

2018 YEAR IN REVIEW

Lots has happened within SOCIAL FARMING IRELAND over the past year. From our national conference held in March, to engaging with international Social Farmers and policy influencers, to undertaking significant research in support of the benefits of Social Farming amongst a variety of sectors, to hosting numerous open days and network events to spread the word about Social Farming we are building the profile practice of Social Farming all the time. We facilitated placements for 300 participants on 22 farms—helping to create **new opportunities, connecting people and enhancing lives.**

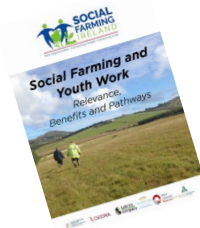
2018 SoFI Reports Published

The first of a series of service-specific guides to Social Farming was launched on Mike O'Connell's farm in Clarina Co. Limerick on the 5th of September, supported by former Munster and Ireland rugby player and current full time farmer John Hayes. He noted Social Farming "is a great opportunity to show how rural Ireland can help other people."



Guide to Social Farming for Youth Services

At the core of this report is a case-study of a highly successful placement with four young men who arrived at their Social Farming placement via a Garda Youth Diversion Project. The launch was featured on RTE 1's Drivetime Programme that evening where Limerick TD Tom Neville noted "using agriculture and animals to actually give back... to youth and get young people engaged is a fantastic way to do things."



Further reports on Social Farming aimed at the mental health, long-term unemployed, intellectual disability and education sectors as well as the links between Social Farming and Healthy Ireland will be available in 2019.

SOCIAL INNOVATION AWARD



In mid 2018 Social Farming Ireland was one of eight full award winners of the Social Enterprise Development Fund. Social Farming Ireland received this award for their work addressing Social Inclusion in rural areas.

"Social Farming Ireland (SoFI) provides nationwide farm outcome-based placements for people, including people with disabilities and those recovering from mental ill health. SoFI is the link between the farms and the service providers whose clients attend placements on the farms. This award will develop the business model to ensure that SoFI serves both the participants and the farmers effectively."

We have attended workshops and received mentoring and support from SEDF over the past number of months which has enabled us to develop our national structures further.



GROWING CONNECTIONS, CHANGING LIVES

INSIGHTS AND LEARNING FROM SOCIAL FARMING

ACROSS IRELAND

On March 23rd 2018, a National Social Farming Conference took place in the Emmaus Centre in Swords Co. Dublin. Attended by 140 people from around the country and from a range of backgrounds and interests, the centre point of the conference was the presentation of findings from a [National Research Project](#) carried out in 2017 by Social Farming Ireland Policy Officer, Dr. Aisling Moroney,

The conference was opened by Professor Jim Kinsella, Head of Section and Professor, Agri-Business & Rural Development, UCD and Social Farming Ireland advisor. Jim highlighted how Social Farming enables participants to do 'ordinary things in ordinary places'.



Dr Moroney noted "From our research to date we can say that the working family farm seems to provide a unique environment in which to address various dimensions of the well-being and development of participants but in a very ordinary, natural and holistic way. Social Farming brings people from all sorts of backgrounds together in new and positive ways and it is these relationships– between participants, farmers, service providers and communities – which are at the heart of what social farming is all about."

Insights from Participants

The strength and quality of these relationships was clear to see in the chat and the banter between participants, farmers and service providers in two "fireside chats" hosted by Martin Rogan of Mental Health Ireland. Patrick, an 18 year old from Co. Limerick who took part in a 10 week Social Farming placement last summer on Mike O'Connells farm in Co. Limerick via Foróige, had no previous experience of farming and spoke movingly about his experience. He reflected on how social farming gave him new confidence and belief in himself and taught him new skills like working with animals and working as a team.

Similarly, Robbie, a resident at Ozanam House in Co. Wexford spoke of his time on Denis O'Connor's farm in Wexford. Robbie is a passionate advocate for Social Farming and the impact it can have on participants, especially those who've had a negative experience of formal education or who just want to be out in the fresh air doing practical tasks. He argued persuasively that Social Farming be available to secondary school students.



