

Social Farming Newsletter

Spring 2021



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Social Farming.... a light in dark times

2020 has been a challenging year for all of us as we learn to live in the “new normal”. Here at Social Farming Ireland we’ve been working hard to continue supporting those in need on our farms. We are happy to say that after much work in early summer 2020 by the team, placements recommenced on a growing number of farms with the implementation of new safety standards and protocols. We worked closely with our Health and Safety consultants and with those supporting our participants to ensure their needs were met and they were able to resume social farming safely. Given the great outdoor opportunity and individual response Social Farming provides, we found the practice is now even more valued in these difficult times than ever. We remain committed to continuing to support placements in a safe manner.

In addition, over 90 people have begun social farming training as we’ve adapted some of our training to run online. Two new publications have been released, “Social Farming & Healthy Ireland” and “Social Farming & Intellectual Disability” and our international outreach has continued, including through our involvement in a number of Erasmus projects. We are particularly pleased to have been successful in receiving a new contract from the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine to continue our Network Development programme for the next 5 years.

Inside this newsletter you will find an overview of some of our work over the past year as we continue on our mission to provide *new opportunities, connecting people, enhancing lives.*



RE-ENGAGING IN SOCIAL FARMING DURING COVID

The Social Farming Team has been working primarily from home since March 2020. After our farms closed on the 12th March in line with the schools closures, a significant task lay ahead for Social Farming in enabling the safe resumption of social farming activity. Key to this was the development of a comprehensive suite of protocols for farmers so that participants could return safely to farms. With the assistance of our Health & Safety consultant and advice from HSE & HSA, full protocols were developed. Our Regional Officers provide individualised support to each of our farmers who wished to re-open their farms to participants.

By the end of the year we had some 25 farms re-activated in 15 counties under our new guidelines, with placements from across all sectors. This work continues and we hope to make significant progress in 2021 as the vaccination programme begins its rollout.



Aidan in Sligo



Michael in Leitrim

Participants and farmers practice Social Farming safely during Covid restrictions



**Covid Participant
Bubble**



Val in Kildare

REGIONAL ACTIVITY IN SOCIAL FARMING DURING COVID

SOUTHWEST



John Murphy's farm near Watergrasshill in Cork became the first farm reactivated in the South West with new participants from mental health services in Cork city choosing this support offered to them. John was a guest speaker at a local information event held in Minane Bridge late in 2019 where this Cork service provider first learned about Social Farming.

WEST

A number of farms in the West became active during the Summer and into Autumn of 2020. Services including Brothers of Charity and Western Care worked with Deirdre to make placements happen while others such as Forum Connemara, Employability and Rehab Care are looking to get engaged in Social Farming for their service users.



Picking spuds on the farm of Joe Kelly in Co Mayo.

SOUTHEAST



A good number of farms re-activated in the South East with both disability Services and Mental Health Services keen to offer participants support on farms. Shay and Ann Marie Gilbert welcome their first participants to their Wexford farm in 2020. Services such as Carriglea, BEAM Services and a number of school LCA programmes are planning engagements in the near future.

REGIONAL ACTIVITY IN SOCIAL FARMING DURING COVID

BORDER MIDLANDS

Pat Bobbets Dublin sheep farm has been reactivated and welcoming participants since late summer 2020 supported by North Dublin local development company Empower.



Several farms in this region have re-activated and are safely conducting placements weekly.

Staying connected when we cannot farm together

On June 30th 2020, we did something a little different in the Border Midlands Region. As a result of the COVID 19 restrictions all our Social Farming placements were still paused. So what do you do if participants cannot go to the farm? Why you bring the farm to the participants of course, but it does take some doing. However, with the right frame of mind and of course, some technical ability you can perform wonders.



Step in Vincent Coyle of Sunflower farm in Summerhill, Co Meath and his technically-minded friend, Hans who is also a social farmer. A zoom call was scheduled for the afternoon with participants from St John of Gods service in Kildare. Hans arrived and brought with him his children and some recently hatched chicks. Vincent provided the hens, the rooster, Shannon the donkey, Daisy the cow, a poly tunnel bursting with vegetables and herbs and fountains of knowledge!



Over the course of the Zoom and as we moved about the farm, we had around 25 participants asking questions and requesting close-ups of different things. It was a huge success, so much so that we repeated the Zoom over a number of weeks with a visit to an alpaca farm, and talks about specific subjects like breeding chickens, milking cows and making butter and cream! Technology used well!!

OUR RESEARCH ACTIVITY

Social Farming and Healthy Ireland

In September 2020, we ran a virtual launch of our latest report which focused on our work with the **Healthy Ireland** programme. The report was officially launched by Minister Frank Feighan on the social farm of Pat & Anne Bradley in Newtowngore, Co. Leitrim. The bonus of having a virtual launch was the wide attendance from across the country with over 60 people including a large number of Healthy county coordinators attending. The event was run from the SoFI Offices in Drumshanbo, Co. Leitrim, with contributions live from the farm and from the South West region with West Limerick Resources. We also included pre-recorded contributions from participants from disability services and a direct provision centre, all of whom benefited from the Healthy Ireland programme. A recording of the event is available [here](#).

