

## Debate

### Debating food, farming and countryside issues

Farming & Countryside Education (FACE) has initiated a number of debates with young people on a variety of topics related to food, farming and the countryside. Debate is a powerful way to engage students in a subject area with which they might be unfamiliar. It offers them the opportunity to research using materials representing a wide range of viewpoints, to question others, to listen to differing views and hence to make their own informed decisions.

In school debate can play an active role in many subject areas from Geography, English and Science through to Citizenship and ESD. A useful stimulus for debate can be provided by presenting case studies which engage the students in consideration of controversial issues. Topics chosen can be Foot & Mouth Disease, the organic movement, genetic engineering or flooding; in fact, anything relating to the countryside which involves an element of controversy.

## Topics for debate

### Rural issues

- public services e.g. transport, village shops, schools, health
- employment
- housing
- country sports

### Work of farmers

- cultivation methods - organic, conventional and integrated crop management
- land ownership issues
- animal welfare
- impact on environment

### Pressure on farming to change

- leisure and recreation resources
- farmers managing & maintaining landscape
- farm shops, farmers markets & sale of regional produce
- use of green field sites for building

### Food health and environment

- what makes a healthy diet?
- food safety - effects of fertilizers and pesticides on environment & health
- spread of diseases e.g. BSE, FMD
- habitat maintenance, creation and encouraging biodiversity

### Trade

- food trading prices - trade barriers, fair trade for all, subsidies, role of large food retailers, exploitation - labour & market demand, over production, starvation, distribution, food dumping
- rich & poor farmers

### Transport of food

- global economy
- live exports & Freedom Foods
- seasonal production, local growing costs - distances as food miles covered, fuel prices, processing location

How might a debate be started? Research materials will be necessary and there is a wealth of published materials available, often by a variety of organisations with different viewpoints: see the catalogue of resources at face-online.

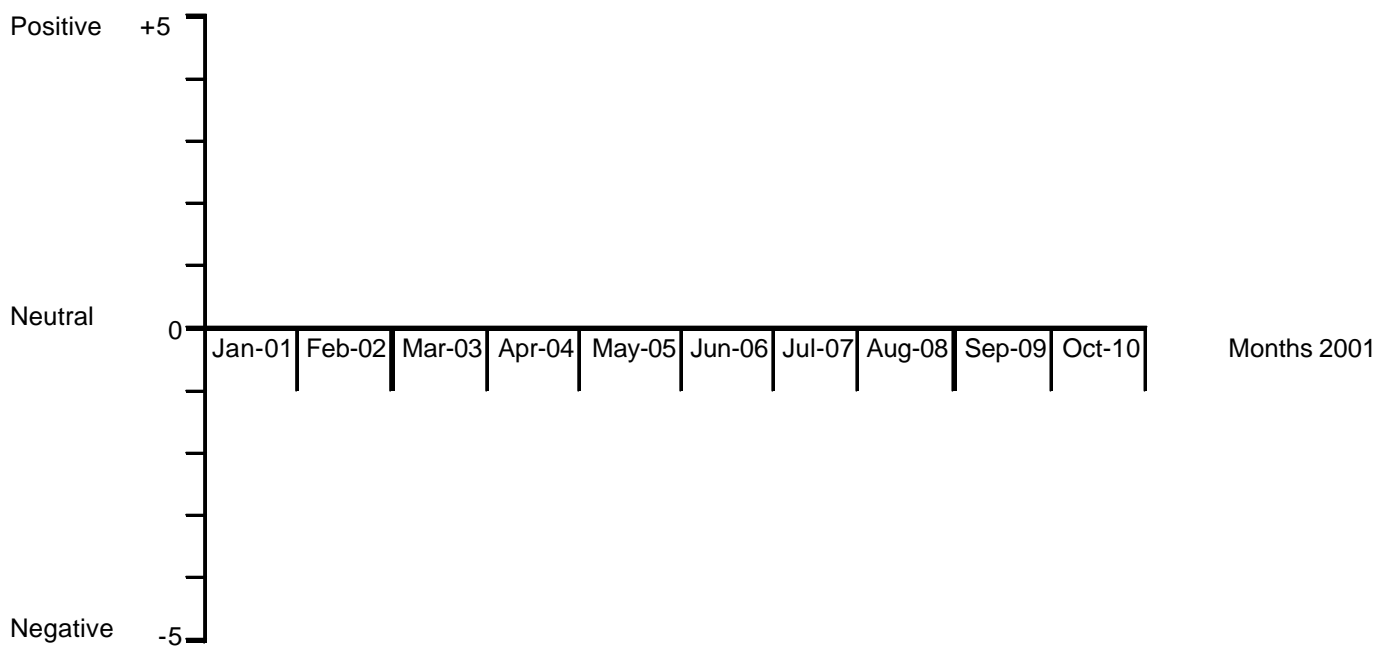
In addition, students can undertake their own investigations into unfamiliar topics by using the FACE Exploring and Discovering sheets under fact sheets at face-online. The Exploring sheets are an introductory aid signposting other websites to find out about topics such as food miles, access to the countryside and genetic modification. The more detailed Discovering sheets have been produced with the help of industry experts and cover subjects from animal genetics and biotechnology, farm diversification to organic farming. All sheets can be downloaded.

