

FOLLOW THE BUMBLEBEE

Bee Concerned

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Like many of us, Julie Roxborough and Mo Burden are concerned about what children eat and the ethical issues around food. Children know what they like to eat, and they have an idea that some of it isn't really very good for them. Whilst getting children to eat healthy food and gain an understanding on ethical shopping seems like a mammoth task, Julie and Mo are doing just that. Here's how...

When did you realise you wanted to do something?

As a teacher, I've worked with children before. I know they can be keen to learn about some of the big issues that adults find difficult. Jamie Oliver was trailblazing the need for healthy dinners in schools, and [we thought that we could work with children about healthy food, where it comes from and how what they eat might effect them and other people living locally and in the rest of the world.](#)

So what was your 'Eureka!' moment?

We were just chatting about [the need for a holistic approach that helps children understand things like mass-produced foods or the impact of growing grain for cattle on rain forests.](#) Julie thought they could use a 'bumblebee' as a way to bring a difficult issue into the classroom. We knew we wanted it to be fun as well as interesting. Having worked with children before, we knew that they already had some understanding of the 'five a day' (portions of fruit/vegetables a day) campaign. So we started from there.

You'd got the idea - but how did you turn that into a project?

We simply decided to go back to school. We got together lots of information that could help explain to children the relationship between the food they eat and the planet. We decided to highlight issues such as the destruction of the equatorial rain forests as more land is used to herd beef cattle and grow grain feed. We started our project simply by writing to local schools, explaining who we were and how we would present the information to their children.

How did you keep the children interested?

Well, [it was really important that the information we used was accessible for children - fun, interesting and thought-provoking.](#) We give talks, provide written information and use videos on compassionate farming, fair trade, food miles and organic food. There's loads of ways to keep children interested, including listening to them and answering their questions. The video we use is always popular.

Are there any setbacks that other people might be concerned about if they wanted to start a similar project?

For Bee Concerned, there were a couple of things that at first set us back. The first thing was getting time in a school's busy diary to come and talk about the project. [Schools at the moment are so inundated with tests, new education policy and league tables that it's often difficult for them to find space to talk to you or invite you to talk to the children.](#) The second problem was that we needed resources and advice to help us get information and plan the project.

So you had a project for schools but no children or resources – how did you get around that?

[We tried to get around this by explaining to schools how the things we do in Bee Concerned helped children in subjects like geography, citizenship, history, home economics and even IT! This way they understood that we were helping them to meet their objectives in teaching the school curriculum and educating children.](#) As for resources, we get support and advice from the Guildford Environment Forum, which is really useful. But we are presently looking for funding.

So you've got Bee Concerned up and running – what's next for the project?

In the future, we hope to get into all the schools in the area and we're also looking for funding.

What were your best decisions?

- Deciding to have a go. We wanted to make a difference.
- To be patient, start small, don't be put off.
- Not to be afraid to tackle 'complex' issues
- Getting help from friends, organisations and local groups
- To practice what we preach by trying to and buy ethical and organic goods where possible and support local food schemes.

Facts and Information

- The distance food travels from the field to the plate accounts for 30% of goods transported by roads. This, plus the use of flying food to the plate from around the world, adds substantially to carbon dioxide emissions and climate change.
- Local, independent stores and farmers markets often support local communities and if the shop or market is local you can use your bike, or walk to it.
- Fairtrade-marked products guarantee workers have been fairly rewarded for their labour. Amongst others, these schemes include Traidcraft, Oxfam, the Fair Trade Foundation and the International Fair Trade Association. Also, ethically produced goods don't only apply to food – you can also buy ethical clothing which are produced in environmentally friendly ways that support local co-operatives and are stylish.
- Organic food, such as vegetables to bread and meat, are free of chemical fertilisers and pesticides, which benefits the consumer, the workforce and the environment. Look out for organic food symbols such as the Soil Association.
- Another way of being an ethical consumer is to buy less. The waste produced from unwanted goods causes massive strains on the environment. You can also use recycled and secondhand products to save precious resources and reduce pressure on landfill sites.

Further Resources

- Check your local library or the internet for more information on ethical shopping, organic food, local markets and food miles.
- If you want to know more about the energy used on bringing food to our table, you can also find out more information from the Energy Savings Trust (www.est.org.uk).
- Organisations such as Sustain (www.sustainweb.org), the Ethical Consumer (www.ethicalconsumer.org) and the International Fair Trade Association (www.ifat.org) provide articles and information on issues related to ethical shopping.
- If you want to set up a project and need more information on issues like setting up a group or getting funding, you can contact your local CVS (Community Voluntary Service). Find their contact details in your local telephone directory or library.