

Social Farming Newsletter – Issue No. 6

Welcome to our sixth edition of the SoFAB Newsletter from the Project team. We hope you find it useful and informative.

This issue there are updates on :

- ◆ Network Study trip to the UK
- ◆ Pilot Farm Open Days
- ◆ Training Update
- ◆ Events Attended
- ◆ Media Events
- ◆ Network Development
- ◆ SoFAB Filming
- ◆ Forthcoming Events

Study Trip to U.K. West Midlands

A total of 34 people set off on April 1st for a three day project 'Study Trip' to the UK, which offered an excellent opportunity for sharing and networking between key project stakeholders. Seventeen of the 20 pilot farms were represented with four representatives from the H&SC Trusts in NI, three from the HSE and the rest from special education, rural development, probation provision and project management backgrounds. The group visited seven farms each with varying themes, support focus and farm enterprise focus.



The Secret Garden Project

Our first day started out with a visit to the Secret Garden Project in Warwickshire where we met Annette. This project works with children with special needs and encompasses small animals and a kitchen garden. Our next stop was Wildgoose Rural training which



Wildgoose Training with our host Noelle

provides opportunities for adults and youths with intellectual disabilities and mental health problems. We had some lively discussions in an outdoor meeting 'room' and lunch in their purpose built training kitchen. Finally we visited the Dugdale family at Tickwood Farm in Shropshire where we walked through their forest school which they use as a learning resource for children with special needs to experience the great outdoors.



Edward in the Forest School at Tickwood Farm

Day 2 took us to two very different venues; Sherratts Wood Care Farm and Willowdene Farm. Sherratts Wood is a professional health and social care business based around a 20 acre farm. Here we met some of the UK commissioners and this led to a very informative discussion session for the group,

At Willowdene our enthusiastic host Dr Matt Home met with us and took us round his extensive facilities comprising of 250 acres of forestry, pasture and arable land. They offer opportunities to offenders through the probation service. It is a not for profit organisation trading as a social enterprise and provides a wide range of training opportunities for these young people in agriculture, forestry, plumbing, engineering, forestry and woodwork, combined with support therapy and basic functional skills.



Sherratts Wood Care Farm



Opportunities at Willowdene

Study Trip to U.K. West Midlands.....continued

Day 3, the final round we visited Bev and Barry at Hampton Hayes Farm in the beautiful Shropshire hills. This is a 200 acre working family hill farm consisting of beef and sheep and is almost self-sufficient growing their own winter barley, meadow hay and silage. Bev's main focus is providing a place for youths with special needs similar to her son Tom. Our last visit was to Valehead farm which is attached to the Glasshouse College, Stourbridge and provides opportunities for young people from ages 16 to 25. Again we had some lively discussion around the mechanisms of providing these opportunities.



Hampton Hayes



Valehead Farm

The focus of the trip was more work orientated than social with the after dinner sessions on both evenings devoted to further reflection on aspects of 'social' farming. Our first evening was used for feedback and reflection on Day one. The second evening included invited guest speakers Dr. Val Williams from The Norah Fry Policy Research Centre at the University of Bristol, Annie Saunders, Director of 'Natural Ability' Northumberland, and Gaynor Tate who

presented on Care Farm Standards U.K. The trip was particularly useful as a means for people, who share a common interest but whose paths don't often cross in everyday business, to explore the potential of building partnerships with ordinary rural community interests.

We would like to particularly acknowledge the welcome and the hospitality extended to the group on each farm that we visited. A particular note of thanks must go to Gaynor Tate of Care Farming U.K. who co-ordinated and chaperoned us for

Media Events

Radio Report:

Suzanne Campbell from RTE Radio 1 Countrywide turned up on the farm of Michael Heslin to record the experiences and sounds of early spring on a social farm. Suzanne had chosen the occasion of the open day at Michael's farm which aptly defined the meaning of the word 'social' in 'social farming'. It was an occasion to capture the community centred nature of social farming with families, friends, neighbours and people from services in neighbouring counties calling in on the day. Despite being a radio show, Suzanne captured the season in her piece as the cold sunny March afternoon, balancing gingerly between winter and spring, recorded the sounds of cattle pulling and chewing from freshly opened bales of hay while in the background birds sang in the hedgerows busying themselves with nest building in the shafts of afternoon sunlight. The most curious and bemused creature on the day was Michael's Aubrac bull who quietly observed the occasion from the safety of his personal paddock.

