

Social Farming Across Borders Pilot Farm Profile:

Section 1 – Your Details

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Section 2 – Your Farm

About my Farm:

The farm is 66 acres – ranging in quality from good land to cut over bogland. In 1998 I bought in 22 acres that lay in to our farm. The quality varied from not great to an area that ‘nobody will ever make land or use of that’. This ‘write-off’ area extended to 7 acres. Now in 2013 those “**7acres**” are definitely not farmland but a very special area; probably unique in so many ways.



Livestock

The farm has a breeding herd of 8 pure bred Charolais cows plus a number breeding Shorthorn cows.

The elusive hope was to breed that very special bull that would hit the headlines and pay loads of bills! That dream still exists.

There is a small flock of 30 Polled Dorset ewes that mate out of season producing 3 crops of lambs every two years. So in effect there is a lot of lambing going on.

There are also a number of rare breed sheep plus a donkey – for their novelty appeal.

We have a good range of livestock housing and handling facilities- most of which I personally constructed.

There is a David Brown tractor and a materials handler – a Kramer. It is some considerable time since they were first new.



The Parkland area.

The "7 acres" area was a swamp – long time abandoned when the last ounce of retrievable peat for firing had been poked out. Nature had taken over. The water had spread out and spread over the growth of years upon years of vegetation. It probably looked alright from the air but for man and beast it was a 'No Go Area'!

Now there are designated areas –teeming with interest. The water was good for ponds. The ponds attracted water-fowl. An infrastructure of native trees and shrubs were planted- now they stand tall; more elegant year upon year. Laneways- an unbelievable number go around go through, or criss-cross the area. And now with the trees it is an adventure of discovery to see where they path leads.

And then I had this vision to recreate a social infrastructure that mirrors a heritage, still remembered but largely lost over the past 50 years. I put my heart and my soul into this- my time, my labour, my skills, and my money.

Now there are things to see and experience.

There is a one roomed fully functional cottage – with open fire, hearth and all that - reminiscent of a time when there was time.

There is a blacksmith's forge kitted out and an increasing array of salvaged farm machines of yester-year now long since quiet, but which evoke memories of days before the carbon footprint!



There are secluded hides constructed to wait and watch and to see the wild birds that come from wherever.

There are more paths, more areas constructed of hard basalt stone- to just sit and wait and see and to take nature in.

There is a potting shed with high and low level beds constructed to facilitate all access levels.

There is an area designated to build a 'wee' school and plans to construct a building symbolic of a place of worship.

Yes, and all this has been approved by the DOE NI Planning Service.

And all of this was constructed with the intention that one day it could be used by people with mental health problems, learning disabilities or addiction.

Now is the time to let this vision, this mission, on my farm, be shared with others.



Farm Activities offered to the Participants:

Livestock care-

The cattle and sheep need looking after.

They need food everyday- grass, silage or meal. They need to be looked and checked daily.

There is grass to be fertilized, cattle to be moved from field to field.

Fields to be shut off for silage making.

There are fences to mend, cattle to be checked, weights recorded and routine treatment for parasites.

Sheep

There are intense periods of activity- shearing and lambing.

The experience of new born lambs always creates a sense of satisfaction and joy!

There is the experience of tending sick livestock and inevitable deaths.

Also taking lambs to the market.

Parkland

There are areas that need cutting back to control weeds, trees to prune, beds to sow out with vegetables .

There are blackberries, raspberries to harvest in the autumn

Paths maintenance both summer and winter.

There are still buildings to construct – and endless jobs to be done.

There is a greenhouse to bring plants on and to provide suitable working conditions in between the showers or in wet, cold weather.



Time

There is time – time to sit back and take it in.

Time for tea.

Time to chat.

Time to think what could be done, what should be done

And there is always tomorrow!

Preferred days of the week: - Any day we are flexible.

Projects on-going at the moment:

- Green house is looking sad and needs to spring to life again.
- Loads of seeds, transplants to bring on
- Potting on to be done
- School garden needs to get into shape- weeds removed, cultivation and beds formed
- Old farm gates to be primed and colourfully painted.
- Tidying up to be done – never ends
- School building to be started
- Livestock and normal spring time farm duties to be done

Section 3 – Your Locality & Community

Nearest Services: Shop and filling station within ½ mile
Doctors surgery – 5 miles.
3 main denominational Churches within 4 miles
Community pharmacy – 2 mile

Nearest village- Armoy

Nearest Town - Ballymoney, Ballycastle

Nearest public transport or rural transport initiative:

Public transport bus past end of lane
North Antrim Community Transport operates from Leyland Enterprise Centre, Ballycastle

My locality and community interests :

There is a local community centre in Armoy opened in 2001 and a multi-purpose centre in Loughguile opened in 2000. Both these centres have programs – some with an emphasis on health and well being
Armoy Community Association is cross community and has a history of doing environmental projects and improvements where people irrespective of creed or class can buy into.
There is a local hill farm ‘Shean’s Horse Farm’ that has just recently opened up a history and heritage trail. Their work includes groups of young people who have behavioural issues and problems of low self-esteem.

Section 4 – You, the Farmer

Me and my Farm:

Apparently when I was at secondary school in Ballycastle it is said that I had a great imagination and was very good at woodwork and metal work. I didn’t realize until recently that is how they viewed me – but it didn’t really matter then as the emphasis was to leave school and get working.

I worked as a joiner and I took pride in doing things to a high standard.

I liked a challenge and repetitive tasks, always seemingly against the clock was not that self fulfilling.

I worked the farm part-time and I did sales work for a local meal company for 8 years.

I still have a mind that works overtime but is not paid overtime..!

There is a personal and family interest in helping people who are mentally and physically challenged.

I have devoted a lot of myself and my family’s time to what I have done.

I was convinced that this was a health related option all of twenty years ago- long, long before I knew of ‘social farming’.

It has been a journey- sometimes very challenging but it has been and is still part of who I am!





The Blacksmith's Forge



What's up here?



Well, Well, Well!



The Potting Shed



Hughie's Garden



Milking the System!