

Social Farming Newsletter – Issue No. 4

Welcome to our fourth 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 :

- Events Held including our Conference & Events attended
- Early Pilot Practice
- Training & Development
- Networking

Cross-Border Conference highlights the value of Social Farming

At the recent Social Farming Across Borders (SoFAB for short) conference held in Carrick-on-Shannon the large attendance of almost 200 heard about the activities to promote Social Farming in the Cross-Border region of Northern Ireland and the Border counties. The participants learned of the experiences of established Social Farmers from Ireland, the UK and Flanders. The wide range of people in attendance from all over the country included farmers and their representatives, local rural development organisations, people that use services and people from many fields in the areas of social care including the Health Trusts and the Health Services Executive, that made for exciting and varied discussions throughout the day.



Dr Tony Bates delivered the key-note address, drawing delegates attention to the subtle yet enormous potential of creating a place and space for people to experience and enjoy the rhythms of life and growth on a farm and of the opportunity to move through the seasons together. Tony completed his talk by recalling the words of Peig Sayers that people survived troubles because 'they lived in the shelter of their neighbours and family and that kind of community support is vital to all our wellbeing'.



The Flemish farmer, Riet De Schrijver shared their experiences of running a busy farm of 70 dairy cows, 20,000 broilers plus arable crops whilst also offering a Social Farming opportunity to 6 people that use services who come to the farm for a half day, six days a week. Phillip Lane shared his experience from the UK and focussed on developing business arrangements with health and social care authorities to enable the farm to create an income from their Social farming activities.

A group of men who engage in farming activities with Vincent Coyle on his farm in Meath were among the most popular speakers on the day with their account of the difference that Social Farming has made for them, delivered by Vincent, Hans Widmann and Marie Nolan from St John of God's, Kildare. Video recordings and copies of all presentations will be available on www.socialfarmingacrossborders.org.



Cross-Border Conference highlights the value of Social Farming ...contd.

The SoFAB team of Aideen McGloin, Paul Henry and Aoibéann Walsh outlined the work to date of the project in supporting the networking of people from services, farmers, agricultural and social care



interests on Social Farming. Steps taken to recruit, train and support 20 pilot farms across the 12 counties involved in the SoFAB Project was explained as well as the monitoring that will take place on these 20 farms so that the lessons learned through delivery of services to 60 people can be



shared.

Brian Smyth of Leitrim Development Co. outlined the



opportunities for Social Farming within Rural Development policy and the challenges of mainstreaming.

Areas of particular interest

discussed at the conference were concerns over insurance - an issue that significant progress has been made through the work of the SoFAB project with support from FBD and NFU Mutual who now offer insurance cover for this important activity.

Issues raised at the conference included how to support the development of Social Farming after the end of the SoFAB project and the recognition of the on-going work needed to

develop Social Farming as a rural development and social inclusion opportunity across the island of Ireland.



SoFAB Network Development

The SoFAB project ends on the last day of September 2014. A structure will be needed to sustain and continue to evolve the practice and growing interest that is emerging around the concept. Over 90 potential participants have applied for the available 60 places on the project. All of these people have family or key service staff who have taken time to find out about the project and submit an application. The combined interests of participants - their family / friends; the cohort of 'non -piloting' farmers registered with the project and the range of services engaged is a sizeable body of stakeholders. Network efforts at local and regional level will be essential to draw and develop this interest particularly over the coming year with the availability and the opportunity of practicing pilot farms to draw on. The project wishes to support local efforts in taking local initiatives in growing relationships with interested parties across the project region. Emerging leads are arising from within the farming / social farming and rural development arenas and from within health and social care provision. The coming months will be important in supporting a mechanism to emerge which enables this interest to evolve with purpose for the future development of social farming.



Keep in touch with us on

www.socialfarmingacrossborders.org

**We are also on Facebook
& Twitter**

'like' and 'follow' us.