Local Press run stories on Open Days

Many of our Pilot's received great press coverage as a result of their open days with the Anglo Celt, Cavan covering Harrington's open day, the Outlook, Down covering Kelly's and the Tyrone Constitution covering Campbell's open day. All Pilots have received hard copies of their profiles and also the standard information leaflets from SoFAB to assist their future endeavours.

Pilot Social Farmer Success JFC Innovation Awards for Rural Business

A number of the SoFAB pilot farmers applied for inclusion in the 2014 farm innovation awards. Larry Masterson of Blissberry Farm made it through to the final stages under the services sector, and will be included in the upcoming award events in May. Larry's achievements have presented a fantastic opportunity to bring focus to the concept of 'social farming' in a national forum. Congratulations to Larry, family, his participants and local service supports. For his efforts Larry has received coverage in the Farmers journal 9th May and will receive mentoring support for his project. JFC is the commercial sponsor of the competition which is run by Teagasc, DARD NI, and the Farmers Journal.

Open Days on the Farms

January 31st was the occasion of the second open day at Paul and Marie Kelly's farm in Hilltown Co. Down. At six o'clock in the morning it was a typical January mid – winter day in Ireland but by 9 am you would have been forgiven for thinking that you had been transported to the shooting location for the Hollywood film 'Twister'. For a number of hours Hilltown was well watered and could have aptly been renamed as Riverstown! Despite the fury of the storm a good number of people turned up and were warmly welcomed by the Kelly family and by Michael, Martin &

Thomas who showed the old farmhouse which they had been actively involved in refurbishing during the project. It gave a welcome refuge on the day and the new wood burner stove ensured we were dry and warm before long. People from services on both sides of the border attended as did representatives from DARD, and members of the local community. The storm blew over and the skies brightened around lunchtime; Michael, Martin & Thomas took visitors on a tour of the farm, garden and orchard which where they had been actively involved on their days out to the Kelly's farm.



On March 20th Michael Heslin and family held an open day on their farm at Gortletteragh, Co. Leitrim. This day attracted an attendance from a wide area including counties outside of the project such as Roscommon, Longford and Galway. Two focal points of interest at Michael's farm were the Aubrac suckler herd which Michael runs and a 5,000 year old ring fort along with a nearby Fulacht Fiadh (ancient field kitchen) and Dolmen.

The local community were an important part of the day with friends and neighbours providing the hospitality including a traditional bacon and cabbage dinner. Thomas, Seamus and Michael showed visitors around the farm identifying the many tasks they had been part of during the piloting days. It was also the occasion when Suzanne Campbell from RTE Countrywide called and interviewed the men and other visitors to the farm about the concept of 'social farming'. The radio programme was aired on Saturday March 29th after the 8am news and is available on podcast.

March 28th saw Dessie and Betty Harrington and family hold their open day on their farm near Drumkeeran, Killeshandra, Co Cavan. Shane, Robert and Francis were on the scene early in the day to assist with final preparations. Dessie's farm drew a large contingent from the local community many of whom had a role on the day or had been part of the new social contacts that had emerged for the three men while with Dessie. A warm welcome and 'Céad Míle Fáilte' was extended to all the visitors. Apart from local community the representation on the day came from other local service providers and from a service in south Kerry. A significant number of the other pilot farmers also turned up with their participants to take



part in the highlight of the day being the opening of Cró na mbó. This once cow byre is now the hub of the social farm and the place where people gather to plan the day, prepare and share lunch and even enjoy a song if someone feels the inclination.

