



A Message for our Network

Our social farming network and activities have grown substantially. In 2024, we observed record interest from many different people, their advocates and services in placements right across the country. This is hugely positive and a sign that social farming is the right fit and delivering very strong benefits and inclusion for many people. The cohort of people enquiring about placements on our social farms has expanded and the benefits are many.

There is also growing awareness in the farming and rural development sectors of the many benefits of supporting people in the green economy. We are using the natural and environmental assets and activities of the farm, and the skills and experiences of farmers to support people in their local community. These local farm businesses are vital to sustain our rural economy and our towns and villages. It is vital that we support and engage our Social Farmers with regular and ongoing placements as demand increases.

We have just come out of the local and European elections and in the debates heard about the needs of people with disabilities, people with mental ill health, refugees and asylum seekers, young people at risk older people and others, and of the gap in services for them. Social farming is filling these gaps for many people as it is person centred, flexible and is community based. We want to ensure that our decision makers, budget holders and Government Ministers are fully aware of what we have been achieving, and of the need for resources to allow participants access to more and longer placements, for their benefit, and to help people progress their own goals. This is very important in advance of budget 2025 in October but also ahead of the general election and a new programme for Government.

We need a national programme of scale and across various government departments including Health, Education, Social Protection, Justice, Children Equality, Disability Integration & Youth, to ensure that people who choose social farming will have the resources to access a place.

All our readers who are interested in the development of social farming can help by talking to politicians, decision makers, funders, policy makers and advocates about the many positive aspects of Social farming and of your experiences of it and the stories of of the people who you see benefiting.

In this Newsletter we reflect on the first half of this year!

- **Message for our Network**
- **HSE Disability Fund 2023**
- **Participant Testimonials and Experiences**
- **“Social Farming”-A poem**
- **Research & Policy Activity**
- **Social Farming around the Country**
- **Farmer Network Building**
- **Training Programme**
- **National & International Activity**
- **In the News**





HSE DISABILITY FUND 2023

In 2023, Minister Anne Rabbitte announced €200,000 in funding to support placements on social farms for people with disabilities. Using this fund, we delivered placements on farms to more than 200 participants. Building on this success, Minister Rabbitte announced an additional €200,000 in early 2024 to continue supporting participants with disabilities to experience social farm placements throughout the year.

“This funding directly from the Department of Children, Equality, Disability Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) through the HSE is very welcome as it guarantees people access to support in their own communities. We are very grateful to Minister Rabbitte for this as she can see the value in community support and inclusion for people who choose these ordinary social farms to connect with others, with nature, with many and various activities in their own community for new opportunities and which enhances their lives.” – Brian Smyth, Project Manager.





Participant Testimonials and Experiences

Participant JC, who supported by Enable Ireland, began a social farming placement on Morgan's farm in Cavan alongside another participant. After their initial experience, they both had the opportunity to experience another farm further north in Cavan for a second placement, where they discovered a love for dairy farming.

Inspired by this newfound interest, JC has now progressed to completing a work placement on this farm outside of Social Farming, furthering his skills and abilities on the farm!



Participant
Voice

Feedback from Brothers of Charity Duffcarrig

I am just writing to tell you how well that our people supported are doing on the current farm with Alan and Helena in Borris. They look forward to it every week and are very happy and content after completing their time on the farm each week. Alan has commented on how well they are doing and that they are very good at completing tasks he has set for them. Alan and Helena have developed a good relationship with each of the men and always have tasks ready for each individual.



Letter to Minister Mary Butler

Self
Advocacy

A very moving letter was recently written to Minister Mary Butler, the minister of state for Mental Health & Older People, by a participant who had a placement on Collette Clarke's farm in Offaly. He described how Social Farming improved his sense of self-worth, connectedness, confidence, and physical activity. In addition, he encouraged people to give social farming a try and expressed his hope that HSE would continue to fund and support social farming placements.

Social farming has enabled Marcel to reconnect with his identity and plans for the future. He is to resume his studies and will be embarking on a Masters at Athlone campus, TUS.

We all wish Marcel the very best.

"SOCIAL FARMING"

A POEM BY A SOCIAL FARMING PARTICIPANT

You're looking very low My counselor said
Do give Social farming a go
I rather wanted to stay home instead. It sounded scary and I felt really wary
But out we went and met Bernie, Tracey and David And Nicola and Ger were there.
A warm kitchen with tea and food And a red cat soon lifted our mood.
There was plenty of chat about this, about that

The cows and goats are fat.
Some have to calf and to lamb yet.
Alas this year, there has been rain galore, Some fields are looking like a shore.
The ploughing has to wait another while
All this worry is making it hard for the farmers to smile. We are trying our best to take it all in....

