

Social Farming Newsletter – Issue No. 7

Welcome to our seventh and final edition of the SoFAB Newsletter from the Project team. In this edition we cover—

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SoFAB Conference 2014:

Belfast Castle was the venue for the SoFAB Conference which took place on Wednesday 10th September. For almost 170 people who attended the conference outlined the experiences of a three year social farming initiative known as the Social Farming Across Borders Project (SoFAB). In their opening remarks Dr. Jim Kinsella, Project Manager UCD and Shane Loughlin, Project Participant described social farming as an exciting and viable option for improving the quality of life for people who use health and social services. The conference marked the end of a pilot project that involved 20 farm families in Northern Ireland and the border counties of the Republic of Ireland.



Conference speakers



Gaynor Tate from Care Farming UK & SoFAB Trainees

The SoFAB Project delivered almost 1,600 'person days' of social farming experience to the 66 people who used the service between April 2013 and June 2014. David Small, Deputy Director DARD stated in his opening address that "the project was a truly innovative and ground-breaking project and that the SoFAB initiative has demonstrated that the farming community is not only willing but also very able to help those most vulnerable adults within society". He also stated that he hoped that today's conference represented another key milestone in the evolution of social farming from a concept to a working model on the island of Ireland. Research gathered during the project was presented by Aoibéann Walsh from QUB who demonstrated that the benefits of the initiative had helped a broad range of vulnerable people suffering from mental health problems and learning disabilities though engaging in the day to day tasks associated with farming. It also helped both farmers & participants connect with communities, providing a vital link between well being and rural life in Ireland.



Pilots and speakers from the day



DARD CAWT & SEUPB delegates

Other Key contributors on the day included—Anne Derwin, Chief Economist Department of Agriculture Food & the Marine RoI; Ann Marie Ward Manager Training and Occupational Support Services HSE West; Lorraine Mc Court, Director Joint Technical secretariat, SEUPB; Neil Magowan, Disability Policy Lead DHSSPS N.I.; Iolo Eilian, Commissioner MH and LD Services Health and Social Care Board N.I. Professor Francesco Di Iacovo University of Pisa Italy provided a European perspective which assured us all Social Farming is very much on the European agenda.



ICA, IFA, Care Farming Scotland, QUB & DARD

For many the highlights of the day were the stories of the SoFAB experience recounted in the opening address by Shane and later by Pilot Farmers Marie and Paul Kelly from Hilltown Co. Down and also the participant's experience from John Murphy who attended the pilot farm of Jackie & Richard Moeran in Mount Nugent Co. Cavan.



Local Development Company delegates

All conference presentations are available on our website—hover on the EVENTS tab then select Conference 2. Videos of the actual presentations on the day will be available also on our website by the end of October.



SoFAB Project Publications

The work of the SoFAB team and experience of the Pilot Farms will be used to publish key reports and a book.

At our recent conference we released the 'Costs & Benefits of Social Farming' Report which sets out the many benefits of Social Farming including benefits for farm families, service users, and the wider society. The cost of service provision is also considered in the context of the experience of Piloting Social Farming with the SoFAB Project. It is a twenty page report and is available to download from our website. You can access it on the landing page of the website at the moment, but it is also available under the Resources tab—then Publications. It is essential reading for anyone interested in becoming a Social Farmer or anyone wishing to avail of Social Farming and especially those in services who need to find solutions for person centred choices.



Two further publications will be available at the end of October, these include a 'Handbook for the Delivery of Social Farming Services' which will provide clear guidelines and protocols for delivery of Social Farming services to farmers, care professionals and others who will deliver social farming services in the future.

A report on Institutional Arrangements was produced which will detail recommendations for improved institutional arrangements to promote and enable cross-sectoral cooperation in Social Farming in the Region.

These will be available to download from our website and also hard copies will be available from the Project Partners. Full details on how to access these will be emailed to all those on our mailing database. You can be added to our database by completing our 'Contact Form' on our website.

Media Events



Eugene his family and participants had the occasion to welcome **Michelle O'Neill**, Minister for Agriculture at DARD NI, to visit their farm on July 9th. This was an opportunity at the request of DARD for their Minister

to visit a number of different projects where DARD is a partner. Social Farming is a project in which Minister O'Neill has a particular interest, having jointly officiated at the project launch in September 2012.

The sun shone on the afternoon of her visit and the Minister was ably accompanied by William, Padraig and Anthony on her tour of the farm and the parklands.



Some weeks earlier John along with Jackie and Richard Moeran, Theresa Peacock HSE Advisor to SoFAB and the SoFAB team were invited by Minister of State, Department of Health and Department of Justice, Equality & Defence with responsibility for Disability, Older People, Equality & Mental Health, **Kathleen Lynch** to meet her in Leinster House, Dublin.

This was an important occasion for the SoFAB project. It presented the opportunity to describe where 'Social Farming' fits and how it can play a really important role in delivering the ambitions of health and social care policy, and the choices of people who use service supports in rural Ireland.