"[The Farmer] treats us with respect. He listens when we have an opinion..."

- Foróige Participant

On a scale from one to ten "I'd give it 1,000"

- Participant, Ozanam House



Insights from Services

Theresa Peacock, HSE Mental Health Services in Sligo/Leitrim reflected on how Social Farming has given her clients a sense of routine and purpose, helped them make new connections and friendships and improved levels of wellbeing and confidence.

Noreen McGarry, Community Inclusion Co-ordinator, Western Care, spoke of how her clients with intellectual disabilities have benefited from Social Farming by getting out into the community and developing a sense of belonging and purpose. She shared a wonderful selection of case studies and photos from those who have enjoyed Social Farming including the story of one participant on a social farm who doesn't communicate with words but who has developed a wonderful relationship with the farmer who he happily works alongside. After months of Social Farming, "they understand each other perfectly".



Insights from Farmers

From the farmer perspective, Aisling noted that the research shows that "Most of those who engage in Social Farming have small to medium farm holdings, do not farm intensively and have mixed farming systems. Many have additional skills, such as woodworking or cooking and we find that there is typically a strong emphasis on the maintenance of traditional farming skills, welfare of animals and the heritage and ecological value of the farm. When we spoke to social farmers about the benefits they experienced, to the forefront was a strong sense of personal satisfaction from having made a difference in participant's lives and a sense of enjoyment and fun from having participants and others spend time on the farm. For many, Social Farming has led to improved community connections and a reduction in the sense of isolation which can be common in modern farming. Other benefits include more meaningful and productive use of the assets of the farm such as old farm buildings or kitchen gardens, and the availability of an additional source of income."

"To be able to provide the space where participants can experience the healing properties of nature is great."

- Tommy Earley, Leitrim Social Farmer



Social Farming is made possible through the valued support of the Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine and Annamarie McNally, of that Department, spoke about the value this initiative is adding to their work.

Throughout 2018 we worked successfully with a wide range of organisations across the country to enable people to access great support on farms

The Sectors we engaged with included mental health, long-term unemployed, intellectual disability, education, youth at risk

Brothers of Charity
Rehab Care
Western Care
Down Syndrome Ireland
HSE Disability Services

Cope Foundation
Camphill Communities
Mental Health Ireland
Camphill Ireland

Foróige
SICAP Project Implementers
Healthy Ireland
Simon Community

Mental Health Services in Community Health Organisations

Italian farmers visit Irish Social Farms

In October we were happy to welcome 25 social farmers and healthcare professionals from across Italy on a study visit to share the Irish Social Farming model. Marco Bernardo Di Stefano, president [Rete Fattorie Social](#) organised the trip along with the Social Farming Ireland office. Italian farmers had the opportunity to tour five social farms in the border-midlands region, each with different farming emphasis. On a stop off at the Organic Centre in Rossinver a Q+A session was held with Social Farming Programme Manager Brian Smyth, Programme Co-ordinator Helen Doherty and Policy Researcher Aisling Moroney. Italy is well accustomed with Social Farming having c. 3,000 social farms across the country. About the day, Helen Doherty, Social Farming Ireland Co-ordinator shared "We enjoy hosting visitors from around the world and taking part in the shared learning process. We draw comparisons and contrasts with how Social Farming is developing across Europe and this helps inform our developing model".



Social Farming and Healthy Ireland

Through the support of the [Healthy Ireland](#) Programme we were able to successfully place nine participants over a 10 week block on social farms in Leitrim in early 2018. In addition to placements, some farm brochures were produced for a range of farms in the Leitrim area. An open day was held on Mike Heslin's farm informing stakeholders about Social Farming and demonstrating how the funding had been used.

Further engagements with many more healthy county initiatives such as Limerick, Kildare, Louth and Sligo happened later in 2018 and into 2019 .

Currently, a report is being prepared outlining how Social Farming interacted with the Healthy Ireland programme across many counties in Ireland.



