

Farm Profile and Information

The Warriner School Farm is a mixed 120-acre Soil Association certificated farm based at an 11-16 state secondary school in Bloxham, North Oxfordshire. It is a purpose-built educational resource providing practical, relevant and realistic experience of farming, the rural environment and land use. The farm has a range of livestock including cattle, sheep, pigs, goats, poultry, heavy horses and donkeys. All of the grassland is organic; four of the fields are ancient ridge and furrow fields. There are areas of both conventional and organic arable land, growing wheat, barley, peas, oil seed rape and turnips as well as grass in rotation. There is a planted woodland area, various ponds and water habitats and a collection of horse-drawn vehicles and farm machinery. We have two classrooms attached to the farm and the farm opens before and after school, and during lunch break for students to visit and assist with routine tasks. The original School Farm was just 16 ha (40 acres) – over the past seven years we have trebled its size to 48ha (120 acres) of which 14ha (35 acres) is arable.



Much of the land is in the Countryside Stewardship Scheme. This has enabled us to plant new hedges, lay others and improve the fencing, and even to put water troughs in those fields without water. We have also entered the Arable Stewardship Scheme – in autumn 2003 we planted 6m grass and wildflower margins around most of the arable land. Some of these margins have a mixture of plants supplying nectar and pollen, and one area is planted for the winter feeding of birds. We have split the larger arable field into three with beetle banks.

Here at the Warriner School Farm, we see value in the way that the farm combines educational provision with vocational experience. It is not only a farm that has been specifically set up to enable people to see and understand what is happening, it is also a real, functioning workplace environment. The opportunity to experience farming operations and work in close proximity to animals helps students to gain self confidence, build self-esteem, acquire new and useful skills and, if they wish, take the first steps towards a land based career. In two decades that have seen a steep decline in the number of school farms following the withdrawal of their LEA funding, the Warriner School Farm has not only survived, but has gone from strength to strength. In addition to the exciting experience of a Royal Visit by His Royal Highness Prince Charles, in 2003, the Warriner School Farm has won a number of prestigious awards, including “Rural School of the Year, 2004” and has featured on national television, on the BBC’s “Countryfile” programme and on Tony Robinson’s “The Worst Jobs in History” on Channel 4.

A large number of schools and community groups regularly use our facilities.

The stock on the farm

- Cattle** 17 cows, 1 bull and youngstock – mostly pedigree Dexters (the UK's smallest native breed of cattle), and recently acquired, 3 Red Poll heifers. The cattle are kept as a suckler herd, the female calves are kept or sold for breeding, and the steers (castrated males) are sold for beef. We usually have 20 – 25 young heifers and steers on the farm at any one time.
- Sheep** 80 ewes. Mostly Suffolk and Mule crosses, but with a pedigree cohort of Lleyns, a nucleus group allowing the farm to breed its own Suffolk cross replacements and negating the need to buy in replacement breeding ewes. We have recently acquired 4 pedigree Leicester Longwools, an endangered breed, entrusted to our care by the Rare Breeds Survival Trust. We also have 3 rams – all pedigree.
- Goats** 4 nannies, 1 billy and various goatlings (yearlings) and kids. All are pedigree Anglo Nubians.
- Pigs** Indoor (non organic): 4 Gloucester Old Spots sows and one GOS boar, kept on straw and woodchips. Outdoor (organic): 4 Gloucester Old Spots sows. They are kept on grass in the summer and stubble turnips through the winter. Where the outdoor pigs have rooted up the ground, the area is cultivated in the spring; it is then sown to organic spring barley and peas, undersown with grass.
- Horses** One Suffolk gelding, one Clydesdale gelding.
- Poultry** Several breeding groups, kept mainly for their fertile eggs for other schools to incubate. We also are part of the Total Butler Conservation Breeding Programme, being responsible for a breeding group of Old English Pheasant Fowl in conjunction with the Rare Breeds Survival Trust.
- Geese** One goose and one gander.
- Donkeys** 'Coco' a jenny and her offspring 'Sooty' a gelding.

