



From vision to action: Empowering rural areas for the future

Building Inclusive Communities through Social Farming In Ireland

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An Roinn Talmhaíochta,
Bia agus Mara
Department of Agriculture,
Food and the Marine



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This project is co-funded by the Government of Ireland, through the Department of Social Protection, and the European Union.

Social farming



What is Social Farming?

- Social Farming is a planned, person centered, outcome focused support placement on an ordinary farm.
- The farm remains a typical working farm where people can benefit from participation in the farm's activities, in a community based non-clinical, environment.
- Uses the natural assets of the farm & environment, the farmer, the activities and the community to support a person to achieve some of their own chosen goals.

People, Place, Participation



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CEDRA



People with

- Disabilities
- Mental ill health
- From the justice system
- Homelessness
- Older people /dementia
- Young people /children
- Asylum seekers
- Migrants /Refugees
- Long term unemployed

Who we are and our vision



- Leitrim Development Company <https://www.ldco.ie/> an NGO focused on inclusion and community / rural development is contracted by DAFM to run the National Network for Social Farming – **Social Farming Ireland**. With a small team National Manager, National Coordinator, 5 Regional Officers, 2 Administrators, Research & Policy Officer. Collaborating with many stakeholders
- **Social Farming Ireland** supports a *person-centered* approach that respects the individuality of the participant and their individual rights, choice and control.
- Guided and led by a set of **values and principles**, Integration, equity, social justice ++ UN convention on rights of people with disabilities, the SDGs, national policies
- All are ordinary farmers and we work with them to meet quality practice standards through training, provision of facilities, vetting, reference checking, insurance etc. The farmers are paid for their time / costs supporting small groups of individuals (3-4) on the farm.
- **Social Farming provides new opportunities for support for people in living ordinary lives, interacting with their community and environment and developing their potential.**

Natural / nature based Support



3 key elements

Each and all deliver inclusion



Vision



Adapted from Bragg and Atkins (2016)



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Vision to Action



Four main areas of benefit to participants **INCLUSION**



Vision

Mental Health/ Wellbeing

Social Connections

Benefits

Physical Health and well-being

Education/ Skills/ learning



A Snapshot of our Social Farms



Action



Is there a **TYPICAL** Social FARM?

- A large diversity of farms, farmers and activity offerings:
- ✓ 160+ active farms available in every part of Ireland
- ✓ range in size from 1 acre to over 600 acres and across all sectors.
- ✓ Activities range from horticulture only to mixed farms, equine, woodland, dairy, poultry etc.
- ✓ Qualities and characteristics of the farmer, the farm family and the community around the farm complete the offering
- ✓ Accessibility nationally for this support approx. 30KM
- ✓ Altruistic, environmentally conscious, connected in the community, experienced



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People and Place



Social Inclusion and Community Activation programme (SICAP)



A National programme of €48.9m (in 2025) from the **Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht**, SICAP aims to reduce poverty and promote social inclusion and equality. Co-funded by Irish Government and **European Commission ESF+ Employment, Inclusion, Skills and Training Programme 2021 to 2027** contributes to Building more Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities by:

1. Empower groups of individuals, local community groups, networks and social enterprises to address collective community needs.
2. Empower Disadvantaged people to improve the quality of their Lives

ACTION

Local Implementers are 45 Local Development companies, members of the **Local Development Companies Network (LDCN)** who are now commissioning social farming placements on farm to help / support some of their clients progress and improve their capacity, inclusion and confidence



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government supporting communities



The Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) is co-funded by the Irish Government, through the Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht, and the European Union through the European Social Fund Plus under the Employment, Inclusion, Skills, and Training (EIST) Programme 2021-2027



Skills and learning

WorkAbility Programme



The **WorkAbility: Inclusive Pathways to Employment Programme** is co-financed by the **EU Employment, Inclusion, Skills, and Training Programme (EIST) 2021-2027** and the **Department of Social Protection (DSP)**.

This 5 year programme of approx. €7.2M annually, funds 57 local, regional and national projects who provide progressive pathways into employment (including self-employment) through education, training, skills development, and in-work supports for people with disabilities based on their needs, their abilities and their potential.

ACTION

These groups are also commissioning social farming placements, for their clients, as a step on the pathway to employment for people with disabilities. It help people with establishing “work” routines, building confidence, skills sampling, taking direction, giving feedback on tasks and activities, team work, and in developing interests. This is all very important for people who may never have worked and who are quite distant from the labour market. The social farm is very much a live, active workplace and allows these people a space to develop, with support from the farmer, and to move towards employment.



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A great Sense of achievement and valued social roles



Rural / Farm inclusion



- Multifunctionality on the farms. SF is a new innovative activity to support and sustain the income of the farm, the household and economic activity in rural areas.
- Farmers are innovating and supplying community health and social care supports in a different and new way in Rural Ireland.
- Putting the “culture” back in Agriculture and connecting farms with people in their community and highlighting farmer’s relevance and importance in the community and in the rural economy.
- Relational support. Social farming builds connections between people, between non-farmers and farmers, community and farmers, between people and the environment, between and across Government departments/ sectors that don’t usually interact.
- The main “asset” is within the Social farmers an released in providing the support. No real capital investment needed. Social farming is an investment in people, in inclusion and in social capital in Rural areas.

New opportunities and experiences



Future perspectives to Action



- Demand is growing for this “nature based support” from both people and commissioners.
- Farmers responding - multifunctionality and additional income
- Support is increasing from Irish Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine and across the European Union / member states
- Social farming leads to farmers focusing on and engaging more people (non farmers) on what farming and food production means, the relevance of farms /farmers in managing habitats, water quality, biodiversity, carbon /climate and in sustaining rural communities etc.
- European Commission supporting innovation in Farming
https://eu-cap-network.ec.europa.eu/publications/report-eu-cap-network-focus-group-social-farming-and-innovations_en

**Which of these is the farmer?
Out in nature / environment we are all the same.**



**“Diversity is a mix and Inclusion is making
the mix work” Andreas Tapia**

Thank you for your
attention

**RURAL
PACT**



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West
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Resources