Between 2017 and 2019, 112 people in eight different counties received support from social farmers to enhance their lives and health outcomes in placements commissioned through funding or co-funding from Healthy Ireland. This publication provides learning and insights from this experience and demonstrates how Social Farming has contributed and can contribute further to meeting the broad goals of Healthy Ireland, around improving physical and well-being for all and in particular, for those more likely to experience health inequalities. [Read it here](#)



“Memories of social farming kept me busy and going during lockdown”

– *Social Farming participant, speaking at Healthy Ireland Report Launch*



Social Farming and Intellectual Disability

On a beautiful sunny day in July 2019, over 200 people from all over the country gathered at the farm of Oliver and Anna Dixon near Claremorris, Co. Mayo for the launch of our report on **Social Farming and Intellectual Disability**. Officially launched by Minister Finian McGrath, we also heard insights and testimony the farmers, participants and services and from Social Farming Ireland staff.



The report itself and the discussion on the day clearly show how the ordinary Irish working farm can be a place where people with intellectual disabilities are supported to grow and develop new interests and experiences, to contribute in a very real way to the life of the farm, to build friendships and natural community connections and to have a lot of fun. [Read it here](#)

TRAINING FOR SOCIAL FARMERS



Our training programme started out brightly with optimism in February 2020 but had to be postponed by the third session. We were lucky enough to deliver in Moorepark, Cork & Mountmellick, Laois. In November 2020, we were able to reconnect with social farmers running our first ever online training sessions.

Over 90 farmers participated in online training. Through breakout rooms and chatboxes we all got to know each other and gained knowledge about social farming. The training was a great success and farmers were excited to progress their engagement with social farming.

We hope to recommence in person training in the spring of 2021 as soon as restrictions allow.



"Great two days, very interactive & enjoyable"

"I feel the Zoom training went well. We got chance to chat to other farms in the process and have since made links via social media"

"The health and safety module was very informative"

"All presenters and facilitators involved were very engaging"

**SOCIAL FARMING
TRAINING PARTICIPANTS**



SOCIAL FARMING IN THE SPOTLIGHT



"The social farmer is the key to the Social Farm farm success"

Helen Carroll from RTE's Ear to the Ground visited one of our social farms in December 2020. The stars for the day were three participants from Carrigallen Vocational school who were social farming on Michael Heslin's farm in Gortlettragh, Leitrim. These three young men attended the farm as part of their Leaving Cert Applied programme. The programme is still available on the RTE player [HERE](#)

In late 2019 we produced a report on our early interactions with the LCA programme and its benefits to participants, you can read that report [HERE](#)



TG4 FEIRMEOIREACHT SÓISIALTA.



Bhí an lúcháir orainn chun dul i gcomhpháirtíocht le TG4 chun dul i gcomhpháirtíocht le TG4 i mí na Nollag 2020. Tháinig siad go dtí Béal an Átha Mhóir, Co. Liatroima, chun taifead a dhéanamh ar an bhfeirm amháin. D'fhoghlaim siad faoin imeascadh lucht iarrtha tearmainn leis an tsochaí ag baint úsáid as an bhfeirmeoireacht sóisialta. Tá an ceangal idir lucht iarrtha tearmainn agus an pobal áitiúil le tacaíocht ó chuideachtaí forbartha áitiúla ag dul ó neart go neart.



In December 2020 we were delighted to engage with TG4 who came to film on one of our farms and hear about the integration of asylum seekers using social farming in Ballinamore Co Leitrim. This is one of the growing number of instances where refugees and asylum seekers connect with local communities with the support of local development companies.

SOCIAL FARMING IN THE SPOTLIGHT

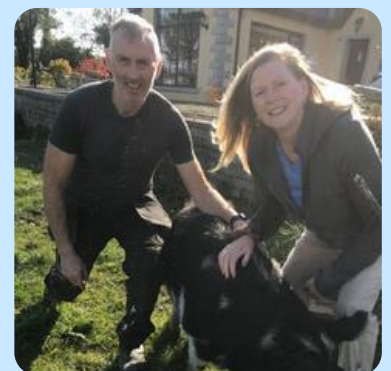


In November 2020, our Policy and research officer Aisling Moroney participated in a lively online conversation about combating rural isolation hosted by Irish Rural Link, alongside representatives from Mental Health Ireland, the Men's Shed Movement and Muintir na Tíre. We are increasingly being asked to become part of these kind of events and discussions and they give us a great opportunity to spread knowledge and understanding of Social Farming.



National Conference of the Garda Youth Diversion Programmes

Along with Limerick farmer Mike O'Connell, our coordinator Helen attended the Garda Youth Diversion Conference in Croke Park in 2019. The event was attended by over 250 youth workers from all over Ireland who run various Youth Projects. Garda Youth Diversion Projects are co-funded by the Gov of Ireland and the European Social Fund as part of the ESF Programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning 2014-2020.