The first day goes by in a blink of an eye
and soon we have to bid Bernie and new found friends Adieu

The second day, a bit more at ease
We go to the goats to feed them a piece. They need to be milked have we any triers?
David holds one kid and Tracy and I go to the willing goat.

Under Bernies guidance and Tracy's expert fingers the warm milk soon flows out.
What a trusting animal, think I to let total strangers milk her without a guile.. it gives me courage to kneel down and try Another milestone achieved

A visit to the alpaca farm is next on the agenda And Maureen will join today wohoo.
With a full car we set off towards Mullingar,
Bernie knows where the alpacas are
the farmers are waiting with a welcoming smile, delighted to show off their beautiful animals in style.

We get to walk them uphill and downhill and then watch them eat their fill
They are so cute and cuddlesome The alpacas are adorably tender.
Their wool though so worthwhile to the spender...

Afterwards a picnic at Lough Owel another day has gone in a blur....

This is fun we all say and look forward to another day,
This time its meeting Ger and her gang in the fresh air
to plant flowers, pet horses, and introduce Hello how are you? To show that we care

The weeks fly by

Something different to see, to learn each time we come. We make birdhouses, plant flowers,
visit garden centres, go to corlea track way in Kenagh Bernie is tireless in her endeavours to
show us the hidden beauty of the Midlands and always in wonderful form.
Her smile lifts our spirits, there is always a listening ear and such warmth and kindness from both her and
Tom. Tracy gets to ride Rosie what a wonderful treat, whilst David and I give her carrots to eat.

Then its out to Mullingar we want to watch the showjumping tryouts for the RDS...
The weather played along... sunshine all day for the boys and girls under enormous pressure
-we pray.
Quite a few fall off. Kiss the ground so to say poor little mites but then that's life.

Competition is tough and life is rough... a good lesson for them... not for me to decide it was
great fun altogether a picnic and coffee held body and Soul together...

Then David wanted to visit the horse statue up on the hill, well, that gave us all an extra thrill.. We marched
up there full of courage and vigour.. Tracy and Bernie helped out to leave no one behind.

The essence of team work everyone is so kind....

The saddest thing of all next week we bid goodbye to Bernie and Tommy, the goats and dear Rosie, the
horse

But ahh what memories we have made . These are things we will cherish forever..
So thank you to Bernie Ger. Nicola and all the team.... For this so worthwhile endeavour.



RESEARCH & POLICY ACTIVITY

A Chapter Ends

As 2023 drew to a close a chapter of our story also ended with the departure of our Policy & Research Officer who had been with us for 7 years - Dr Aisling Moroney. Aisling had been an invaluable part of the team and her contributions and work made a significant impact on the project. We wish her lots of luck with her next chapter in life with the Western Development Commission and we look forward to our paths crossing again. Pic - Aisling presenting at the YDP Conference in Croke Park last November.



New Policy & Research Officer joins the Social Farming Ireland Team!



We are delighted to have Dr Mary Brennan join the team in the post of Policy & Research Officer!

Mary joins us from Teagasc where she spent 7 years as a research officer, PhD scholar and post-doctoral researcher, and most recently as the Postdoctoral Researcher with the ERA-NET DairyMix project – a European project. From a farming background in rural Galway, Mary brings a wealth of research experience, policy analysis, research methodologies, and stakeholder consultation to the role.

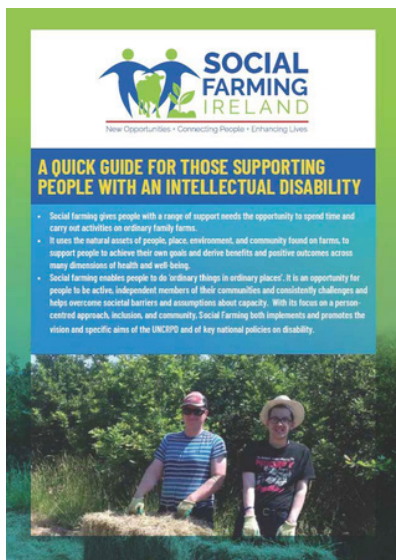
We look forward to Mary becoming embedded in our team and contributing to our team goal of mainstreaming ensuring the sustainability of Social Farming in Ireland!

