

## The Eco Centre

**SAFER FUTURE COMMUNITIES**  
Empowering local voluntary & community partnerships

Based at Home Farm, Screveton, and managed by Farmeco Community Carefarm, the Eco Centre project aims to excite, stimulate and engage offenders on the Community Payback scheme in environmental and land based studies by providing a safe, practical, work related learning environment on a working farm and to provide 'taster' sessions to career paths in the land based sector.

Working with the Community Service team for Unpaid Work at Nottinghamshire Probation over the last two years, 10 people carrying out community service have benefited from the project, gaining from training, increased confidence and an appetite to learn and redevelop themselves. One person who was on parole was taken on for a work placement, following which he was employed by the company for 18 months until ill health sidelined him to a volunteer role.

The project filled a gap in the type of placements that the Integrated Offender Management team could refer prolific and priority offenders to. It was innovative because there was nothing similar in place that provided an environment like a commercial farm that engaged offenders whilst enabling them to develop their motivation, thinking skills and leadership. Offenders often could not see the value to the community of existing community payback activities, such as litter picking.

As well as reducing crime, the project also aimed to meet the need of supporting offenders who wanted to turn their lives around. It recognised that offenders are

often individuals who are chaotic, lack motivation, self-esteem, are intolerant and frustrated and exhibit this in an unacceptable way.

The project uses the care farming approach to help them learn about themselves, to work together, communicate, reflect, plan and organise and offer 'education by the back door'.

A recent study showed that care farming improved participants' self esteem and reduced feelings of anger, depression and tension.

Farmeco are currently planning to expand the services they offer to enable offenders to design and implement a plan to landscape and plant 15 acres of woodland that compliments the land/season and to provide mixed enterprise training for the management, production and marketing of mixed livestock, including butchery.

Sheila Wright, Deputy Chief Executive of Nottinghamshire Probation Trust said: "Farmeco offers individual work placements for suitable offenders - providing work such as hedge-laying, painting, fencing and general farming duties. Through this they learn valuable skills and disciplines to increase future employment prospects - such as team working, time keeping and a sense of pride in seeing a job completed."

For further information on Farmeco Community Carefarm visit <http://www.farmeco.co.uk/>.