

## RWL Case-Study – School Farming

A week-long programme for school classes on an organic farm. The students become farmers themselves and are responsible for their group, the animals and plants on the farm. They discover strong connections to their own life through the practical work.

### **Country**

Germany

### **Name of the programme?**

Schooltrip to the organic school farm “Hutzelberg” (German: Klassenfahrt Schulbauernhof Hutzelberg)

### **Age of the children involved?**

The programme is run with children between 8-12 years old and families on the School Farm “Hutzelberghof”.

### **What is the frame?**

Experiencing responsibility, taking actions and feeling their impact and the self-efficacy in the context of local, organic food production.

### **What are the goals of the programme?**

The main aim is to impart competences and that the children feel themselves as capable to act and experience openness. The feeling “I can do that too! And its not so hard!” is very important for the children – as much as the emotion to be truly responsible for something or someone.

*Michaela Schenke: What children can experience in this world and what we allow them as responsibilities is very poor! The artificial world we have created sends the message out to them: What you do, is not really important. Where can they truly feel that their actions make a difference and that they are needed in this world? This is where School Farming can make a difference.*



Of course also knowledge about agriculture is delivered: The holistic understanding and experiencing the cycles and production processes on a farm, the responsibility for the animals, plants and own nutrition. New knowledge is in a direct link with the surrounding and from the practical work the sense is evident as well as the “need to know”. This is how the knowledge can become relevant for your actions and the childrens environmental behaviour and values.

Further than this, the children are sensibilised for the food: how good fresh and healthy food can taste, how important it is not to throw food away. They develop a loving and respectful contact with



the animals which is affected by their feeling of responsibility for them. They learn, how their choices of food decides upon life or death of the animal.

FOTO: <http://www.schulbauernhof-hutzelberg.de/hof/landwirtschaft.html>

**Which values are promoted in the programme?**

a) according to the hand model (self-transcending values)

- respect for nature and care for the state of our planet
- equal opportunities for all people to shape their lifes

b) according to PIRC/ Schwartz´ list of values:

- unity with nature
- a world of beauty
- curious
- responsible
- helpful
- sense of belonging



**Which competencies are developed that empower learners to shape a sustainable future?**

Critical Thinking	Interpretation, Thinking	Students will be able to identify connections and relationships (they will determine and report links and relationships between phenomena, events and concepts of different disciplines. They will understand the systemic nature, identifying similarities and differences, consistencies and inconsistencies, causes and effects). Students will be able to use their sustainability linked skills and knowledge in everyday situations.
Dealing with change	Flexibility	Students will be able to use their sustainability linked skills and knowledge in everyday situations.
You & Me & All the World around us	World Problems, Relationship	Students will be able to recognize their relationship to nature. Having nature experiences of different kinds will encourage them to reflect on their relationship to nature.



**Which of the specific scientific concepts does the programme relate to?**

**Cycles** and **stability** are the concepts which are directly or indirectly touched by the various activities and tasks on the farm. For example, cycles are understood when the children do different tasks and see how it all works together: Making hay, Milking the cow, Making cheese from the Milk, manuring the soil.

**Which ecological problems are involved, if any, and how?**

Ecological problems and challenges are mainly touched, when the children question things during the week-long School trip. Topics which are therefore raised regularly are Climate Change and Biodiversity. Michaela Schenke explains the children for example, that she heard, that the biggest share in climate change is not caused by individual travels, but by consuming meat and everything connected to meat-production. The children then can make the decision by themselves, when they want to eat meat and accept happily e.g. not to eat meat in the mornings. The topic of biodiversity is also touched through practical examples: The children are wondering, why there are red cows on the farm (an old farm animal breed) or why the potatoes they cultivate look different than the ones they know from the supermarket.

**Transferability: Which different areas of life are involved, and how?**

Many different areas of life are involved during the work on the farm:

- the global society in an indirect way when it comes e.g. to questions of food production (What do the children eat at home? Where does the fruit, meat or cheese come from?)
- the influence of our way of eating on the local community, e.g. the land structure, use of pesticides on biodiversity, or the structure of the village/town becomes evident, when the consumerism of local and organic products is put into comparison with consuming “globalised” food from big supermarkets
- the natural environment is explored in animals, trees and plants and natural principles like cycles or interconnectedness are understood.
- the learners themselves experience self-efficacy and learn, that they are a part of the





natural world and that their thoughts and actions have an impact on it.

### **What educational strategies (learning models, methods, etc.) are used in your programme?**

The main strategy is learning by doing. Acting itself and the own curiosity that drives the actions derivates new questions and fields of interest.

*Michaela Schenke: I do it like Rousseau: I do not tell a lot by myself. If the children are asking, they get as much answers as they want. When they don't listen anymore, I stop.*



### **How is the programme evaluated? How do you know the programme achieved its educational goals?**

There is no long-term evaluation, although different theses and studies about School Farming exist. A bachelor thesis found out that the week on the school farm Hutzelberghof had an impact on the values of the children, an abstract in german can be found here: (<http://www.schulbauernhof-hutzelberg.de/presse/download/umweltbewusstsein.pdf>) The emotional approach gives also a hint that educational goals are achieved: What children can experience emotionally they become interested in. Experiencing responsibility, the joy of being outside, cooperating in the group, being with animals and achieving a task raises their self-confidence and well-being. The environmentally-conscious behaviour is connected with fun and happiness: this is an important base for sustainable behaviour.

*Michaela Schenke: "Our work can give an impuls. Sometimes you realize this only years after: Recently a student contacted us: she wanted to write her master thesis about our school farm. As a child, she was once for a week on our farm as well.."*

### **Does the programme drive a behavioural change? How do you know that?**

The feedbacks, especially from special schools, give clear hints that behavioural change happens. The rhythm on the farm and the basic necessities which come from the things itself – and not from someone who invented them – is essential for this.

In some classes the week on the farm completely changes the hierarchy in the class – the fidgets



and the ones on the end of the class suddenly can do something which is acknowledged by others.



Michaela Schenke: *“Some years ago, I had a group of women from the neighboring villages visiting our farm. One of them told me that she was curious to find out what happened to her child when it was on a school trip for a week on our farm: Since then the child pushed the family to buy only organic food. This really surprised me, because we do not explicitly talk with the children about organic farming as the best way to do things.”*

### **Describe the programme.**

The programme of the school trip to the Hutzelberghof takes one week. During the week, the children get to know the life and work on an organic farm in 4 working groups:

- The cow-group milks the cows, goats or sheep and takes care of them and is responsible for the cheese dairy.
- The animal-group takes care of the other animals of the farm, the goose, pigs and rabbits, they bake the bread and also do a bit of farming crops.
- The garden-group is gardening, planting, harvesting and weeding and takes care of the greenhouse. In the winter, this group does old traditional handcrafts connected with the farm life: forging, carving, tanning, yarning etc.
- The cooking-group brings all the groups together: It uses the products of all the groups and cooks the food for the group with a cook.

The children change the groups every day, though the first day is dedicated to get to know the farm and the rules.

### **Included resources / materials / tools.**

School Farm Hutzelberg: <http://www.schulbauernhof-hutzelberg.de/>

School Farming Network Germany: <http://www.baglob.de/>

School Farming Network UK: [http://www.farmgarden.org.uk/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=28](http://www.farmgarden.org.uk/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=28)