

# Social Farming Newsletter

## Year in Review 2021



Our Network passed the milestone of having 100 active social farms in 2021, with farms now available in every county in Ireland. We came close to reaching the level of activity achieved pre-pandemic in 2019 and our small team continue to work hard, keeping the participants at the heart and centre of everything we do. Our Social Farming participants come from an increasingly wide range of sectors. Intellectual disability and mental health services remain the source of the majority of activity but we have seen significant growth in the number of participants and in the levels of interest from the youth, education, homelessness, addiction, eldercare and foster care services where really positive – and in some cases lifechanging – outcomes are being achieved.

We were delighted to have achieved some significant national media coverage in 2021 with slots on RTÉ News and Nationwide and a number of articles about Social Farming published in Agriland. The members of our Social Farming Network are innovators in other areas outside of their Social Farming activity. This year, a number have gained national recognition through being nominated for Farming for Nature Awards, through their biodiversity initiatives or through operating novel enterprises such as raw milk production. No names are needed as we might leave someone out (there are so many!) but anyone who follows us on social media will see what fantastic people our farmers are.



Corrina Corrigan, farmer from Monaghan who also works for the Simon Community in Dundalk, helped tell the story from both the farmer and the participant perspective on Nationwide

We also had great interest from our elected representatives and were delighted to host a number on farms and also meet with some. Frank Feighan, Anne Rabbitte, Joe O'Brien, Erin McGreehan, Matt Carthy and Pippa Hackett all had the opportunity to learn more about Social Farming

We continued our very successful collaborations with the Healthy Ireland Programme which enabled participants to access social farming support in 10 counties... we hope this continues to grow in the new programme in 2022.



"The social farm has given our RehabCare members a meaningful, new experience. We have one member who had behavioural issues and since he started going to the farm, these issues have reduced and we put this down to working with animals," said Stephen Caraher of RehabCare Dundalk, on RTÉ News in September 2021

# Social Farming Around the Country

## Border Midlands East

The number of farms increased greatly and we now have two new farms in Longford. Participants are enjoying great and diverse experiences on ordinary farms in their local communities.



Farmer Ciaran in Kildare with participants



North Connaught Youth & Community Services and HSE Kildare West Wicklow MHS are among the 13 services sending participants to farms.

- Social farmer Ciaran Duggan, from County Kildare, is doing research on Ash Dieback for his PHD – the help he is getting from his Social Farming participant "S" has so impressed the Research team that "S" will now get a citation in the thesis for his support and participation. A brilliant outcome for "S" (and Ciaran)

We are fortunate to be in the space where we have been supporting participants on farms almost continuously since the start of the pandemic. Once we had our Social Farming COVID protocols in place and signed off by the HSE, we were amazed at the willingness of our farmers to adopt new procedures to make their farms safer for participants attending. While the extra administration is a little bit burdensome, it is a small price to pay for supporting our fantastic participants onto farms. We noticed some changes in the structure of the placements with a lot more 1:1 placements taking place to limit contacts and reduce risk to our participants. We will continue to operate under Social Farming COVID Protocols in line with Government recommendations for the foreseeable future.

On Tommy Earley's Roscommon farm, Tommy and his participant have been hard at work designing and manufacturing a chicken tractor. F has a passion for chickens and travels to poultry shows around the country in search of the perfect bird to improve his flock. Purchasing more fowl means that there is always a shortage of good housing and in an effort to remedy this a new chicken tractor was envisioned! A design was proposed, debated, enhanced and finally agreed and production commenced in November 2020.

After 6 months of sustained effort, a fantastic chicken tractor (tank) was produced. It is fox and predator-proof, has lots of space for hens to graze and scratch to their heart's content, is fully mobile and has some design features to make feeding and watering the birds less of a chore. The carefully crafted nest boxes also offer easy access to the eggs and offer a safe place for the hens to roost overnight.

Well done to F and Tommy!



# Happening Around the Country

## West

Mayo Social Inclusion Awareness Week 2021 (7th October)



There are 7 new Social farms in the West ready to deliver Social Farming Placements in 2022

Visitors had an opportunity to meet participants and social farmers on a Social Farming Placement Day as part of Social Inclusion Week in Mayo.

