

## **City Farms and Rare Breeds**

The European Federation of City Farms (EFCF) was launched in 1990. National and regional democratic federations are the members of the EFCF. Individual city farms are members of their own national and regional federations. The EFCF is a network of city farms for sharing experiences and exchanging good practice. The EFCF is a voluntary and democratic organisation and facilitates meetings, courses, conferences, workshops, seminars and working groups and promotes international and bilateral collaborative projects.

City farms are environmental, social and economic projects where children, young people and adults can daily learn about urban and rural environments, natural cycles, plants and animals, the impacts of the seasons and the relationships between all of these. The city farm movement is a key tool in helping urbanised people of all ages to develop an understanding of sustainable development using farming and/or gardening as a platform. City farms come in all shapes and sizes, from a few square metres to over 50 hectares. In some countries there is a close co-operation between city farms and commercial working farms with a school programme or visitor's farms. Many city farms work together with care farms, environmental organisations, zoos, museums or are involved in conservation grazing and forestry work. Some city farms have adoption programmes for their animals. Direct sale of farm products at farm shops can be found.

City farms were created because of the increasing distance and lack of understanding between farmers and the consumers of agricultural produce. Most people rarely come into contact with production farms. Even in the country there is little contact. Through processing and distribution the relationship of the food sold and that produced by the farmer is often lost, e.g. chickens become separate legs, breasts and wings and a head of lettuce becomes mixed lettuce. People get little opportunity to see domestic animals in their own environment and no longer understand how domestic animals are bred and raised. Let alone that they notice the difference between the breeds. Very often they don't even know about the origin and needs of their own pets.

The services and activities city farms provide, vary according to their location and local needs. City farms actively promote the equal access and involvement of children, young people and adults through practical experience in a wide range of social, recreational, educational, environmental and economic activities focused around farming. At city

farms the public can freely enter without harming the business or perhaps placing themselves in a dangerous environment. City farms strive to maintain an ambience that is both welcoming and encourages the unexpected, yet is also safe and predictable. City farms provide a meeting place for young and old, where teachers can show their pupils that respect for the environment is a necessity, and where visitors of all ages can participate. City farms attract many visitors. In the Netherlands for instance the about 300 city farms together account for 12 million visits per year!

City farms keep farm animals. Because of increasing rules and regulations it gets more and more difficult for most city farms to buy animals from production farms. Most modern breeds are not suitable anyway because city farming is totally different from intensive farming. Apart from that there are very few production farms with a variety of farm animals or breeds. Therefore it is obvious that city farms keep 'ordinary' breeds, native or non-native. Many city farms make use of a network of breeders or take part in a national survival programme for rare breeds. Not only are rare breeds more attractive for a city farm than modern 'factory' breeds, unlike most production farms, city farms do not focus on a production as high as possible from each animal. City farms focus on quality, character, appearance and educational value. Visitors can learn about the origin of modern breeds and of techniques of making food and clothes. At city farms goats and cows are milked, sheep are sheared and the wool is spun, in the hen house eggs are collected; the horse or the donkey draws the tilt cart and, at Christmas, home-grown poultry is eaten. Children can see that animals are bred for meat and have to be killed. For some it is the first time they have ever peeled potatoes, for at home they may be used to ready prepared food, cooked in the microwave oven.

City farming offers the opportunity to influence attitudes. Issues like animal welfare can be addressed. Visitors can learn about the needs of farm animals and subsequently very often also about the needs of their own pets. City farms remind children that animals are not humans in furry disguises (pets) or just meat-suppliers at man's convenience, but are unique creatures with unique needs. Double muscled cattle, which cannot be born in a natural way, chickens which grow too fast for their legs and genetically modified animals, are issues for educational programmes and exhibitions. Local food, food miles and traceability of meat become understandable concepts. Education about rare breeds transmits an understanding of our history, culture, landscape and future through living animals. Rare breeds represent the basic or the beginning

of agriculture as we know it today. Agro biodiversity is an essential and integrated part of ecology and nature conservation. The relationship between producer and consumer will be rebuilt.

The EFCF brings together the very diverse city farm work of ten European countries and has contacts all over the world. In 2008 the EFCF holds her Annual General Meeting in Antwerp, Belgium in April and a EFCF Conference, hosted by the German Federation in Dresden in September. Rare breeds will be on the agenda:

- Set up a rare breeds working group.
- Promote keeping rare breeds at city farms and comparable projects.
- Collect existing examples of Good Practice for the EFCF website and develop material which can be used across borders.
- Promote a European conference about rare breeds at city farms.
- Extend the city farm network to new Eastern and Central European countries, where traditional family farms and farm animals still exist. Instead of being regarded as being behind they could very well become established examples of agro-biodiversity and we can learn from them.
- Promote a European Open Day for city farms and comparable projects where the public can get in touch with farm life and rare breeds.

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