

## Social Farming Newsletter – Issue No. 3

Welcome to our third edition of the SoFAB Newsletter from the Project team. We hope you find it useful and informative. We have had a very busy number of months through the Spring of 2013 and in this issue there are updates on :

- Training for SoFAB Pilot Farmers.
- Our first Network trips.
- Our Third Network Meeting at Omagh Library
- A Social Farm Experience
- Upcoming Events

### TRAINING DAYS FOR SOFAB PILOTS

Mid Spring brought with it the first round of training for the pilot farmers and their representatives to the Project Advisory Committee. Interest from the farm families was strong with many having two



family members in attendance. To accommodate the interest the initial two day training course was delivered at CAFRE College Enniskillen on February 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> and repeated in Loughry College on February 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup>. It was a good occasion to meet and exchange ideas as well as learn from each other. The training over the two days focused on 'Values for Practice', the history of service provision, the future direction of services and where



'Social farming' fits. Specific focus was given to the history of social service provision in Europe, the centrality of relationships and dignity were captured in the 'Values for Practice' element while



other areas such as the 'Protection of Vulnerable Adults' and managing risk

were also covered. The initial two days were delivered by the Project Team with the assistance of an external trainer Claire Murphy from LEAP Services.

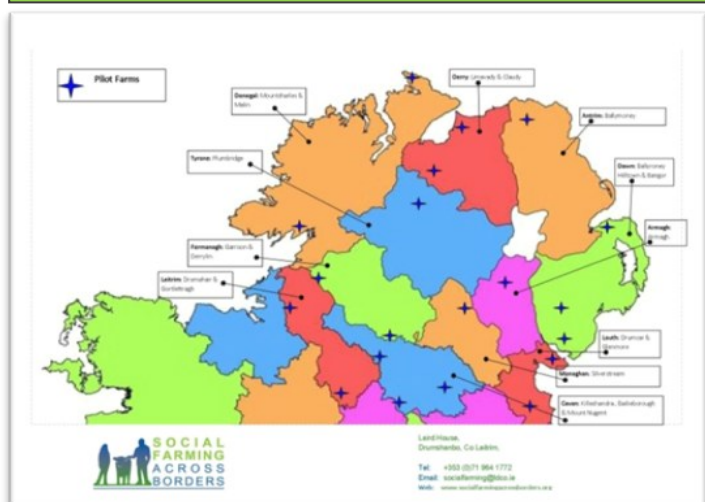


Further training attended by pilot farmers was with the Farm Safety Partnership of Northern Ireland. This training was delivered on two 'Host Farms' by farmers and covered the principles of farm safety management drawing on video and testimonial resources from the Health and Safety authorities on both sides of the border. The expectation from this was that farmers would complete their own farm risk assessments. To assist farmers in completing their 'Safety Statement', 'Farm Risk Assessment' and 'Safety Induction Module' the SoFAB project is providing individual guidance via a farm safety consultant. This will constitute a piece of formal project training for each pilot farmer. Further training will focus on specific areas associated with individual supports, community connecting and activity planning. The thrust of on-going training days will be shaped by feedback on experience from all parties to the pilot practice.



## Location of 20 SoFAB pilot farms

We have had some changes since our last newsletter  
Malin, Armagh and south Cavan are new locations.



## A Story from an Irish Social Farm

In June 2012 four men were supported to experience Social Farming for their first time. Three of these people had chosen to sample this activity, while the fourth had agreed to go reluctantly. Something happened that is hard to describe, without observing or experiencing it. Previously these men would not have been willing to participate in programmes and if they did would not have continued despite activities being of their choosing. However eight months later they all attend the farm every week without fail, hail, rain or snow. One of the men inquired lately if he could come for another 20 years! Another man who is usually quiet sings "I'm so happy" on his way to the farm. Families are fully supportive of this experience for their sons and advocate that it continues because of the positive difference they see in their family members.