We worked with approx. 15 organisations in the West region in 2021 across the mental health and intellectual disability sectors, schools, and long term unemployed services - providing local placements to participants in natural outdoor settings. We welcomed some great new farms to the Network in all three counties.



Shane Keaveney with Participants from Castlerea Secondary School



Participant from Claregalway Secondary School on Murphys Farm



Farmer Steve in Galway with participant Declan

# Happening Around the Country

## Southwest

Limerick Open Day

Tipperary Open Day



This September there were a good mix of participants, services, and farmers on the farm of Sean O'Farrell offering an opportunity for learning and connection for all.



Celia O'Connell and Geoffrey Brighten, Rathkeale, were our hosts for an open day for Churchtown Day Centre and O'Connell House participants in October. As a result, a number of potential participants are in the process of beginning their placements.



Limerick Youth Service & Garda Youth Diversion Programme came to visit one of our social farmers in Clarina, Co. Limerick, to experience what Social Farming can offer their participants. An informative and interesting morning was had by all.



There are currently 16 farms open for participants in the Southwest region



Eadaoin attended the Farm Connect event in Clare along with a number of local farmers who heard from "Awareness Head to Toe" about mental health and wellbeing in the farming community. It was great to reconnect with John Hayes, farmer and former Irish Rugby International, who launched our Youth Report in Limerick in 2018.



Along with the SICAP & Primary Health care teams we visited a social farmer in Rathkeale where we recorded short videos on the care of plants for the "Grow it Yourself" project. These will be used to help complete planter boxes being presented to the housing estates within Abbeyfeale.



# Happening Around the Country

## Southeast

The Regional Development Officers for North and South Tipperary, Eadaoin O'Connell from West Limerick Resource and Christine Rossi from Waterford Leader Partnership, worked together to have a well-attended Open Day on the farm of Sean O'Farrell in Roscrea. The event



was supported by Dan Downey from Healthy Tipperary and Helen Doherty from the Social Farming Ireland head office at Leitrim Development Company.



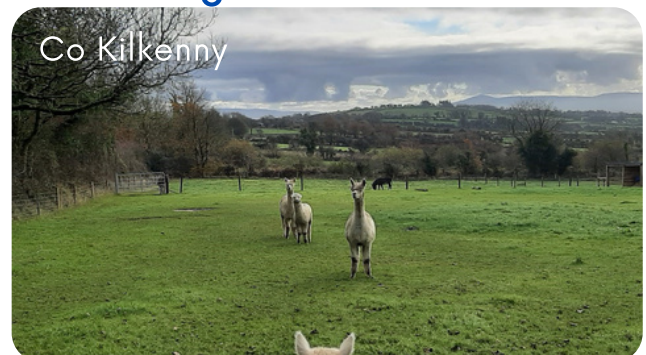
In 2021 we worked with over twenty organisations with new interest and participants from schools and the youth sector. We continued to build on our core areas of activity of Mental Health Services and Intellectual Disability supports.

## Two of the new social farms coming in 2022



Certified organic farm producing vegetables and edible flowers.

- Plant care: sowing, planting, feeding
- Compost management
- Pot and tray management; keeping tunnels clean and clear



30 acres with Herdwick sheep, cattle, horses, donkeys and alpacas.

- Animal care: feeding, brushing
- Health checks and dousing
- Changing bedding
- General tidying, fencing

# Social Farming Stories

This summer, participants from Stafford Day Service, St. Annes were welcomed on Michael O'Connor's farm outside of Nenagh. Activities on the farm included checking on and feeding animals, cleaning out the hen houses, watering, feeding and weeding plants in the polytunnel, and fencing. Michael's sister Katherine was there most days to offer support.



Everybody really enjoyed the placement, really looked forward to going each week and really miss it now that it has finished.



One individual, at the start of the placement, needed verbal and physical prompts to complete tasks, but as their confidence grew during the placement they completed tasks independently.

Michael and Katherine were extremely supportive in assisting with developing a picture schedule for one individual prior to attending each week. Michael would email the task planned for the day and the service so they could devise a picture schedule, allowing the individual to be able to "check off" their activities - knowing that once all tasks were complete they would happily get to sit on the tractor.

