

GROW YOUR OWN LIFESTYLE

Smallholdings have never been more popular. Breed your own livestock, grow your own food and leave the rat race behind

Images: Edmund Dabney Photography

BRITISH SITCOM, *The Good Life*, aired in 1975 for the first time, influencing a nation of would-be farmers aspiring to self-sufficiency. But, it's not easy going it alone and growing your own, just ask Jonathan 'JB' Gill. Following a successful career with boyband JLS, he moved out of the limelight in 2013 and into the Kentish countryside, where he is now the proud owner of a ten-acre smallholding.

Since his break from the music industry, JB has been busy raising a family and lives on his smallholding with his wife, Chloe, and their two-year-old son, Ace, who shares his father's passion for farming.

"He always wants to be out on the farm with me, feeding the pigs and the chickens," says JB. "And now, alongside these prized Tamworth's and hens, we're dedicating time

to rearing Kelly Bronze turkeys, just in time for Christmas!"

JB admits that when he first considered pursuing a farming career he was very naive as to what it entailed: "It's been trial and error. The first pigs I got were rescue pigs and at the time we didn't know anything about pig farming, but from speaking to various experts we've developed a herd now and have our own breeding stock. We also rear pigs which we sell to local butchers."

For those looking to pursue their own version of *The Good Life*, JB assures us that the greatest benefit of having your own smallholding is producing your own food: "One of the most satisfying things for me is tasting the difference in the bacon, sausages and eggs that come from the animals on my

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One of JB's greatest pleasures has been watching his son Ace enjoying the farming environment

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land. There is no comparison to what I used to buy in the supermarket."

It's clear that JB's understanding of farming has developed greatly since those early beginnings. When it comes to growing your own, JB stresses that it's important to do your research: "There are many things you can grow indoors or in your back garden but there are also many plants, herbs and vegetables – that we are accustomed to eating out of season – that can only be put down at certain times of the year. It is this preparation that's the key to successful growing. And obviously, the more prepared you are the better the results will be."



JB has swapped sharp notes for flat caps!

JB's life has changed drastically since leaving the rat race but he recognises the parallels in managing his smallholding and being in a successful boyband: "I have to work late and get up early, just like I did when I was in JLS. And although feeding and caring for my animals is a daily occurrence, I find that my lifestyle now means I can spend more time with my family and Ace in particular.

"I have seen how much of a positive impact living in the countryside has had on him and we are able to develop our relationship through our shared love of farming."

While JB's feet are now firmly planted in the countryside, he hasn't quite bid the entertainment industry farewell. Much to the delight of children across the UK, JB presents the CBeebies series *Down On The Farm* – an educational children's television show that seeks to improve their understanding of food provenance.

One of JB's biggest aspirations for his smallholding is to have it as a space that the whole community can use and to provide people with an insight into farming and the smallholding way of life.

"I don't have the background in farming that a lot of traditional farmers do but I've spent the last few years honing my skills and figuring out how I can make the most of the land I've got," he says. "For me, the advantage of growing your own is being able to share this lifestyle with others and I'm

hoping to improve people's exposure to the countryside and help young people realise that anyone can become a farmer."

This year, JB became an official ambassador for the Mayor's Fund for London (mayorsfundforlondon.org.uk), a social mobility charity that empowers young Londoners from disadvantaged backgrounds to acquire the skills and opportunities they

need to secure employment and escape the trap of poverty.

Together with the Mayor's Fund for London and City Hall, JB will be working on key programmes to encourage children to grow their own food within the city's urban spaces. JB also champions rural careers and engages people of all ages in the spirit of the countryside and the 'good life'. ■

WANT TO TAKE THE PLUNGE?

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