SoFAB Network Development

Deepening the Network

Piloting on a number of farms finished around Christmas 2013, with the majority of farms completing their pilot practice before the end of March. As practice finished, the demand increased from participants, farmers and service providers alike for a continuation of the opportunities offered on farms. Many services proposed new potential participants, while others found that current participants wanted to spend more of their week farming. Interest also arose from new service providers and from those in counties adjacent to the project region. A 'working group' comprising six pilot farmers representing this emerging interest sought support from the project. In consultation with the project funders SEUPB, a dedicated piece of work was approved and undertaken to establish the level of interest on farms and how they would be best represented as an acknowledged resource in rural communities, supporting people to live fulfilled lives contributing to society. The work was undertaken via 20 individual teleconferences with farm families, two focus meetings and a final meeting. The outcome of the process rests as a resource and impetus for the pilot farmers to continue to advance their vision for social farming.

Fourth Advisory Committee Meeting

The Advisory committee was expanded at its last meeting on 26th February to include 4 pilots, joining representatives from the Health Trusts, HSE, Rural Development, international partners and academia. It was an occasion which helped shape the focus for the concept of 'social farming' and the roles it can play in delivering for people who use service supports, for community, and for policy in both jurisdictions. Another key focus was the development of a set of standards for social farming, and the planning and delivery of the 2014 training programme to 60 new interested people from farming and from health and social care perspectives.

2014 Training

From June to August 2014 the project will offer two 12 evening courses to people who want to learn more about social farming. The course will be designed with input from University College Dublin and Queen's University Belfast and will draw on the experience of the learning through the SoFAB project, international experience, and leading models in practice in supporting people to lead inclusive fulfilled lives in the community. The course will be offered in 10 classroom sessions and two 'on farm' sessions.

It will be available in two locations in the region – CAFRE Enniskillen Campus, Co. Fermanagh and CAFRE Greenmount Campus, Co Antrim.

The course is open to all applicants and while there is no charge for the course there is an expectation of commitment to completion by people applying to the course.

Further information and application form is available on our website or contact Helen@ldco.ie

SoFAB Filming

The project continued to record activity on farms across the region though the winter and spring of 2014. This has been a most valuable exercise and is a wonderful audio visual record of activities and stories from people who were part of the pilot phase of SoFAB. There is already significant demand for use of the film to demonstrate the concept of 'social farming' to audiences in various settings such as meetings with health and social care authorities and conferences. The 'Participants' film captures the stories of a number of people and is in particular a strong statement as to what happens when you offer an opportunity within an ordinary community setting. A second film captures the farm family experience, and a third the perspective of service staff who supported piloting. A final film will capture the views of key people from the health and social care authorities, rural development networks and academia on the role social farming can play in delivering social policies such as Bamford Review Objectives (NI) and 'New Directions' (RoI). Our thanks are extended to everyone who dedicated time and energy to these days, with a special word of thanks to those who shared their personal stories.

Events Attended by the SoFAB Team

Willowbridge Transition Planning evening Willowbridge School Enniskillen—13/01/2014

Individualised budgets—Public event on at Dara Residential / Possibilities Plus / Genio - 15/01/2014

Healthy Body / Healthy Mind Conference held by Macra na Feirme, Cavan - 30/01/2014

Development Trust NI—seminar on collaboration between statutory and third sector business, Derry - 13/2/2014

St Christopher's Longford—New Adult Day opportunities 18/02/2014

NICVA Evaluation - Public Service Delivery and the Voluntary and Community Sector Conference, 17/04/2014

AOTI Conference - Presentation by Dr. Jim Kinsella UCD Wexford 09/05/2014

Forthcoming Events:

Balmoral Show— We will be at this years show in the Agri Pavilion - AP49, 14th to 16th May

'Post 19' Conference - Presentation by Pilot Farmer Jennifer Bullock, Lisburn May 14th.

Open Days—Mount Nugent Co. Cavan June 2014 date tba & Armoy Co. Antrim August 13th

Down's Syndrome Ireland AGM & Conference—Presentation by Paul Henry, Drumshanbo 14th June

Tullamore Show—August 10th 2014.

Conference—Our final Project Conference will be in Belfast Castle on the **10th September 2014**