What made this placement special was that everyone looked out for each other and everyone was willing to help. The final personal touch came on the last day when participants were presented with certs and two apple trees were planted in honour of the placement. Great friends and memories have been made and thank you Social Farming Ireland for this opportunity. - Support worker, Stafford Day Service.

We brought 2021 to a close with the completion of a 10-week Social Farming placement in partnership with County Wexford Community Workshop.

Four participants joined us each week to help around the yard participating in daily activities with the horses: collecting from the fields, feeding and grooming, tacking up, and cleaning the stables.

One participant had quite a bit of previous experience around horses and she felt it all coming back to her as the time progressed. The others had less hands-on experience with horses but were used to caring for other animals so took to the tasks like a duck to water.

The weather was favourable most of the time but on the wet days we cleaned tack and organised the tack room - this gave us a chance to explain the purpose and use of each item.

We did some leading exercises at the start of the placement to ensure the participants were confident and competent before we gave them a bit more independent work. We are lucky to have a good selection of ponies and horses which are in retirement or semi-retirement that were perfect for the group. They needed to be brought in to be fed and checked over, so this became a key part of the lads' role over the weeks. And it was clear that both horse and human enjoyed the experience. As the saying goes- "There's something about the outside of a horse that's good for the inside of a man."

- Rag Tree Farm, Co Wexford



# Social Farming and Education

## Social Farming & The Leaving Cert Applied Programme

On April 27th 2021, we held a hugely successful on-line information session on Social Farming and the Leaving Cert Applied Programme, attended by staff from 35 schools in 17 counties.

For students, Social Farming provides a real-life learning experience away from the classroom, builds confidence and genuine self-esteem, develops social and practical skills and community connections, all of which happens in the everyday and local setting of the family farm.

Staff from Social Farming Ireland were joined by Elaine Meehan, LCA Coordinator in Carndonagh Community School in Malin Head, by LCA students school Laura and Brendan and by social farmer William McLaughlin, all of whom featured in a case study based on the very positive experience of Social Farming within the school. The information session has really sparked interest amongst participating schools and we have had significantly increased levels of activity since September 2021.



*"This is one of the highlights of LCA. It's more than just getting out of the school, it's the farming itself that was brilliant".*  
- student participant

## Social Farming & LYIT



lyit

Institiúid Teicneolaíochta Leitir Ceanainn  
Letterkenny Institute of Technology

Since September 2021, have been collaborating with researchers from Letterkenny Institute of Technology (LYIT) on a two year research project which will involve clinical research on the impacts and benefits of Social Farming for those experiencing mental health challenges. This Project, which has received funding under the prestigious LYIT President's Research Bursaries programme, provides funding for a Masters student to conduct national level research. The Project is supervised by Dr. Gail Cummins (Dept. of Early Education and Social Studies, LYIT), Dr. Louise McBride (Dept. of Nursing and Health Care, LYIT) and Dr. Aisling Moroney (Leitrim Development Company/Social Farming Ireland)



Our work in building connections and developing knowledge of Social Farming amongst third-level academic staff, researchers and students continue. In April, and at the invitation of Prof. Jim Kinsella, Aisling delivered an online seminar on Social Farming to students on the MSc in Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development, UCD. Seminars to at least three different groups of students within the broad Health and Social Care fields in UCD, UCC and NUIG are taking place in the academic year 2021/2022.

# Research & Policy Activity

We are delighted to announce new funding from the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine which will enable us to continue our research and modelling work on Social Farming over the next 5 years. As Social Farming continues to grow and develop, it is so important that we retain our ability to evaluate practice, to build the evidence base for Social Farming and most importantly, to progress mainstreaming and full commissioning. The new research/modelling Project is called SoFarMAIN and commenced in autumn 2021: watch this space for further details.

In May, Helen and Aisling were invited to join the monthly on-line learning and networking session of Healthy City and County Co-ordinators to share information on Social Farming.



Aisling worked with SoFI National Project manager Brian Smyth on a joint paper/presentation to the **World Down Syndrome Congress 2021** which focused on the benefits of social farming to people with Down Syndrome.



Minister of State at the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth and at the Department of Health Anne Rabbitte, TD met with Social Farming participants, farmers and service providers on Sean Butlers Roscommon farm. Joining us were representatives from the HSE, and Local Development Companies.



Minister of State at the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM), Senator Pippa Hackett enjoyed her first encounter with social farming on the Mayo farm of Anna & Oliver Dixon.



