

We've explored...

farming

Children's interest in local farming led to a visit to their setting by one of the dads in his tractor, reports **Annette Rawstrone**

A pleasant village walk led to children investigating farming and farm machinery as they delved further into their fascinations with their local area.

The children attending Mon Ami Nursery in Swineshead, Lincolnshire are surrounded by farms, with many having family members or friends who work on the land. 'We like to take the children out to explore our local area, and being situated in rural Lincolnshire means that we're always reminded of the farming industry because we have fields all around us,' says nursery manager Courtney Baird. On a recent walk the children showed a particular interest in the tractors and other agricultural machinery that they could see at work.

Children were fascinated to watch them moving in the fields and staff were intrigued by how much some of the children knew about the different machinery, the terminology for various parts and what they are used for.

Three-year-old Noah, who lives on a small arable farm, was particularly excited to tell the other pre-school children about ploughing, harvesting, crops and tractors. On returning to nursery, the children decided to use their literacy skills to write a letter to Noah's dad telling him how they had been on a walk, seen tractors in the fields and would love it if he could visit them with his tractor when he had time.

They were very pleased to receive a response saying that, yes, he would be happy to drive his Claas tractor to the nursery.

UP CLOSE

'Although children are used to seeing tractors in the fields, many hadn't had the opportunity to see one up close before. They were amazed at how big it was – it was so huge that a toddler could sit inside the rear wheel. Of course, the children wanted to get into the cab and pretend to drive the tractor but it was so high up that they had to climb the ladder and then be lifted in. They enjoyed using the steering wheel and especially loved sounding the horn,' says Ms Baird.

'They were interested in looking at the pedals and the steering wheels and all the buttons. Quite a few of the children were able to share their knowledge of mechanics, even those whose parents weren't involved in farming, such as a boy whose dad does dragster racing.'

Practitioners saw a different side of Noah as he was really proud of his dad and was able to confidently show off his knowledge. He got his dad to open up the tractor so that the children could see the engine. They were able to discuss the engine's different moving parts, what they are for and how they



Above: the tractor outside the nursery. Below: inside the cab with Noah's dad



sometimes need to repair the tractor's engine – when this happens, Noah often helps by passing tools to his dad.

FARM MACHINERY

Noah's dad shared some tractor magazines with the children so that they could see for themselves the different types, including John Deere tractors, which the children are familiar with because there is a store in the village. They were able to identify makes of tractors by the colour they are painted, such as Massey Ferguson, which are traditionally red, and John Deere, which are dark green, while the Claas tractor at their nursery was light green.

They also looked at the range of machinery that is available to help farmers with their work. They could discuss how machinery makes a farmer's job easier by reducing the amount of physical work needed – such as a combine harvester reaping, threshing and winnowing grain crop all at once, and balers being used to press cut crops into compact bales so that they are easy for the farmer to transport and



store. Noah showed his friends where the plough fixes onto the front of their tractor and told them that it is used for preparing the soil in the fields before sowing seeds.

CROPS AND CEREALS

Noah's parents also brought with them some cereals that they grow on their farm to show the children, including oilseed rape and barley grains. They got to see and feel them in their raw state and discuss what they are used for – from making into oil to animal feed, bread and beer. They learnt that the small, black, round, oil-rich rape seeds come from bright yellow flowers and compared them to the pale, oval barley grain that comes from 'ears' of barley.

Since the tractor visit, nursery children have been showing a renewed interest in growing and the herbs that they grow at nursery – which they harvest to use in their food cooking and in the mud kitchen. Practitioners have been linking their interest to books and shared stories with the children such as *The Little Red Hen* and *Oliver's Vegetables*.

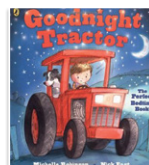
The children now want to become farmers themselves. There are plans to get a greenhouse and they are planning to cultivate some of the children's favourite vegetables from seed. 'We have talked about how we grow vegetables and how we need to plant and tend to them, such as making sure they are frequently watered. The children are looking forward to using their watering cans and monitoring the different vegetables' growth before picking and eating them,' says Ms Baird. They are also going to be following in the Little Red Hen's footsteps and baking their own bread.

FOR REAL

Practitioners are amazed at how much learning the children have gained from their farming explorations and how much of it relates to science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) – from looking at engines and how they work to how plants grow and cooking food. 'It's great for the children to have seen the tractor and talk about farming because now they have got something real to relate to,' adds Ms Baird. ■

book corner

fiction



Goodnight Tractor

by Michelle Robinson

A little boy says goodnight to all his toys, but Tractor is his favourite. With rhyming text, and plenty of animal sounds to join in with.



The Little Red Hen: First Favourite Tales illustrated

by Liz Pichon

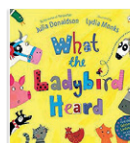
This retelling of a traditional folk tale follows the little red hen who finds a grain of wheat and asks for help to make bread.



Oliver's Vegetables

by Vivian French

Oliver likes chips and won't eat anything else until his grandpa challenges him to eat the vegetables that he finds in the garden, from carrots to spinach, while searching for potatoes to make chips.



What the Ladybird Heard

by Julia Donaldson

Hefty Hugh and Lanky Len are two crafty robbers with a cunning plan to steal the farmer's fine cow. But a ladybird overhears their plot, and has a better plan...



A Seed in Need: A first look at the plant cycle

by Sam Godwin

Follow a tiny sunflower seed on its life cycle, germinating from a seed, becoming a sunflower and shedding its own seeds.



The Tiny Seed

by Eric Carle

A tiny seed grows into a big flower. Then the wind blows and thousands of its seeds begin their own journeys.

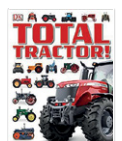
non-fiction



Following the Tractor

by Susan Steggall

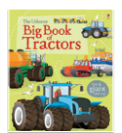
Follow the tractor as it ploughs, sows and harvests the fields throughout the course of one year.



Total Tractor!

(Dorling Kindersley)

From exciting vintage tractors and farming machines to the latest John Deere.



The Usborne Big Book of Tractors

by Lisa Jane Gillespie

Colourful pictures show all kinds of machines, from combine harvesters to snow and sea tractors.