The following activities have been devised by FACE to stimulate discussion of countryside issues.

1. Some of the controversies in agriculture can be treated as a timeline of events. Statements can be put onto a set of cards for students to discuss, sort, classify and display. The students should be left free to choose and justify their criteria.

Jan 1	Another year begins with mild weather allowing us to make a good start
Feb 2	Confirmed cases of Foot and Mouth Disease are just 10 miles away
Mar 3	Disinfectant straw lies across the end of the farm drive, with a bucket and brush available for those who choose to use it. What more can we do? These efforts seem futile; a token gesture
Apr 4	The practicalities of no stock movements are proving difficult in day-to-day farm management as lambing looms and space here is limited
May 5	If Foot and Mouth Disease gets closer, grazing safety must be considered as there would be a greater risk of cows catching air-borne virus
June 6	Smelling the acrid smoke around the yard first thing in the morning, brought here on the wind from one of a dozen or so pyres we can see most days, isn't the best start to the day
July 7	No new cases of Foot and Mouth Disease have been confirmed locally today for the first time since the outbreak
Aug 8	Sometimes a gentle stroll down the track at dusk is required to restore a sense of proportion. How lucky we are to be able to live and work amid such beauty
Sept 9	With sheep auctions a long way off restarting, the local auctioneers organised a video sale
Oct 10	After an eight-month break we have started the local farm project meetings again. It was really good to get together and start looking forward

2. 'Living graphs' are a novel tool to help students not only make connections but to talk, disagree and ask even more questions. For example, classifying a set of events (such as those in 1 above) taking place on a farm over a period of time as positive, neutral or negative and then plotting them as a time line.



REACTIONS TO EVENTS

3. Compass Rose: Birmingham Development Education Centre produced a useful tool called the Compass Rose.

This can be applied to the exploration of any issue by encouraging pupils to start asking questions about the influences of environmental, social, political and economic dimensions.

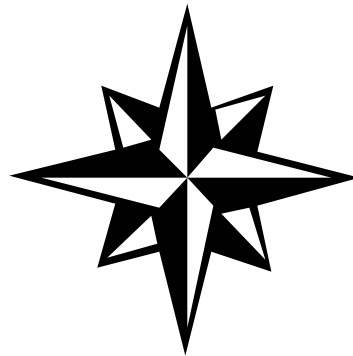
## The Compass Rose—making the links

### ***Natural***

These are questions about the environment—the land, the sea, living things, and their relationship to each other. These questions are about the built as well as the 'natural' environment

### ***Who decides? (political)***

These are questions about power, who make choices and decides what is to happen; who benefits and loses as a result of these decisions and at what cost.



### ***Economic***

These are questions about money, trading, aid, ownership, buying and selling.

### ***Social***

These are questions about people, their relationships, their traditions, culture and the way they live. They include questions about how, for example, gender, race, disability, class and age affect social relations.

4. Role-play is another useful way to create debate by introducing various roles with different perspectives on the issue. Characters might include a scientist, a farmer, conservationist or consumer. It helps students to understand that there are other points of view, that real life issues are complex and that conflict can be resolved. The following scenario uses flooding as the issue for debate.



It's not my fault!

A member of your family was going to hospital in an ambulance when it got trapped in a flood.

A special meeting has been called to make sure that it does not happen again. However no-one thinks it's their fault.

Your task is to persuade everyone at the meeting to agree on a plan.

#### River Engineer

I have been monitoring the river's water levels which have become higher over the last few years. They could stop the situation getting worse if they accepted my plan to deepen and straighten the river.

#### Conservationist

Areas such as woodlands and wetlands are not just places which encourage wildlife. They are also natural ways of dealing with the causes of flooding.

#### Scientist

My research has found that there are too many sheep on the hills. The vegetation is being destroyed and the water runs straight off the land.

