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Social Farming is the practice of offering outcome based placements on family farms as a form of social support to individuals in progressing their own personal plans and to improve their lives. In Social Farming the farm remains a working farm at its core but invites people to participate in the day to day activities and interactions of the farm. Social Farming provides people who use services with the opportunity for community inclusion, to increase self-esteem and confidence and to improve health and well-being. The farm is not a specialised treatment farm; rather it remains a typical working farm where people in need of support can benefit from participation in farm activities in a non-clinical environment.

Leitrim Development Company have been awarded two contracts by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine to support and develop Social Farming in Ireland during 2017.

The first step is to develop and establish a countrywide Social Farming Network involving all interested stakeholders from farmers, advocates, service providers, Families and other agencies and organisations and to provide a Social Farming Support Office to facilitate this Network and its development across Ireland.

This network aims to build on the successes of the SOFAB project, using its experience of piloting to facilitate placements on farms across the country. We are working closely with colleagues in three of the local development companies to assist with the National reach, in the South East, Waterford Leader Partnership, in the South West, West Limerick Resources and in the West, South West Mayo Development Company. We will continue to build on the existing base in the border and midlands. These four regional hubs will allow for a step-by-step rollout of Social Farming across Ireland and there will be a level of support in each of the regions to allow development to occur. Four Regional Development workers have been recruited in these areas with details below.

The regional hubs will be a local source of support for new Social Farmers, supporting service users and services and also farmers and will implement the processes and procedures developed by the National Support Office.

The National Social Farming Support Office will deliver training in the regions to any interested parties, build and develop the Network Nationally through meetings and events, publications and online with website and social media presence. Each region will be supported to achieve farmer activation in Social Farming during 2017 and to ensure that sampling placements occur across the regions.

The second project is collaboration with University College Dublin (UCD), to establish and examine best practice social farming projects and provide evidence based learning through sampling placements, particularly focused on the outcomes for participants engaging with Social Farming.

This project will deliver learning, exemplars of best practice and policy recommendations to both national and local audiences and will contribute to answering some of the questions posed by health and social care service providers, advocates and policy makers in an Irish context.

LDC and UCD are uniquely placed to deliver on this project, having worked together in development and establishment of Social Farming over the past ten years. Collaborations to date included the EU Social Farming (SoFAR) initiative (2006-2008), the Social Farming Across Borders (SoFAB) project (2011-2014) <http://socialfarmingacrossborders.org/>, and their respective roles in establishing and managing the National Social Farming Support Office since 2015.

The complexity and diversity of the needs of potential social farming participants (service users); the institutional and structural variations across sectors; it's responsible development, demands that Social Farming and individual social farms are able to engage with the diversity of participants, the diversity and variability of their needs and aspirations and also of their services providers, their families and the statutory agencies and requirements which are associated with this. To that end a range of exemplars will be developed across Ireland.

NATIONAL SOCIAL FARMING SUPPORT OFFICE TEAM

Leitrim Development Company have assigned two staff members to operationalise the national level of the proposed social farming network. Both have extensive experience in the field, having been actively involved in all aspects of LDC's work with regard to social farming.

Brian Smyth will act as National Project Manager. Brian has been involved in all aspects of social



farming, on behalf of Leitrim Development Company, since 2006, having previously worked as LDC's Rural Resource Worker. Since 2009 Brian has managed the implementation of the RDP 2007-2013 LEADER programme all over the county. Brian has a BAgSc from UCD, and MSc in Organic Farming from the University of Glasgow. He has been involved in developing social farming in Ireland since 2006. Brian also has a family member with an intellectual disability and is a director of a Down Syndrome Ireland and is involved with local advocacy groups for people with disabilities in the HSE

Sligo Leitrim West Cavan area.

Helen Doherty, who will take on the role of Project Co-ordinator, she has worked for LDC in the



area of social farming since 2011. She has very extensive knowledge and experience of all aspects of social farming, having worked on all aspects of the delivery of the social farming project including financial management and reporting, engaging directly and constantly with all the partners and stakeholders, developing and managing the support process around all stakeholders in the Social Farming process and co-ordinating training for farmers. She also acted to support the project research officer in all research aspects of the project.

Helen has delivered a range of supports and guidance to emerging social farms and initiatives across the Island of Ireland during 2015-2016. She will bring that extensive experience and knowledge into the role. She facilitated and supported commissioning and contracting arrangements for the cohort of SoFAB pilot farmers - mainly with the HSE. She will bring that extensive experience and knowledge into the role.

