

Food source confusion for children in region

Posted By [MELISSA](#) On February 2, 2010 @ 10:00 am In [News](#) | [No Comments](#)



Almost two thirds of school children across the South West struggle to identify the origins of everyday food products they consume, according to a new survey being published today.

Among the findings some youngsters thought that beef burgers came from McDonalds or Burger King, eggs from sheep, that yoghurts were made using turkeys or ducks, ham came from the Co-Op, bacon from horses, goats or peacocks and cheese originated from butterflies, rats or mice.

Less than one in four knew that beef burgers are sourced from cows, with 29 per cent saying beef burgers came from pigs. Over 1,100 youngsters from Cornwall, Devon, Dorset and Somerset, between the ages of six and eight, were questioned for the research* which was commissioned by rural insurance firm Cornish Mutual.

The survey was used to determine their level of awareness and knowledge of vegetables, dairy products and meat produce and to determine if they are able to recognise how they are sourced.

Other bizarre responses from pupils that emerged from the survey include pupils believing rabbits, plastic or sheep were the main ingredient of crisps (two thirds correctly identified potatoes) and some thought ice cream was made with cheese, air, fish or potatoes (43 per cent correctly said milk or cream).

However, children's overall level of recognition of vegetables was high, ranging from 98 per cent for carrots and sweetcorn to a low of 44 per cent for swede/turnip. Levels of animal recognition were even higher, with all pupils correctly identifying cows, 99 per cent for pigs, 98 per cent for chickens and 97 per cent for sheep.

Encouragingly, nearly 70 per cent of youngsters gave the correct answer of five portions of fruit or vegetables a day as part of a healthy diet. 77 per cent of pupils in the South West had visited a farm and just under two thirds in the South West had grown their own vegetables.

As a result, today a new campaign called 'Dig Down South West', aimed at encouraging children to grow their own produce, is being launched at Highfield Farm in Topsham, near Exeter with well-known TV personality and gardening expert Charlie Dimmock.

‘Dig Down South West’, supported by Cornish Mutual, is aimed at all primary schools across the region with an interest in growing their own vegetable garden. It will help to create 50 new vegetable gardens in schools across Cornwall, Devon, Somerset and Dorset to encourage children, between the ages of five and eight, to take an active interest in ‘growing their own’ produce. The aim of the campaign is to promote the value and benefits of children understanding the source of their food, nurturing their own produce and learning how to live a more sustainable life for the future.

TV personality and gardening expert, Charlie Dimmock said: “I think that ‘Dig Down South West’ is a really fantastic way of getting children involved in growing their own vegetables. Youngsters love getting their hands dirty and I’m sure this will be really popular. It provides the opportunity for them to be creative and the children can see the progress of what they’re growing, and in the process of growing they learn a whole lot more.”

Alan Goddard is the Managing Director of Cornish Mutual, which has Members across the region. He commented: “Considering the South West is at the heart of the UK’s rural economy, we are surprised by the findings of this survey. Given that we are surrounded by farming and the countryside, we would have expected children in the region to know more about the origins of their food.”

He added: “It’s really important that we reach children at this young age. Clearly they do have an understanding, however, there are some huge gaps in their knowledge and we hope that through ‘Dig Down South West’ we can help to build on what they know and get them enthusiastic about local produce.”

Teacher Justin Vernon from Topsham School in Devon added: “Our children are thoroughly enjoying being involved in ‘Dig Down South West’ and have visited Highfield Farm many times before. Growing vegetables is the next exciting step, allowing us to expand on what we’ve been doing in our allotment patch at school in recent years. We’re really looking forward to not only growing the crops but also thinking about how we can use them in school, for example, establishing a cookery club or using them in school meals and for snacks.”