Welcome to our team Mary!

An essential aspect of the Research and Policy Officer's responsibilities is to cultivate an understanding of Social Farming among the upcoming cohort of health and social care practitioners.

Throughout this academic year, we have had seminars in University College Cork for Youth Work, Community Development and Social work student in February and Occupational Therapy students in March!

We extend our sincere gratitude to the lecturers for enabling this valuable interaction with students, fostering dynamic sessions that incorporate practices directly into the academic setting.



Earlier this year, we launched two quick guides, one for “Those supporting people with an Intellectual Disability” and one for “Those supporting people in Mental Health Recovery”

These quick guides provide a great synopsis of the practice of Social Farming, aimed at the very busy Health & Social Care professionals. The contain all the key information on what to expect from a Social Farming placement.

Find them on our website [here](#) or call us for a hard copy!

Southeast Region



SOCIAL FARMING AROUND THE COUNTRY

SOCIAL FARMS IN THE SOUTHEAST

There are currently 32 farms available for Social Farming participants in the Southeast Region

HEALTHY KILKENNY

Gillian McCarthy met & chatted with Hildegard Naughton, TD Minister of State with responsibility for Public Health, Well Being and the National Drugs Strategy at a showcase of Healthy Kilkenny funded programmes in February!



THE FUTURE IS ACCESSIBLE

MEP Grace O'Sullivan visited the farm of Michael Hale in Lismore Co. Waterford along with her Colleague MEP Katrin Langensiepen as part of their Future is Accessible tour. They spoke with participants Michael, Stephen and Liam who attend Michaels farm regularly as well as WLP Staff and board members and staff of Carriglea Cáirde Services. Both MEPs were presented with good luck charms on the day by the Hale family. It was great to receive such great recognition of the work being carried out by Social Farming Ireland by the visiting MEPs.



SOCIAL FARMING IN THE SOUTHEAST

It has been an incredibly busy year, so far, in the Southeast (Waterford South Tipp, Kilkenny, Carlow & Wexford).

Since the beginning of the year we supported over 120 participants on ordinary farms in the Southeast.

Participants with disabilities, mental health challenges, elderly, and young people, spent time on a family farm in a healthy, supportive and inclusive environment.

**To contact the Southeast
Regional Development Officer**

☎ 087 231 1061

✉ southeast@socialfarmingireland.ie



Border Midlands Region



SOCIAL FARMING AROUND THE COUNTRY

SOCIAL FARMING IN THE BORDER MIDLANDS

More than 185 participants were supported by Social Farmers in the Border Midlands region so far this year.

Participants with disabilities, mental health challenges, from LCA, youth services, homeless and addiction services, and people with alzheimer's or dementia spent time and carried out activities on ordinary family farms as a form of social support!

To contact the Border Midland Regional Development Officer

☎ 086 144 8796

✉ Bordermidlands@socialfarmingireland.ie

SOCIAL FARMS IN THE BORDER MIDLANDS

There are currently 42 Social Farms in the Border Midlands available to deliver Social Farming

CONNECTION MENTAL HEALTH

Border Midlands Regional Development Officer Charlotte & social farmer Bernie Whyte attended the Mental Health Ireland "Connection Mental Health Longford" meeting. Charlotte gave a short presentation explaining Social Farming in a national and local level and Bernie discussed her experience with Social Farming and having groups from the Mental Health Sector. Bernie captured the attention of the room with her heart warming stories!



NORTHWEST AUSTISM AND DISABILITY FAIR

Charlotte attended the Northwest Autism and Disability Fair, where she met parents and

organisations to discuss Social Farming.



South Midland Region

SOCIAL FARMING AROUND THE COUNTRY

SOCIAL FARMS IN THE SOUTH MIDLANDS

There are currently 22 farms available for Social Farming participants in the South Midlands Region

MENTAL HEALTH IRELAND

Social Farming Ireland's National Coordinator, Helen Doherty & South Midlands social farmer Gerard Deegan attended and presented at the Mental Health Ireland's "Connecting Mental Health for Mullingar"



MIDLANDS AUTISM AND DISABILITY FAIR

Our Social Farming Administrator, Caoimhe attended the Midlands Autism and Disability Fair in Athlone to share the benefits of social farming and how people can get involve! It was heartening to see the enthusiasm and curiosity about inclusive community initiatives!



OVER 180 PARTICIPANTS SUPPORTED ON FARMS SO FAR THIS YEAR

SOCIAL FARMING IN THE SOUTH MIDLANDS

It has been an busy year in the South Midlands area! On the last quarter of 2023 Shannon Ballantine joined the team as the new South Midlands Regional Development Officer!

