



PRESS RELEASE

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Apprenticeships grow future farmers

Against the backdrop of National Apprenticeship Week, one farming apprentice is looking forward to putting his learning into practice on his family farm.

Jon Fell, 17, was the successful candidate to apply for The Ernest Cook Trust's inaugural Francis Stone Apprenticeship.

The UK-wide educational charity, which owns upland sheep farm Low Beckside, in Mungrisdale, offered the apprenticeship opportunity to those who are new to farming or who want to learn to farm in a different way. It was named in memory of Francis Stone, a former long-serving tenant farmer of the Trust.

Jon's 18-month apprenticeship started in September, and he is learning from The Ernest Cook Trust's farmer, Hector Meanwell, as well as through Kendal College.

"I was over the moon when I got the apprenticeship and I am really enjoying it," said Jon, whose family run a farm near Wigton. "It is something different to what we have at home, as Low Beckside is a fell farm and I have always been interested in this."

Already, Jon is putting into practice what he has been learning at Low Beckside. He's planning to devote time to hedge-laying and will be fencing off parts of a beck to encourage wildlife.

"I am learning from my apprenticeship, and from Hector, about the nature-friendly side of farming, and the importance of things like hedge-laying. If we look after nature, it will look after us. The apprenticeship has developed my understanding of how we can work alongside nature while running a business and making farming sustainable for the future."

Jon is particularly enjoying working with college students, who spend time at Low Beckside as part of their land-based studies.

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“I like sharing my knowledge with other people younger than me, who might want to do what I do and take an apprenticeship, or follow in the footsteps of Hector when they’re older. Farming is a great career to go into.”

Jon isn’t the only apprentice supported by The Ernest Cook Trust. The Trust is part of the Cumbria Connect partnership, which is offering three apprenticeships. The apprentices – who are all new to farming – are spending time with the RSPB at Haweswater, at Lowther Estate and at Low Becks Farm.

Vicki McDermott, Learning Operations Lead (Cumbria/Lancashire) with The Ernest Cook Trust, said: “Jon has settled in really well and is already making a great contribution to the day-to-day running of Low Becks Farm. We believe it’s essential to support the next generation of farmers, and to help them develop and put into practice nature-friendly farming techniques which lead to a more sustainable way of farming.”

For more information about The Ernest Cook Trust and its apprenticeship opportunities, visit <https://ernestcooktrust.org.uk/> or email learning@ernestcooktrust.org.uk.

The Ernest Cook Trust is a UK-wide educational charity, which creates Outdoor Learning experiences for children, young people and their families, on its own estates and with partner estates across the country. It also gives out some £2m in grants every year, to support Outdoor Learning activities.