### Farmer

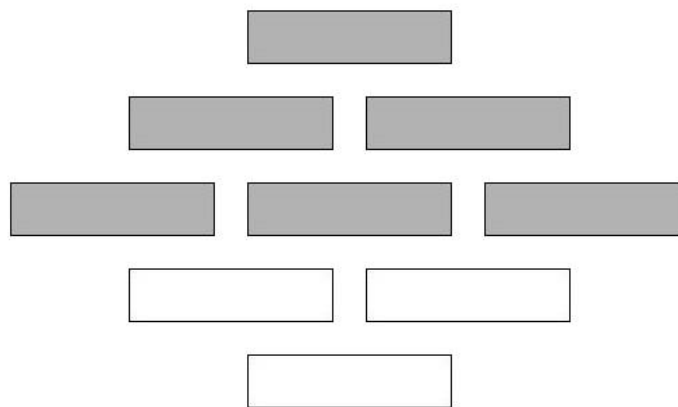
This is my land and I need to make a living. We have been encouraged to keep more sheep on the hills. I would be willing to manage the land differently as long as it was economic.

### Home owner

Our new housing estate has to get rid of water from the roofs and drives when it rains. Where else can it go except straight into the river?

5. What is a healthy sustainable countryside?

Each group is provided with a set of cards with statements on them and a large piece of paper with the shape of a diamond on it. The students have to arrange the statements within the diamond so there is only one card at the top, then two cards, four cards, two cards and one at the bottom. The top of diamond denotes the most important statement and the bottom is the least important. Discussion is based around the students' choice of which statements are more or less important.