Participants from Mental Health Services, ID Services, unemployment, and youth services have engaged in Social Farming placements on family farms in this region!

To contact the South Midland's Regional Development Officer

☎ 086 136 6503

✉ Southmidlands@socialfarmingireland.ie



West Region



SOCIAL FARMING AROUND THE COUNTRY

SOCIAL FARMS IN THE WEST

There are currently 20 Social Farms in the West available for Social Farming Placements in 2024

MINISTER ANNE RABBITTE VISIT TO GORDON FAMILY FARM

We were thrilled to have Minister Anne Rabbitte TD visit the Gordon Family Social Farm in Mayo! During her visit, she met with participants from Western Care Association & Scannan/Beehive Day Service, as well as social farmer Alan Wood and a participant from his farm!!



SOCIAL FARMING IN THE WEST

It has been an busy year in the West!

Over 125 participants were supported by Social Farmers across Galway, Mayo and Roscommon so far in 2024!

Participants with disabilities, mental health challenges, from LCA, acquired brain injury services and elderly people all had great farm experiences.

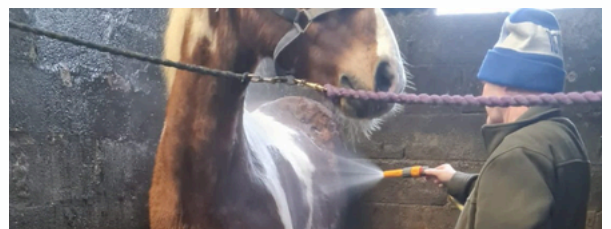
To contact the West Regional Development Officer

☎ 087 623 3862

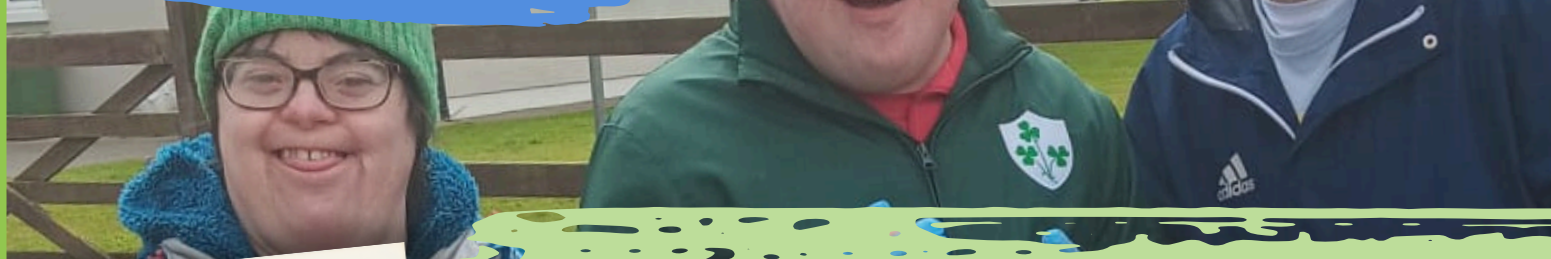
✉ west@socialfarmingireland.ie

OVER 50 NEW PARTICIPANTS ATTENDED A SOCIAL FARM SO FAR THIS YEAR

OVER 20 FARMS ARE IN DEVELOPMENT IN THE WEST!



Southwest Region



SOCIAL FARMING AROUND THE COUNTRY



SOCIAL FARMING IN THE SOUTHWEST

Another busy start to the year in the Southwest region, with over 90 participants supported on Social Farms!

Participants with disabilities, mental health challenges, youth services, homeless and addiction services, acquired brain injury and some who are socially excluded spent time and carried out activities on ordinary family farms as a form of social support!

SOCIAL FARMS IN THE SOUTHWEST

There are currently 33 Social Farms in the Southwest ready to deliver Social Farming, with 4 new farms becoming fully trained and ready to welcome participants!

TRAINING FOR MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Helen provided training for Occupational Therapists, Occupational Therapy Assistants, Nurses, Social Workers and others involved in supporting placements from the mental health teams, in a number of areas nationally including the Southwest to help them achieve the best outcomes for their participants on social farming placements.

To contact the Southwest Regional Development Officer

☎ 087 366 3842
✉ southwest@socialfarmingireland.ie

There are two upcoming Autism & Disability Fairs in the Southwest, on the 29th Sept in Cork and the 16th of November in Limerick! We look forward to meeting more interested participants there!