The men have taken ownership of their day on the farm and engage in activities of their choosing, whether its feeding animals, gathering eggs, looking at cloud formations in the sky, visiting neighbours, chatting the postman, peeling spuds, chopping firewood or frying onions. The farm offers them opportunities to make their unique contributions, form relationships, access ordinary places like family kitchens, putting a log on the fire or just going to the local shop. What's more important is their day is designed by them for them, in an unstructured, unmanaged way. This experience and environment is allowing their self esteem and self confidence to grow. They are starting to vocalise their wishes and concerns. One of them recently participated in an assertiveness course in the community and is now actively planning what he wants to do in his life. To summarise their experience in their words

*"That's what I call living."*

*'Listen to that lovely peace and quiet.'*

*'It's the best thing that's ever happened to me.'*

*'I've found something I'm good at and why should I stop?'*

## SoFAB Network Development Meeting in Omagh Library



Invitations were extended to all on the project database to attend the above meeting. The motivation for the third network meeting was generated through the training days and the emphasis on the 'social' aspects of 'social farming'. Farmers saw this as an opportunity to link with other 'non piloting' people in the farming and rural communities including 'service' contacts within the community. The meeting was attended by 30 people with 7 attending as representatives of the health and social care services. An update was given by the Project Team on progress since the last network meeting in Armagh in November 2012; project tasks for the coming months were highlighted. Attention was drawn to the project website and the 'Farm Profiles' section – these will be a really useful place to direct people to if interested in being participants on the pilot farms. The remainder of the evening was given to 'networking' and the establishment of local



'grass roots' hubs of interest around the project. The representatives from the network who will have roles on the 'Project Advisory Committee' (Annie Mullan, Alan Rainey and Pdraig McBreen) were introduced. The audience broke into four groups each including people from farming and service interests. They explored how to best use the project to exploit the opportunity of growing a network of interest with the potential to continue the evolution of 'social farming' beyond the end of the project. Key themes emerging were; evolving new partnerships and looking wider than just health and social care when connecting within local communities; the role DARDNI, DAFM (ROI), Teagasc and Local Development Organisations can bring from the rural development perspective; the leadership roles people who use services their families and advocacy services will play in shaping the journey.

## SoFAB Network Visit Sunflower Farm



Our second trip to a practice farm took place on May 2nd to 'Sunflower Farm and Garden' in Roscommon town. A group of around 35 people gathered in Carrick on Shannon and made the journey by bus to the small holding of Gerry and Caitlin Browne and family. We were greeted on arrival by Gerry and Caitlin who have been working in partnership with the Brothers of Charity Services Roscommon for the last six years or so.

Sunflower garden is located on a 3.7 acre site in 'suburban' Roscommon. It was part of the Browne's original family farm where liquid milk was produced for local sale in the time of Gerry's father. The site became the location of Gerry's veterinary practice. Gerry's first engagement with the concept of Social Farming was initially on a voluntary basis in supporting one man who wanted to reconnect to a farming lifestyle. In the intervening years the project

has grown to accommodate a group of 5 men who attend up to 5 days a week. The 3.7 acre site has evolved as a garden with features being added and continuing to evolve each year. Gerry also operates a 30 acre out farm which is managed from the home base. Animals are included on the home farm at times throughout the year, particularly two cows which are kept and milked from calving throughout the Summer / Autumn. The site also has a number of other small businesses including a crèche, an art school and a water treatment plant. While this presented with some challenges over the years the benefits of a wider social mix and has been part of the positive experience for the men who work with Gerry. The kitchen, connecting with neighbours and welcoming visitors is a significant aspect of being part of community in Gerry's view. The kitchen is the hub for the lads, for locals and visitors to meet and share time together. It has also served as a very natural place to learn the self-sufficiency skills of cooking and using the produce from the farm and garden. A number of the men are very competent today in their culinary skills since joining Sunflower garden. At the heart of the kitchen is a Stanley cooker which is fuelled by wood gathered and cut as part of the work at the garden. Winter work also includes gartering leaves from the locality to compost for later use.

In the afternoon our group were invited to the offices of the Brothers of Charity and had the opportunity to spend time with Margaret Glacken (Director of Services) and Felix McElhone (Financial Controller). The significance of having a range of new community partners was explained and the role a project such as Sunflower garden plays in meeting the choice of people who want outdoor options. The risk management, regulatory and monitoring requirements and the processes which arise from this were explained. The service was clear on the benefits that such local partnerships bring to it and those it serves. They noted the importance of the 'community connecting' disposition of social farmers sitting as an example the role of Gerry Browne as lead in the annual 'Lamb Festival' – May B.H. weekend! It was also clear that the service recognises the necessity to have a sustainable financial arrangement in place with the social farmer to ensure that the quality and safety requirements of all could be realistically achieved. The intent of the service is to expand the social farming options available to its clients through partnering with a number of other farm families in the county.