## **Farming**

Everyday foods, timber,  
energy crops

## **Health**

Clean water, sewage disposal,  
waste disposal, clean air, low  
noise levels

## **Work**

Employment opportunities,  
good wages

## **Environmental care**

Flood prevention,  
conservation, land  
management

## **Participation**

People involved in planning and  
decisions

## **Wildlife**

Ponds, hedgerows, meadows

## **Leisure**

Outdoor activities,  
birdwatching

## **Community**

Public transport, post offices,  
village shops, education, homes

## **Heritage**

Buildings, landscape, traditions,  
country crafts

## **Open spaces**

Fields, woodlands, peace and  
quiet, water

## **Safety**

No crime, personal security

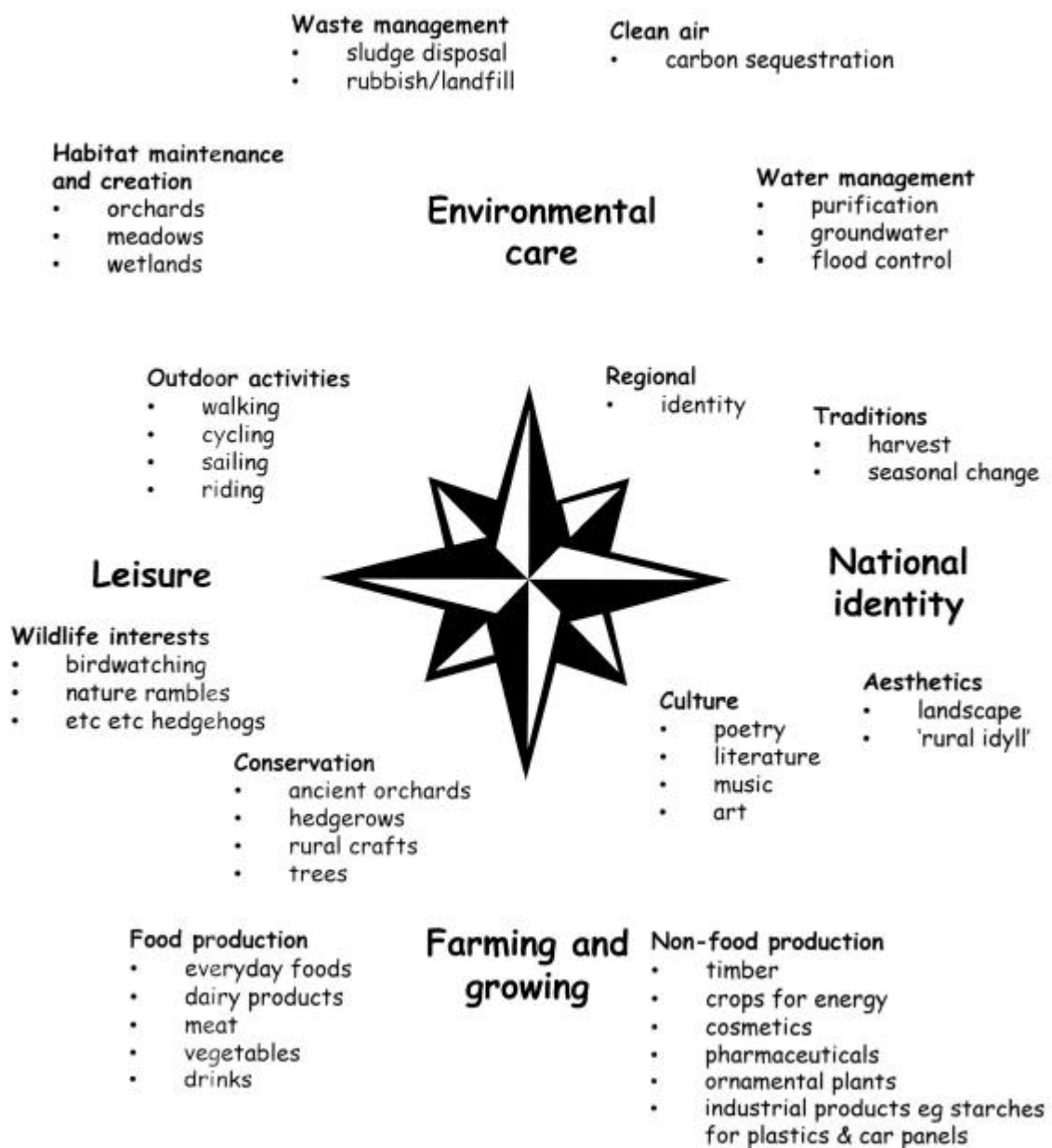
## **Rural economy**

Tourism, quarrying, horses,  
plant nurseries

6. Why is the countryside important?

A worksheet is provided for students to brainstorm ideas. A spoke diagram outlining examples within some of the main areas such food production, heritage and environment is available for facilitators. Ultimately, the students must decide what they feel are the three most important reasons why we need the countryside.

# Why we need the countryside



## 7. Countryside Quiz

A quiz to find out students' initial thoughts on countryside matters is a straightforward way to engage interest. A head count or more sophisticated way of recording votes can be useful for certain questions. The same question can be posed after the debate to see if students' attitudes have changed. Examples of some quiz questions follow.

Answers in bold type need to be changed before giving out to students!

1. The total amount of land used for farming in the UK is

- a. 25%
- b. 50%
- c. **75%**

2. Which is the odd one out?

Wheat is used to make

- a. plastics
- b. bread
- c. **carpets**

3. The amount of European Union money spent on agricultural projects to improve the environment is

- a. £50 million
- b. **£150 million**
- c. £300 million

4. Which of these crops is not grown by farmers in the UK?

- a. Hemp
- b. Maize
- c. **Rice**

5. Which of the following is false

- a. The Environment Agency helps prevent flooding
- b. **The Environment Agency looks after food standards**
- c. The Environment Agency encourages care of the environment

6. In a supermarket a pint of milk costs about 28p. The farmer gets paid

- a. **9p**
- b. 17p
- c. 21p

7. Silage is

- a. the manure/waste from cows
- b. **stored grass**
- c. a rock band with attitude

8. The number of trees that farmers have planted in the last ten years is approximately

- a. 30 million
- b. 60 million
- c. **90 million**

9. Margarine comes from

- a. Cows
- b. **Oilseed crops**
- c. Barley

10. Which of the following is not farmed in the UK?

- a. worms
- b. snails
- c. **ground beetles**

11. Which government agency is responsible for access to the countryside?

- a. Environment Agency
- b. English Nature
- c. **Countryside Agency**

12. How many people in England and Wales live in flood risk areas?

- a. 1 million
- b. **5 million**
- c. 10 million

13. What has the countryside ever done for you?

- a. Nothing. I am not interested in the countryside.
- b. The countryside is useful because it gives us food and a place for leisure activities.
- c. There is no difference between town and country because everything is interconnected.

#### Organising a debate with external providers

Whether or not the preparatory activities have been undertaken, students will need help in formulating questions to put to a panel of 'experts'. Time should be set aside for this session, enabling students to decide on the wording of questions and which students will ask them. It is a good idea to write out two copies of each question, one to be retained by the students so that they can read out the questions if required, and the second to be given to the organiser of the debate. All questions should also bear the name of the student. The organiser can then sort all the questions into topic areas and select a sample from each.

FACE can offer advice and contacts for those wishing to bring together a panel. Those invited could include a selection of the following

- representatives of agricultural organisations such as the Royal Agricultural Society of England or the National Farmers' Union
- a local farmer
- an environmental organisation such as LEAF (Linking Environment and Farming)
- someone from the Environment Agency
- a supermarket buyer
- a food technologist

What is being achieved?

Helping young people to examine countryside issues by research, by talking about and listening to various viewpoints is an invaluable way to assist them in the formulation of their own views. The activities described help students to examine the positive and negative effects of developments on the environment and to uncover ways forward.

This approach is also contributing towards the acquisition of many skills:

- information processing – locating and collecting relevant data
- reasoning – giving reasons for opinions and actions, and making decisions informed by reasons or evidence
- enquiry – asking relevant questions
- evaluation – judging the evaluation of what they hear and read