INFORMING AND INFLUENCING POLICY

Finian McGrath, Minister for Disability Issues, visits Annagh Social Farm, Northern Ireland



Finian McGrath, Minister of State for Disability Issues, recently [visited Annagh Farm located in Aghalane](#), Fermanagh, NI just across the border from Belturbet, Co Cavan. There he was welcomed by participants and signed piece of artwork illustrating a harp they created for him.

Along with Social Farming Ireland staff, he also met with representatives from [DAERA](#) (Department of Agriculture, Environment, & Rural Affairs, NI) and [Western H&SC Trust](#). It was a great opportunity to hear about progress in [Northern Ireland](#) with the Health Trusts individualised budgets and the Social Farming Referral Fund. Many participants are receiving supports on farms through both of these mechanisms and we hope similar opportunities are developed to enhance choices for people in the Republic in the near future.



Informing the next generation in our Colleges

Social Farming Ireland Policy Officer, Dr. Aisling Moroney had the opportunity last autumn to share learning and insights on Social Farming to the next generation of service providers and support workers in Irish third-level colleges. In October, she delivered a seminar to 80 second and third year Occupational Therapy students in Trinity College Dublin and in November to rural development students in the Department of Food Business and Development, University College Cork. Social Farming also remains an option in the MSC in Agriculture in UCD where it has been taught for a number of years under the guidance of Prof. Jim Kinsella.



SoEngage—Engaging Social Farmers

Funded through Erasmus, the [SoEngage project](#) objective is to develop training to support farmers engaged in Social Farming with the aim of maintaining and improving the social, economic and cultural sustainability of rural areas. The partners of the project represent six regions: Ireland, UK, Germany, Poland, Romania and Spain, with the Irish Team leading the project. The partners are sharing their expertise and resources to create a comprehensive set of online self-learning resources which will provide farmers with training to develop their competence to engage in Social Farming.



Peter McVery Trust

Brian Smyth, Social Farming Project Manager, participated in a panel discussion on issues facing rural Ireland at the 2018 National Ploughing Championship with Francis Doherty of [Peter McVery Trust](#). Chaired by Mairead Lavery Brian explained, "There is no typical case study of a Social Farming participant - but it gives everyone the skills to open up and

Social Farming Ireland engaging across Europe

On the 31st August 2018, we participated in the European Regional Science Association Congress held in University College Cork. At a Special Session on social agriculture, Dr Aisling Moroney, Policy Officer at Social Farming Ireland presented a paper 'Growing Connections, Changing Lives: Innovation and Cooperation in the Development of Social Farming in the North-west of Ireland', co-authored by Prof. Jim Kinsella of University College Dublin and Brian Smyth of Social Farming Ireland. The conference ran for two days and was attended by hundreds of delegates from across Europe.



In November we hosted [Prof. Sarah Skerrett](#) SRUC Scotland who visited the Social Farming Ireland offices and toured several social farms accompanied by our colleague Dr Jim Kinsella UCD. Having been involved with us prior to the SoFAB project, she enjoyed discovering the growth and development in Social Farming over the past few years.

NETWORK DEVELOPEMENT

Open Days & Network Events were held across the country this year welcoming current and prospective service providers, service users, a variety of local and national government representatives and fellow social farmers.

Network Events

Galway: Social farming in the West – Information and Learning

This event brought together service providers, participants, social farmers and agency representatives from across Galway, Mayo & Roscommon. It was an opportunity to showcase Social Farming in the West and increase knowledge of Social Farming, where it sits in policy and to disseminate the findings of the research undertaken in 2017. There were interesting and informative presentations and inputs from Social Farming Ireland, Brothers of Charity Galway, Western Care, practising farmers in the region and participants.

Clare: Ennis

At the farm of Rebecca Hussey this past autumn visitors were able to sample sorting pumpkins varieties while learning more about social farming from farmers Rebecca Hussey & Jim Cronin. Rebecca shared, "a lot of social interaction happens on the farm... it is very enriching".