SOCIAL FARMING OPEN DAY - LIMERICK

It was great to meet everyone on Celia & Geoffrey's farm in Rathkeale, Co. Limerick! It was a day filled with learning, laughter, and a wonderful sense of community!



FARMER NETWORK BUILDING

Southwest Farmer Meet-Up



It was wonderful to gather most of our Social Farmers in the Southwest together in January. After the busy year and the festive Christmas period, it was a great opportunity to reconnect and catch up. The event provided valuable time to network with each other, to learn, share experiences, and discuss new ideas for activities. It also allowed us to reflect on the successes and challenges of the past year while planning collaboratively for the future!

West Farmer Meet-Up

Farmers from Galway, Mayo, and Roscommon gathered in Claremorris for an enriching evening of learning, experience-sharing, and connecting with the National Network. This provided support and built farmer confidence in their practice.

While not all our farmers could attend, the strong representation from all three counties highlighted our commitment to building our network and best practices as we continue to grow and develop. There is real strength in connecting in person again!



Social Farmer meet-ups are an excellent opportunity for new social farmers to meet, building a support network, and taking time out to discuss their social farming experiences. It is also an chance to share idea of activities and to learn from one another.

The Social Farmer meet-ups also provide an opportunity to engage with the Social Farming National Office and ensure connectivity on the overall aims of the project.

Whether you're a seasoned social farmer or just starting, your insights and experiences are invaluable to all.

SOCIAL FARMER TRAINING

Social Farming Ireland has successfully ran 18 training sessions so far in 2024. These sessions have been designed to equip farmers with the necessary skills and knowledge to engage in social farming.

In February, we ran two online training sessions, which is the starting point for all new farmers and is followed up with further in-person training. All our training (currently provided free) is aimed at enhancing farmers understanding of working with individuals with support needs, ensuring that they are well-prepared to provide a supportive and inclusive environment on their farms.



Online Training

Over 75 farmers have attended our training sessions this year, some of whom have already had placements on their farms.

Additionally, we have a group of farmers who are diligently working towards becoming practicing social farms this year. They are actively applying the skills acquired during the training sessions, preparing themselves to welcome participants to their farms in the near future!



Framework for Practice & Disability Awareness Training

As always we have the necessary sessions including HSE safeguarding and framework for practice, but the on farm 'Peer Learning' days prove the most popular - where farmers have a session on an existing farm. Our awareness workshops also prove to be very popular and enjoyable, pushing peoples boundaries!

Training new farmers is always rewarding and we are looking forward to their journey with us!



Peer Learning

NATIONAL & INTERNATIONAL



Social Farming Ireland's National Coordinator, Helen Doherty attended the Annual LCANA conference in January, where she had the opportunity to meet very enthused LCA coordinators with great interest in what our social farmers can potentially do for students, farming has so much to offer young people!!



Social Farming Ireland's National Coordinator, Helen Doherty and Social Farmer Richard Moeran from Cavan had the opportunity to chat with Gavin Moroney from Agri Insider about Social Farming!

The conversation delved into various aspects of Social Farming, and Richard shared his experiences as a Social Farmer, providing valuable perspectives!

[Click to Listen](#)



Social Farming Ireland's National Project Manager attended the Longford Purchasing Group members meeting at the Longford Arms Hotel!

It was a valuable opportunity to engage and connect with members of the Midlands farming community and to discuss Social Farming!



Helen and Shannon, meet with the SICAP Community Engagement Workers about continuing collaborations in Co Kildare!



IN THE NEWS

2024



At the beginning of 2024, the **Irish Examiner** highlighted the announcement made by Minister Anne Rabbitte “**€200,000 in support announced for social farming in 2024**”

Read the full article [here](#)



“**Social Farming is 'more rewarding than I could ever put words to'**”

Two of our Social Farmers, Bernie Whyte & Gerard Deegan featured in an article in the **Irish Farmers Journal** to discuss their Social Farming experience

Click [here](#) for the full article



“**Social Farming' is a 'win-win' for rural communities**”
Social Farming Ireland featured in article in **AgriLand** discussing how Social Farming can be used to diversify your farm and about the benefits of Social Farming for the farmer, as well as the community

Click [here](#) for the full article



Social Farmer Ciaran Duggan was interviewed by the Irish Independent where he discussed Social Farming & his recent research project on ash dieback!

Click [here](#) for the full article

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