Early Pilot Practice

By the end of June nine pilot farmers had commenced practice on their farms supporting participants who had chosen to engage with the opportunity offered through the project. The pilot practice activity is a key aspect generating the 'learning through experience' elements of the project. The participants who commenced come from support services in intellectual / learning disability, mental health and autism. Participants opted to join the project through completing a 'Potential Participant' form. This has been an important process as



All hands on deck at Eugene's Farm

it tells us why the person wants to try the opportunities on offer by the project. We asked people initially to use the SoFAB website to inform themselves about the project and in particular to have a look at the 'profiles' that each of the farmers had produced for their farm. We asked the potential participants to share this with 'other significant people' in their lives such as other family members, key support staff and friends. The intention of the project is that people should choose to engage with

this opportunity as a personal preference, or as something that they and their significant supports felt would be a good opportunity to try. We asked support services to work in partnership with us in trying to progress this choice becoming a reality for people. Building relationships with everyone involved putting practical support plans in place and continues to be a central part of activity at this point. Services and families have been really positive and engaged and have brought key information to the individual support plans around each person.

While it is early days to make comments about the outcomes we have had some interesting observations. Probably one of the most encouraging being that there are a lot of happy faces, and people are doing things



Making Friends—the new foal at Dessie's

The Killeshandra men have welcomed the birth of a new foal at Dessie's farm and the group up in the Cooley Mountains are becoming quite adept in the husbandry around a flock of hill sheep.



Plans for the day at Marie's farm Hilltown



During the hot days of Summer Barry's farm looked a little more like Arizona than Cavan! Shelter from the sun was welcomed!

that have surprised others - and possibly even themselves. A few specifics would include a very nice piece of neat fencing erected in Plumbridge, a few nifty pieces of turf footing in Claudy, a number of engaged gardeners in Aghalane and Bangor and some budding dry stock apprentices in Drumcar Co. Louth - who have already done piece of video recording of their work (see this in the website—Events: News).



Making Hay while the sun shines in the Cooley's

Training and Development.

The main thrust of training over recent months has been around the planning for safe quality experiences for all associated with the pilot farming practice. Two areas have been central to the focus in achieving this namely an individual support framework for each participant and the farm safety management practices on each farm. The 'individual support framework' is the support information that is required to make the experience both safe and positive for people engaging with the project. This is the information which the person, those close to them and their support service hold and share to achieve this outcome. It involves all the relevant people meeting together to share what is important and to note any particular supports required. It is intended to work in conjunction with information already used to support the needs and choices of participants such as that held in a 'person centred plan'. The project produced a short prompts guide to help people cover issues that may be relevant to the SoFAB opportunity. The 'farm safety management' piece was progressed with dedicated input on safety management by Farm Relief Services. Each pilot farmer will on completion develop a set of Risk Assessments, a safety induction plan, an activity exclusion list for current level of social farming, and a safety checklist in support of their farm health and safety practices.

The final 3 days of pilot farmer training are currently being prepared for delivery in Autumn 2013. The focus of these final days will be, feedback and experiential learning, business planning for social farming, 'Recovery' as a model of support in mental health, quality, safety and risk management in social farming.

Events Attended by the SoFAB Team

Balmoral Show May 15th to May 17th 2013.

The project had a stand at the show for each of the three days. This was the first year for Balmoral Show at its 'new home' on the 'Maze' site near Hillsborough in Co. Down. The project continues to promote the concept of 'social farming' and specifically the aims of the SoFAB project. Expressions of interest were gathered from people – particularly farmers and organisations engaged in social care projects and service providers such as nursing homes in rural communities. A number of rural families supporting a person with a disability also spent time exploring the concept with us and wanted to stay connected with the learning we make through the project. While the emphasis on attending in 2012 was focused on promotion with a view to recruiting pilot farmers, the 2013 event gave us an opportunity to discuss in more detail the concept and relationships that are emerging within the region through the opportunity of the SoFAB project.



Forthcoming Events:

NETWORK MEETINGS

Scheduled for 27th September @8pm in Mount Errigal Hotel, Letterkenny

And

4th October @8pm in The Fairways Hotel, Dundalk.

Discussion topics will include - Piloting experience; The next Rural Development Programme; Sustaining the Network;

BOOKING ESSENTIAL - email helen@ldco.ie

PILOT FARMER TRAINING

Training is scheduled for our Pilots

27th & 28th September Letterkenny

4th & 5th October Dundalk.

NATIONAL PLOUGHING IN PORTLAOISE

**The Project will be present in the UCD tent
come say hello if you are attending!**

@ Block 1, Row X, Number 408