# In The News



Christine & Eadaoin's interview with Jim Finn from September can be [heard here](#) on Tipp Fm podcasts



Eadaoin spoke with Seamus Kind on Tipp Midwest FM about Social Farming Ireland, and our open day on Sean O Farrells farm.



[RTÉ's Radio 1 Countrywide is on Joe Kelly's organic farm in Co Mayo 9th October](#)



[Louth disability service praises social farming project 27th September](#)



['Social farming can make lasting difference to young people' 29th May](#)

['As a mother, I saw the real benefits of farming on family life' 6th June](#)

['Cavan woman keen to give back through social farming' 25th October](#)

International Women's Day  
IWD (INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY) 2021: #CHOOSETOCHALLENGE  
ARTIST WOMEN FARMERS WEBINAR, 2PM MARCH 8TH

June Danaher Lisa Fingleton Breda Larkin Sheila Flanagan Mary Burke

Hosted by Ella Mc Sweeney

Register your interest to participate today by visiting: [www.limerickgallerypages.com/talks](http://www.limerickgallerypages.com/talks)

Great to see one of our Social farmers in the southwest, June Danaher, involved in this webinar for International Women's Day.

And later in 2021 another of this wonderful group of Farming Artists joined the social farming network. We look forward to working with Breda Larkin in 2022!

# National & International

  **Farm Business Options**  
**Social Farming**

Tuesday, 2 March | 11am

Accessing an agricultural holding on a regular basis can help a wide range of people with a vulnerability improve their health and wellbeing and build social skills. This webinar will outline what anyone considering running a Social Farm enterprise needs to know.



Barry Caslin,  
Host



Helen Doherty,  
Social Farming Ireland



John Murphy,  
Farmer



Jennifer Payne,  
Farmer

Register today at: [www.teagasc.ie/farmbusinessoptions](http://www.teagasc.ie/farmbusinessoptions)

If you missed our talk with two of our farmers John Murphy, Cork & Jennifer Payne, Roscommon with the Teagasc Farm Business Options Programme you can catch up here. Its a great way to learn about Social Farming and how you might get involved.



National Project Manager Brian Smyth making a presentation to NW Assembly COSME Network project Local Food Chains on #socialfarming with Connecting People with food and producers.



We contributed to this very welcome insight into opportunities in Green Care, in our case highlighting the value of connections with nature available on ordinary farms. [Click here to visit the webpage](#)

We continue to be involved with two projects with ERASMUS+, the EU's programme to support education, training, youth and sport in Europe.



Aisling and Brian continue to participate in the Erasmus + SoFarTEAM Project, with our partners from the Netherlands, Germany and the Czech Republic on developing teaching materials on different target groups in Social Farming.



Helen and Brian continue to work on media training materials for social farmers to help them promote and raise awareness of the work they do with participants on their farms. The training materials will be available online for all post project.

For more on SoFarTEAM, go to the Project LinkedIn page <https://www.linkedin.com/company/sofarTEAM/>  
For more on SoEngage, visit [soengage.eu](http://soengage.eu)

# Training

We ran 19 training sessions – some online and thankfully some also in person. Over 90 farmers attended this past year. As always we used the resources we have developed from extensive experience and practice and delivered training on 5 farms in the counties of Donegal, Roscommon, Kilkenny, Limerick, and Westmeath

Some of these farmers have already commenced practice and accepted their first participants while others will begin practice in 2022. All are joining the network of fantastic farms and enhancing the #socialfarming offering all over Ireland.



If any of you have recently completed any exciting projects with your participants, with the participants permission, please share the details with us and we can put the stories in the our next newsletter.

The Social Farming family were saddened to hear of the sudden death of Pat Bogue. We had worked closely with Pat on a number of pieces of work as far back as the original Social Farming Across Borders Project. Pat was one of life's true gentlemen and rural Ireland has lost a great champion. May he Rest in Peace



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



[twitter.com/Lairdhse06](https://twitter.com/Lairdhse06)  
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An Roinn Talmhaíochta,  
Bia agus Mara  
Department of Agriculture,  
Food and the Marine



Comhpháirtíocht Leader  
Phort Láirge Partnership



Waterford Leader  
Partnership