Minister Frank Feighan attended the virtual launch of the 'Social Farming and Healthy Ireland,' report with Healthy Ireland, which Minister Feighan oversees. He was interviewed on Ocean FM afterwards. [Click here](#)

Nick & Dymphna Maher were interviewed on Midlands 103 for the 'THE OPEN DOOR - PO THE PIG'. Po is part of a 'Social Farm' in Ballickmoyler in County Laois. Dymphna and Nick spoke about the benefits for people who need social care support to experience farm life on their farm. [Click here](#) to listen to the interview.

SOCIAL FARMING IN THE SPOTLIGHT



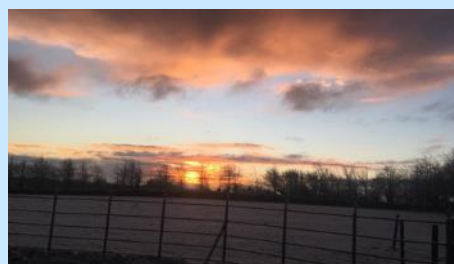
AgriLand featured a story about the farm of Celia O'Connell & Geoffrey Brighton which described their plans for Social Farming on their Limerick farm. Read the article [here](#).



Social farming is being embraced by three generations of the Sullivan family from Lemybrien, Co. Waterford. Read the AgriLand article [here](#).



As a mother of four young children, Mary Cooke-Connolly from Cork could see the real benefits of farming on her family's daily life. That realisation led her and her husband Tom Connolly on a journey to becoming social farmers. Read the AgriLand article [here](#).



A BRUSH WITH ROYALTY

Our own National Programme Coordinator, Helen Doherty, along with Meath social farmer Vincent Coyle at the Irish Ambassadors Reception in Dublin in recognition of their work in Social Farming. The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge, who have a special interest in mental health initiatives, were visiting Ireland meeting people from across the creative arts, sports, business, and charity sectors.

DEVELOPING OUR INTERNATIONAL LINKAGES



WE ARE DELIGHTED TO BE INVOLVED IN TWO PROJECTS WITH ERASMUS+, THE EU'S PROGRAMME TO SUPPORT EDUCATION, TRAINING, YOUTH AND SPORT IN EUROPE

The aim of Erasmus+ is to contribute to the Europe 2020 strategy for growth, jobs, social equity and inclusion, as well as the aims of ET2020, the EU's strategic framework for education and training. Erasmus+ also aims to promote the sustainable development of its partners in the field of higher education, and contribute to achieving the objectives of the EU Youth Strategy.

SoEngage

The objective of this project was to provide training to engage farmers in Social Farming for the economic benefit and sustainability of the farm and the rural community. Partner countries included Ireland, UK, Germany, Poland, Romania, and Spain. The SoEngage project wrapped up in September 2020 and each partner country hosted dissemination events where they shared the outcome of project and newly produced website featuring training materials which are available to download (soengage.eu). The SoEngage Plus Project launched in November 2020 and focuses on training farmers to create videos and use social media to promote their Social Farming activities. [View the site here.](#)



“I was impressed with the the positive impact that the social farms have had on so many peoples lives” – soengage.eu content reviewer

SoFarTEAM



Launched in October 2020, and working alongside European partners from the Netherlands, Germany and the Czech Republic, the SoFarTEAM Project centres on developing teaching materials on different target groups in social farming for mainstream agriculture and social care programmes in third-level institutions. Social Farming Ireland will be the lead partner in taking these materials and developing user-friendly guides for farmers on working with different target groups. When completed, this will add greatly to the resources we will be able to make available to our social farmers and the services we work with.



SOUTH KOREA

Social Farming Project Manager Brian Smyth visited Seoul, South Korea at the 2019 Social Farming International Symposium organised by the Korean Ministry of Agriculture Food and Rural Affairs with Vice Minister Jae Wook Lee. A social farmer in Korea explained his activities with older people including the art and heritage of making paper, tea & other products from Siberian chrysanthemum plants.

EUROPEAN NETWORK

Dr Aisling Moroney, Social Farming Ireland Policy Officer, contributed to the conversation on Education in Social Farming at the 4th international seminar on Social Farming, Ministry of Agriculture, Prague, Czech Republic in October 2019



OUR TEAM

NEW SOUTHWEST REGIONAL
DEVELOPMENT OFFICER



We are delighted to welcome Eadaoin O'Connell from Clarina Limerick to join the team with West Limerick Resources as Development Officer for the South West Region.

Eadaoin is a dedicated, and motivated Social care worker, who is passionate about the work she does. She holds an honours degree in social care work from Limerick Institute of Technology, and has worked in the field of social care throughout her studies and thereafter.

Contact Eadaoin
087 3663842
eoconnell@wlr.ie

Eadaoin initially got involved in Social Farming in 2017 as a farmer, through her family farm in Limerick. Having attended the Social Farming training, and her experience with the programme, she already has a good understanding of our Social Farming Programme.

THE TEAM WORKING
FROM HOME



Deirdre



Brian



Andrew & Maryanne



Gillian



Aisling & Helen



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

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