



New Opportunities + Connecting People + Enhancing Lives

Social Farming and Youth Work

Relevance, Benefits and Pathways



Introduction

This publication from Social Farming Ireland is aimed at services and groups/advocates working with disadvantaged young people who may be experiencing behavioural and social difficulties and who are at risk of becoming or who are categorised as Not in Employment, Education and Training (NEET). It provides an introduction to social farming, an understanding of its potential relevance and value to such young people and the pathways which can be taken to explore this option. It is divided into four sections:

1. **What is Social Farming?**
2. **Relevance of Social Farming to Youth Work: International Evidence**
3. **Relevance of Social Farming to Youth Work: Case Study from Social Farming Ireland Research**
4. **Pathway to Social Farming for those Working with Young People**

1. What is Social Farming?

A strong and growing body of evidence points to the role of nature and ‘green care’ in delivering a variety of benefits and positive outcomes for individuals with a range of needs (Alcock et al. 2014; Elings, 2012; Gullone, 2000; Hansen-Ketchum, 2009; Leck et al., 2015). Interventions such as social farming, animal assisted therapy, social and therapeutic horticulture, eco-therapy and wilderness therapy are increasingly being explored by health and social care services working in areas such as disability, mental health and youth-work. **Social farming** is an outcome focused, support placement for people on a farm or horticultural unit using the natural assets of the people, the place, the activities and the community to support a person to achieve some of their own chosen goals. It is fundamentally based on spending time with farmers / growers and their families in the **natural environment** of the farm, but also encompasses two other key elements; **meaningful activities** and **social context** which combine to deepen its impact further, as Figure 1 overleaf demonstrates. In the Irish context, social farming is largely the practice of offering activity on working family farms as a form of social support. The farm is not a specialised or institutional / treatment farm – as is sometimes the case in other countries – but rather, remains a typical working farm where people take part in day-to-day farm activities in a non-clinical environment. A variety of types of farms engage in social farming and some could be described more accurately as horticultural units which are run by growers. However, for simplicity, the terms social farm and social farmer/farmer used throughout this document are taken to include horticultural units and growers.

Social farming, also known by a variety of names such as care farming, farming for health and green care farming has developed at varying rates at the European level in the last decades. It is at an advanced stage of development in the Netherlands, Norway and Italy and is moderately developed in countries such as France, Finland, Germany and the UK. Ireland falls somewhere between what we could describe as pioneering and moderately developed status; it is a relatively new concept and practice but the number and diversity of social farming projects is growing and networks are developing and consolidating. A National Social Farming Office (Social Farming Ireland) funded by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine and the CEDRA Innovation and Development

fund and based in Leitrim Integrated Development Company CLG (based in Drumshanbo, Co. Leitrim) supports the national development of a social farming network alongside regional partner organisations where regional development officers (RDOs) are based. These are South West Mayo Development Company CLG (Western Region), West Limerick Resources CLG (South-West Region), Waterford Leader Partnership CLG, (South-East Region) and Leitrim Integrated Development Co. CLG (Border/Midlands Region).

The increased interest in and the particular development of social farming in Ireland in recent years has been driven by a set of interlinked processes and developments including: the emergence of a social model of disability; the emphasis within mental health policy and practice on recovery in the community and on a more holistic approach to mental well-being; and the increased use of a **person-centred** and **progressive** approach within most social inclusion work, including youth work. Some of the benefits of social farming to participants which have been identified include:

- Development of personal, social and/or occupational skills from undertaking farm based tasks with others in a supportive environment
- Increased self-esteem and confidence and an increased sense of purpose and vitality
- Improved physical and mental health and well-being
- The development of social relationships and connections with the farmer and their family and others
- Improved wider community connections
- The establishment and development of valued social roles.