Farm Open Days

The final two open days were held on the farms of Jackie and Richard Moeran Mount Nugent Co. Cavan on June 20th and on Eugene Mullan's farm at Armoy Co. Antrim on August 13th.



Both occasions similar to the previous open days were great opportunities to demonstrate the journeys and share the experiences of all associated with both farms. These farms

were approaching the end of piloting and the confidence of participants in sharing their experiences and guiding visitors was notable; both Darren and John play important roles in this regard on Jackie's farm on the day. With it being the heart of Summer both farms were at their best with arable crops and cattle looking well in the sunshine on Jackie's farm, while for Eugene (despite inclement weather not typical of the summer we had) it was an occasion to show the significant progress made towards completing the buildings at the parkland with the Chapel, School, and Shop all well advanced over the summer months.



Promoting SoFAB

The two big agricultural occasions where the project had a presence in the Summer of 2014 were the Balmoral Show May 14th - 16th and the Tullamore Show August 10th. A real difference on these two occasions by comparison to previous years was the presence and sharing by pilot farmers at the stands. These were significant occasions to share the stories



Pilots & Staff at Balmoral

which were emerging from the pilot phase of the project and to respond to the interest of the farming and general public from within the project area and from further afield.

That week was also the occasion where the pilot farmers Jennifer and Simon Bullock presented a workshop on social farming at the '19 Plus' campaign conference in Lisburn, an event attended by the NI. Minister for Health Mr. Edwin Poots MLA.

In the southern reaches of the country Dr. Jim Kinsella SoFAB project manager presented on the early findings from project research at the conference of the 'Association of Occupational Therapists of Ireland' in Wexford.

JFC Innovation Award

During Balmoral show there was a significant announcement for the SoFAB Project, one of our pilot farmers, Larry Masterson, won the prestigious JFC / Irish Farmers Journal Innovation Award in the Tourism and Services Category. Our congratulations and best wishes are extended to Larry and family of Blissberry Farm Mountcharles Co. Donegal, to their participants Daniel, Linda, John; to the community, friends, neighbours and to the service partners in the HSE who are reflected in this award. Three of our farmers entered with Malachy Dolan and Mabel Campbell also promoting/presenting the SoFAB concept.



SoFAB Network Development—The Future

As farmers finished piloting focus moved to looking to the future and mechanisms to support the continuance of social farming. This enthusiasm and commitment was based on the experiences farmers had and their wish to continue with the concept – this was mirrored by the choices of participants and service agencies to engage both for existing and potential new participants. In response to this the pilot farmers have held a number of meetings and are looking at ways of embedding and growing the presence of 'social farming' in rural Ireland. They are committed to building on the relationships developed between farm families and people who avail of service supports in producing a response to needs and choices within local communities. This approach fits well with the ambition of statutory agencies to support local collaborative arrangements of meeting needs and choices in ways which build social strength and social roles for people and communities. Social Farming Across Boundaries may be the future of Social Farming.



SoFAB Training 2014

A significant aspect of project work in 2014 was the development and delivery of a training programme to 'new interests' in the concept of social farming. This training curriculum was built on and deepened by the experience of the pilot phase of the project. It was promoted to interested parties established through other project activity and attracted over 70 applicants.



Group discussions at Enniskillen Training



On farm Training at Campbell's Farm, Plumbridge.

The course was designed as a 10 evening course with 8 classroom sessions and 2 farm based evenings. Each session was delivered in two locations – Tuesday evenings in Fermanagh House Enniskillen, and Thursday evenings in CAFRE College Greenmount Co. Antrim. The training was facilitated by the SoFAB team and partners and delivered by a range of external trainers and organisations.

A number of trainers had contributed to the 2013 training with pilot farmers while others were new contacts the project had made in the community, statutory and services sector during the life of the project. A key part of the experience and learning for course participants was the farm based evenings – four in total. Each farm evening was hosted on a pilot farm with two further pilot farmers in attendance to broaden the access for trainees.



Trainees at Antrim with Brian Smyth LDC & Paul Henry SoFAB

THANK YOU....

On behalf of the project partners and staff we would like to extend our thanks to the project participants pilot farmers and the many friends neighbours and local community groups without whom this project would not have been possible. A special word of thanks is owed to the support and collaboration that was always provided from the statutory and voluntary service agencies with whom we worked. Our hope is that this is the beginning of a journey in community partnership working across sectors towards new ways of enhancing the quality of life and the experiences of a wide range of inhabitants in rural communities.

This project would not have been possible without the support and funding from INTERREG IVA as provided and managed through the SEUPB in conjunction with the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development N.I. and the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government RoI.



Brian Smyth Assistant CEO Leitrim Development Company, Aoibéann Walsh Research Asst SoFAB, Roy Nelson DARD NI / QUB, Paul Henry SoFAB Co-coordinator, Helen Doherty SoFAB Administrator, Jim Kinsella UCD.