Previously Helen spent over ten years working in the private sector for large multi-national companies in various Financial Management roles, and later also worked in Financial Management role in Not for Profit Sector. Helen also has experience in teaching in the area of Finance and holds an honours Degree in Business.

Both Brian and Helen have an established presence and reputation across the regions with regard to social farming, as a result of the support and advisory services that they have been offering to agencies, organisations and individuals in that regard.

Contact details; helen@ldco.ie 086 7905596

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Paul Henry, Social Farming Development Officer

Leitrim Development Company CLG

Living in Westmeath for many years but originally from North County Dublin where I farmed on rented land for 7 years after completing the BAgrSc in UCD. Since 1989 I have worked in a range of roles in day and residential support services for people with disabilities. Since 2008 I have worked on a number of development initiatives aimed at supporting people to live fulfilled lives as contributing members of community. These projects have been underpinned by key national policies with objectives of enhancing the lives of people availing of disability and mental health support services. In 2011 I completed a M.Sc. in Leadership in Healthcare Management (RCSI), and was part of the SoFAB team 2012-2014.

Paul's will be working across the border and midlands region working with Leitrim Development Company and he can be contacted at 086 1448796 or paul@ldco.ie



Gail Cummins, Social Farming Researcher

Leitrim Development Company CLG

Dr. Gail Cummins has a wealth of experience and expertise in Public Health and Health Promotion. To date, she has successfully a number of degrees, including two research degrees. Her Masters research focused specifically on the health, wellbeing and health related behaviours of Asylum Seekers living in Direct Provision while her Doctoral research explored ways to engage with young people in the creation and dissemination of health information and in the development of health promoting research methodologies. Phase one of her PhD was published by the Dept. of Health and Children, due to its contribution to the field of Health Promotion in Ireland.

Throughout her academic and professional career, she has developed, coordinated and lead various health campaigns to promote the health and wellbeing of specific population groups. She also has an extensive research portfolio, having worked as both researcher and supervisor on a range of research projects. In the past decade Gail has lectured extensively at 3rd level, working particularly in the Institute of Technology Sligo, Athlone Institute of Technology and Letterkenny Institute of Technology. During this time she has also completed international placements and has acted as H.P. Expert with the European Commission.

Gail can be contacted at 086 1448719 or gail@ldco.ie



Stefanie Jaeger, West Limerick Resources CLG, Regional Development Officer

Stefanie Jaeger comes from a rural background in Bavaria, southern Germany. Since achieving an honours degree in International Development and Food Policy from University College Cork, she has been working in both community development and refugee resettlement in County Limerick. After helping to establish a local social farming project in Limerick, she joined the Social Farming Ireland team as Network Development Officer. Stefanie is working with West Limerick Resources in Newcastle West and will be supporting social farming developments across the South West region. She can be contacted at 087 3363842 or SJaeger@wlr.ie. She will also work in collaboration with South Kerry Development Partnership on the Social Farming project which they are delivering.



John Evoy, Waterford Leader Partnership CLG, Regional Development Officer

John is from a farming background has a Degree in Psychotherapy and a Masters in Equality Studies. John has been involved social entrepreneurship and community education and development since 2005 including setting up the Irish Men's Sheds Association in 2011 for which he was awarded an Irish People of the Year Award in 2015 for his work with Men's Sheds.

Social inclusion and rural social cohesion has been a constant theme throughout John's work over the last decade. John lives on the family farm at Grallagh in Co. Wexford.

John is working with Waterford LEADER Partnership and is covering the South East region and can be contacted at 087 2311061 and john.evoy@wlp.ie



Margaret Leahy, South West Mayo Development Company CLG, Regional Development Officer

Margaret has worked and volunteered in the community & voluntary sector for over 20 years. Her work has included management of a community organisation, development of community based social enterprises, supporting government funded community organisations and delivering training in compliance/governance and financial sustainability. Born to a farming background, Margaret was involved in running the family's organic farm and served a term as the National Chairperson of the Irish Organic Farmers and Growers Association. Margaret has extensive experience serving on local, regional and national boards including the Food Safety Authority of Ireland, a number of Dept. of Agriculture sub committees and community organisations. Her Academic background include a Masters Rural Development and a BA in Training & Education.

Margaret is working with South West Mayo Development Company and is working across the western region and can be contacted at 087 6233862 and her email is mleahy@southmayo.com

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