Many thanks to all who contributed and supported the two visits in recent weeks.



## *Events Attended by the SoFAB Team*

Some of the events we attended over the last quarter included: Meeting with Northern Ireland Union of Supported Employment & Disability Action NI, Workshop on Creating Sustainable Lives-Examining support options and personalisation from a family perspective, Federation of City Farms & Community Gardens Networking event. We hosted a visit by the EU group from Portugal, Italy and the Netherlands through UCD. We attended the launch of Building Change Trust Social Innovation report 'Growing Social Innovation In Northern Ireland' and the SDLP Agri-Food Seminar 'Ireland's Food and Farming Future'.

Keep in touch with us on - [www.socialfarmingacrossborders.org](http://www.socialfarmingacrossborders.org)

We are also on Facebook & Twitter 'like' and 'follow' us.

## Field Trip by SoFAB Network to Summerhill

Our first trip to practicing social farms began at the 'Wetlands Centre' Ballybay on a cool Tuesday morning in April 2013. The group who had travelled from across the 12 counties of our project region and from as far south as Kerry and Tipperary were welcomed and refreshed by Paul Flynn and staff at the Wetlands Centre.

A couple of miles down the road we were welcomed by Tom Horan to 'Robb Farm' Camphill Community Ballybay. Tom who has spent 43



years with Camphill Communities welcomed us and introduced us to the co-workers at Robb Farm. For the time of year, particularly given the very cold Spring there was a most impressive array of protected spring greens and salad crops evident along with the first signs of new growth in a fertile and well minded community kitchen garden. I feel Patrick Kavanagh would have been moved by the experience of community and would have been hard pushed to discover any 'stony grey soil'. The livestock area which provides both milk from a small herd of Shorthorn cows and meat from their followers was well laid out and

accessible for the co-workers who run the livestock enterprise. An impressive element under construction was a new purpose built ambient Barn Drier to enhance the quality and supply of winter forage.

We had an opportunity to visit the weaving shop, candle craft area and community bakery. Before departing Thomas and the community answered our questions in the comfort of their meeting hall supplemented by home baked refreshments.

Our second port of call was to the small holding farm and home of Vincent Coyle near Summerhill Co. Meath. For the last four years or so Vincent has welcomed a number of men from Saint John of God Services in Co. Kildare to share days with him and his family on their farm. Vincent aims to be as close to being self-sufficient as possible in

potatoes, vegetables, eggs and milk. Surplus of produce is

shared or exchanges or left in trust at an 'honesty box' at the entrance to the farm. The men who visit Vincent vote with their feet in doing so. What began as a trial option has evolved into an experience of choice; one which would not easily be discontinued at this point. The experience has allowed each person to evolve his own interest and roles be it cutting the wood for the stove, caring for poultry or working with the livestock stock or in the gardens. The change of seasons are celebrated as the year evolves, Vincent describes the kitchen table as being as important as the farm. Occasions for people, friends and family to prepare and share food, stories and song are at the heart of social farming for Vincent. This philosophy was well evidenced on the day with a most generous array of food prepared by Vincent, his men and his family was set out before us



at the end of our visit. The most memorable aspect of this visit has to be the 'ordinary way' in which the men engage on the farm with Vincent and the sense one captures that this space has become as much part of their lives as it is part of Vincent's.

## *Forthcoming Events:*

### **SoFAB CONFERENCE**

#### **'Living an Ordinary Life'**

**Venue:** Landmark Hotel Carrick on Shannon, Co Leitrim

**Date:** Wednesday 12th June 2013

**Booking Essential (Numbers limited)**

**@ <http://socialfarmingconference.eventbrite.ie/#>**

### **BALMORAL SHOW**

**We will be attending the Forthcoming Balmoral Show from the 15th to 17th May 2013. Come and say Hello to us in the Shopping Village — Stand SV42**