?

Whilst infectious disease is a complex subject, minimising the risk of infection is actually quite straightforward. The fundamentals are:

- ▶ good hygiene
- ▶ adequate washing facilities
- ▶ clear instructions to visitors
- ▶ no food to be eaten where animals might wander, and
- ▶ effective signage.

Although these actions will not make a disease disappear, they will reduce the risk to an acceptable level.

Animal welfare

Do we need an animal welfare policy?

It is good practice to have a statement of the principles by which you will keep your livestock. Defra require you to keep their relevant 'Codes of Recommendations for the Welfare of Livestock' onsite for each type of livestock you keep (available from www.gov.uk/government/publications). You may also wish to consult the Soil Association/Organic Farmers & Growers organic standards or the RSPCA's Freedom Food standards. FCFCG and the School Farms Network also publish a Get Your hands Dirty resource pack in which there is more information about registrations, transport of animals and movement licenses etc.

How can we get information on looking after different types of animals?

Information on animal husbandry is available from many sources, including the internet, books, DVDs/videos, training courses and monthly magazines. Local enthusiasts may be able to advise you, and there are well established clubs for each breed of farm livestock.

FCFCG can also put you in touch with other city farms who can provide advice. It is essential to have several members of your group trained in the general care of livestock, and having people trained in specific livestock types, before animals are brought on site.

Do we need a single person to be responsible?

Your group will need to decide how to manage its own work, but both animal care and health and safety must be at the top of your priorities. It is good practice to have a single person overseeing the welfare of all of your livestock, even though others may be looking after them on a day-to-day basis. If this task is delegated to a team it is easy to overlook things and make mistakes. Ensure that there is always a named person who is contactable should an emergency arise.

What types of animals should we keep?

City farms often keep a range of livestock. The most commonly kept are sheep, goats, pigs and poultry. Research in detail the care requirements for the animals you plan to keep, and where possible recruit advisers

with relevant knowledge and experience.
Consider:

- ✓ How you will attend to your animals' care requirements 365 days a year, including making contingencies for night time emergencies
- ✓ What facilities you can realistically provide
- ✓ How you will dispose of surplus animals and fatalities,
- ✓ Whether you wish to breed from the animals
- ✓ If you want to focus on rare breeds or a mixture, and
- ✓ Whether your stock will be managed productively for profit, or solely for recreational and educational purposes.

You may face pressure from some sections of the community if you choose to produce meat. Indeed, you may even face pressures for keeping animals in captivity. This does not mean that you should not do it - but you should be prepared to justify your activities.

You may be offered unwanted animals, but before accepting you need to consider whether the animal is appropriate for your site, as well as the potential health risks they pose. As a general rule, animals should only be obtained from known and trusted sources. If you do choose to accept unwanted animals you'll need to have facilities for isolation and veterinary inspection.

Do we need a licence to keep farm animals?

In most cases, no. However, you will need to register as an agricultural holding. If you choose to keep animals other than common farm livestock you may require extra licences under the "Dangerous Wild Animals Act" (e.g. ostriches). If you keep non-farm animals you will need to obtain a zoo licence through your local animal health office.

If you intend to breed pets for sale you will need a pet shop licence. However, if surplus pets (young or old) are given to new owners in exchange for a donation then a licence is not required - but you should have a procedure in place to ensure they will receive good care.

What facilities do we need?

In addition to animal housing and fencing you will need equipment and supplies for feeding, watering, cleaning, handling and otherwise caring for your animals (e.g. isolation and veterinary care). You will also need dry and secure storage space for all of this equipment and food.

How do we arrange veterinary care? Are there things we can do ourselves?

You will need to register with a vet. Your vet can train you to administer certain medications. There are regulations to control who can administer medication to animals, so always follow their advice. It is also worth cultivating your vet as a friendly adviser!

How can we dispose of surplus animals?

If you choose to sell stock, consider operating a vetting procedure to ensure the animals go to a suitable home, and never sell animals to children without parental consent. You may have some stock that you are unable to sell or give away, in which case you need to consider in what circumstance your group would use euthanasia as the means of disposal. Part of the responsibility of keeping livestock includes ensuring their humane slaughter where appropriate.

You should also be aware of the National Fallen Stock Scheme. This is a voluntary scheme designed to assist farmers and horse owners dispose of dead animals in compliance with the Animal-By-Products Regulation. It is not legal to bury or burn fallen stock, whether on or off-site.

Can we sell produce?

You will not be able to sell meat or milk products without obtaining consent from relevant bodies; check these with your local environmental health department (or equivalent) or seek advice from other practitioners. Provided you only keep a small number of chickens, you can sell eggs from the farm gate without expensive disease testing, but only if they are not washed. Please note that the laws guiding such matters consider gifts to be the same as sales.

Further information

FCFCG

Model risk assessments and topic sheets 'Health & Safety for community growing projects', 'Selling produce' and 'Cooking and feasting on the plot', and 'Clean Hands Zone toolkit'.

www.farmgarden.org.uk/publications

Get Your Hands Dirty

A resource developed by the School Farms Network and Growing Schools to help teachers consider the issues involved in growing plants, or caring for animals, in schools and other educational settings.

www.farmgarden.org.uk/education

Health and Safety Executive

HSE's Infoline is their first point of contact. Contact details for regional offices are available from the HSE website.

Infoline: 0845 345 0055

www.hse.gov.uk

Preventing or controlling ill health from animal contact at visitor attractions

The industry code of practice. Essential reading.

www.visitmyfarm.org/component/k2/item/339-industry-code-of-practice

Soil Association organic standards

www.soilassociation.org/whatisorganic/organicstandards

Organic Farmers & Growers organic standards

www.organicfarmers.org.uk/licensees/of-g-control-manual

RSPCA's Freedom Food standards

www.freedomfood.co.uk/industry/rspca-welfare-standards

Department for Environment, Planning and Countryside (DEPC) - Wales

Tel: 0292 082 5111

www.countryside.wales.gov.uk

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARDNI) - Northern Ireland

Tel: 028 9052 4999

www.dardni.gov.uk

Scottish Executive Environment and Rural Affairs Department (SEERAD)

Tel: 0131 556 8400

www.scotland.gov.uk/About/Departments/ERAD

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) - England

Helpline: 08459 33 55 77

helpline@defra.gsi.gov.uk

www.defra.gov.uk

National Fallen Stock Scheme

www.nfsco.co.uk

