SOCIAL WORK IN FARMING

Introduction to Guides for Farmers to Working with Different Target Groups

Social farming is about giving people experiencing a range of challenges in life the opportunity to spend time and carry out a range of activities in a farm environment. This **core offering** of spending time in the natural environment of the farm, connecting with other people and carrying out meaningful activity is essentially the same for every person who comes on to your farm, regardless of who they are. Similarly, participants will typically experience **many benefits and positive outcomes in common**, including improvements in mental health and well-being, improved social connections, increased self-esteem and confidence, the development of new skills and improved physical health and fitness. And a core principle of social farming is that it is person-centred, that everyone is an *individual* first and foremost, regardless of why they have chosen to take part in social farming or what their challenges in life are.

However, we can also improve practice and support people more effectively if we distinguish between and understand more about **the different target groups** who spend time on social farms. The attached Guides are designed to provide you with insights and learning on many aspects of social farming with people with a range of backgrounds, needs, challenges and perspectives. For this Project, we have focused on **seven key target groups**.

- People with mental health challenges
- Youth
- People with intellectual disabilities
- Older people
- Refugees
- People with physical disabilities
- People in recovery from addiction

You may work exclusively with one of these groups – and if so that specific Guide will be of use to you – but most social farms will have a mix of groups over time. This will require flexibility and an openness to learning about what works and what doesn't when supporting different target groups. The main aspects of practice covered within the Guides include:

- **Background information.** It is important to have a basic understanding of each target group and of what we mean when we talk about 'physical disability' or 'the elderly'. It is also important to be able to distinguish between different conditions or circumstances: for example, the target group 'people with mental health challenges' includes not just people with depressive disorders, but also people with anxiety disorders, or schizophrenia. This kind of background information will also help to highlight different challenges or **support needs**, ranging from refugees who may be very physically able but who may require language supports, to people with physical disabilities who may need tools which are adapted to enable them to participate fully.

- **Benefits and outcomes**. There are *particular* benefits and outcomes which you can actively support people from different target groups to achieve. For example, while all groups may develop new social connections, this may be an especially important outcome to achieve for people with mental health challenges, who may live particularly isolated lives.

- **Activities**. Some may be particularly valuable or meaningful for particular groups. Young men, for example, may be very interested in working around machinery and in 'high action' tasks while a group of older people with dementia may enjoy the opportunity to pet or be around the animals or smell the plants in the garden.

- **Approach to supporting and working alongside people.** This will also need to vary, from, for example, the need to demonstrate a non-judgemental approach to people in recovery from addiction to focusing on building the confidence and capacity of people with intellectual disabilities who may have not had an opportunity to grow and develop in other settings.

- **Challenges associated with working with different groups**. These will vary substantially, from low motivation levels in some people with mental health challenges, to a distrust of authority amongst some younger people. Equally, the means of overcoming these challenges will vary from group to group.

We hope that these Guides will support you in engaging more confidently and effectively with existing or new target groups on your farm. But they are intended only as guides and as always, you will also rely on your **own judgement and experience, on the guidance and involvement of professional health and social care support staff and on the inputs from participants themselves**.