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Hugh Darbishire, of Hill Farm, Warwickshire, took part in Open Farm Sunday for the first time in 2016



Stand proud on LEAF Open Farm Sunday

LEAF (Linking Environment And Farming) is calling on farmers to open their gates on 11 June 2017 for Open Farm Sunday. Since the first Open Farm Sunday event in 2006, it is now firmly established as the farming industry's annual open day

I knew I wanted to take part in Open Farm Sunday ever since the 2015 event, so with six months to go, I took the plunge and signed up.

As this was our first event, we were unsure what to expect, so decided to keep the day simple and stick to what we knew we could talk about and showcase with confidence and passion.

As well as displays of livestock and machinery, we organised a nature trail led by both our agronomist and a Natural England adviser.

We also made full use of the resources and support LEAF provided, as well as the useful resources and advice provided by national sponsor Sainsbury's.

Our event

The day was a huge success with more than 450 visitors. Environmental conservation is a key feature of our farm so we decided to focus on the nature trails and making them very interactive to excite visitors, and really bring to life what we do. We dug holes and explained what goes on beneath the soil, as well as why we grow wild flowers.

Our agronomist brought bags of wheat and barley for visitors to touch, while he talked about what is involved in growing healthy crops and explained how the grains can be used to make a loaf of bread and bottle of beer. Together, they explained how everything on

the farm works in tandem.

Parents were surprised by their children's knowledge of food production and they were able to answer the questions posed by our agronomist.

It was very encouraging to see how the younger generation are being encouraged to think and learn more about where their food comes from. It seems the knowledge and interest in the provenance of our food that my parents' generation had, but which skipped mine, is now being instilled in the younger generation today.

Open Farm Sunday is undoubtedly a lot of work, but it is definitely worth it. We are unable to host a big event this year due to a family wedding,

but we are planning an evening farm walk instead – and another full open day in 2018.

Advice for first time host farmers

For any farmer considering opening for the first time, I would say, start small. Do what you feel most comfortable with and make use of all the free support and resources provided by LEAF. A great way to spread the workload is to work with a neighbouring farmer; whether this means sharing the organising or borrowing machinery. Although we have arable and livestock on the farm, we don't have a great deal of machinery, so my neighbour lent us his sprayer, which added an extra dimension.

We need the public to value, appreciate and trust the food they eat, where it comes from and the skill farmers put into producing it. Even if just one visitor changes their opinion or selects food from a British farm for just one meal, everything is a step in the right direction.

So, be proud, stand up for our industry and open your gates on Open Farm Sunday, it is hugely rewarding and vital to all our futures.

Sponsors of Open Farm Sunday 2017 confirmed to date are: Asda, BASF plc, Co-op, Defra, Farmers Weekly, Frontier Agriculture, LEAF Marque, Marks and Spencer, National Farmers Union, Waitrose plus the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board, with direct support from the beef and lamb, cereals and oilseeds, dairy, horticulture, pork and potato sectors.