Open Days



Westmeath: Service Provider Open Day

In July, we welcomed several service providers to experience social farming in action at the farms of Gerard Deegan and Kate Egan in Westmeath. Representatives from the Murisoa Foundation, Three Steps and Mullingar Resources were among the services who witnessed first-hand participants feeding pigs and showing off the farms where they spent their Social Farming days.



Cork: Bantry

Jim Daly Minister for Mental Health and Older People visited Jerry Daly's farm in Bantry and was delighted to see a "vision of change" in action through Social Farming with social inclusion and community support a real outcome and benefits from farms.



Waterford: Down Syndrome Ireland

On January 11th, Minister Finian McGrath TD visited the farm of Bill Spencer and Renata Anukaite to meet three members of the Down Syndrome Ireland Waterford and South Kilkenny branches who had just completed a 12 week Social Farming placement.



Open days and network events were also held in the following locations:

- Rathoe, Carlow
- Killaloe, Co Clare
- Watergrasshill, Co Cork
- Lusk, Dublin
- Williamstown Galway
- Roscahill, Co. Galway
- Clarina, Limerick
- Ballinamona, Waterford



Cross-border event sponsored by Trouw Nutrition

A Cross border networking event took place in November for a group of farmers experienced in Social Farming delivery and those increasing their readiness to deliver social farming. The event was jointly organised by the Social Farming Support Service for Northern Ireland and Social Farming Ireland, and was made possible through support from [Trouw Nutrition](#), a global leader in animal nutrition with customers across the island of Ireland. Trouw kindly made a donation for the benefit of Social Farming development on an all-Ireland basis in lieu of its regular Christmas hamper for customers.

The focus of the event was building the capacity of farmers to provide a Social Farming service by strengthening their experience through farm visits and coming together as a network. The first farm visit by the group was to Yellow Road Farm in Hilltown, County Down, a sheep and beef farm, with hens and a vegetable garden owned by Marie and Paul Kelly with Social Farming happening one day per week currently. The second farm visit was to Creag Ard Farm in Riverstown, County Louth a sheep farm with mountain grazing, various poultry and a horse owned by Matthew and Clodagh McGreehan with Social Farming also happening one day per week currently. A representative group of farmers from all regions of Ireland gathered to hear and learn from each others experiences, All found it rewarding and re-energising to network with their peers. A great way to round off the year!



'Physiotherapy and Mental Health'

Physiotherapy and Social Farming

September 8th 2018 was World Physiotherapy day. Gráinne Flannery BSc Physiotherapy, MISCP and social farmer published an article in the ISCP on her experience Social Farming and the benefits of nature based therapies to her clients and others. [Click here](#) to view the article.



Service providers have the following to say about social farming:

"This is our job, getting people involved in their local community. This is what is great about social farming for them. Some of the people they have met had said they had never heard about our centre and would love to visit so it's a two-way friendship..." - Support worker, Intellectual Disability Service

"I think that there's something very homely about the support... it's very casual and there are no airs and graces and people feel like they fit right in..." - OT, Mental Health Service



SOCIAL FARMING TRAINING

Training was delivered in 2018 in four venues across Ireland to over 150 prospective and current social farmers. We kicked off in Ballinasloe in April then onto Mallow and Carlow. We finished these 2 day blocks in early May with the final session in Sligo. In August we had a further full day in each venue which included an HSE safeguarding session with an extra session run in Navan in November to round off training for the year.

The curriculum was enhanced this year by offering in-person HSE approved Safeguarding training as well as a Mental Health module led by Mental Health Ireland.

We will deliver further training both to existing and new farmers in 2019.



What is Social Farming?

Social Farming is the practice of offering activity on family farms as a form of social support. In Social Farming the farm remains a working farm at its core but invites people to participate in its day to day activities. Social Farming provides people who use health and social services with the opportunity for inclusion, to increase self-esteem and to improve health and well-being.

The farm is not a specialised treatment farm; rather it remains a typical working farm where people in need of support can benefit from relationship building through farm activities in a non-clinical environment.

Social Farming also benefits farm families by enhancing social inclusion and connecting farmers and participants with their communities.

Stay in touch with what's happening in Social Farming on our social media accounts and our website



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