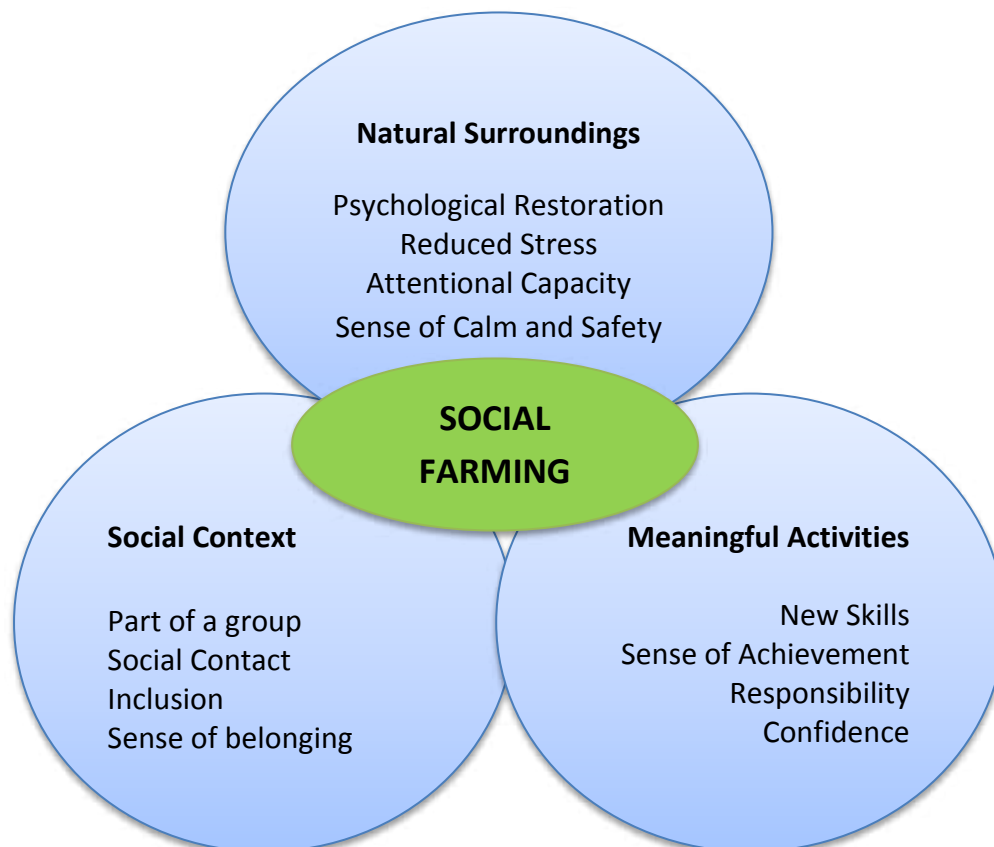


Figure 1: Three Key Elements of Social Farming (Adapted from Bragg and Atkins (2016:46))

2. Relevance and Benefits of Social Farming to Youth Work: International Evidence

One of the groups which have been found to benefit significantly from the opportunities provided by social farming are disadvantaged young people who may be experiencing behavioural and social difficulties and who are at risk of becoming or who are categorised as Not in Employment, Education and Training (NEET). In addition to the more general benefits of social farming already noted, a range of specific benefits of social farming for such young people have been noted in studies conducted in the UK and the Netherlands, where young people are amongst the key target groups for support provided through social farming:

- The learning and skills development associated with social farming provides an alternative to traditional/formal educational settings, of which some young people may have a negative previous experience. This learning can be provided alongside such formal settings or after the young person has withdrawn from them.
- It provides opportunities for a new and positive connection with nature, animals and plants for a generation who due to societal changes, are amongst the most disconnected from the natural environment.
- Working with other people and with plants and animals builds capacity to care for and consider others and increases empathy.
- Time on the farm can remove young people from negative networks or influences or the kind of triggering events which can provoke challenging behaviours.
- Those at risk of engaging in criminality, anti-social behaviour, etc. can see and experience an alternative to the path they might be on and may re-evaluate potentially destructive lifestyles.
- Farmers and farm families provide positive role models and an experience of a positive family culture, particularly for those with challenging or chaotic home lives.
- Social farming provides a positive and pro-social environment in which to learn how to work effectively with others, to take direction, to control negative impulses and behaviours and to contribute as an individual to the whole.
- It can lead to a reduction in conduct problems, hyper activity and the use of non-productive coping strategies.

Hambridge (2017); Hassink et al (2011); Hine et al. (2008)

In the Netherlands, farm-based residential farm work projects have been developed in the Noord-Brabant region for young people between 16 and 20 years of age who are experiencing serious problems in terms of family relationships, non-attendance at school, anti-social behaviour, etc. While the model is substantially more developed and intensive than is currently available in the Irish context – it comprises 4 separate 6-week residential stays on a farm over a period of 6 months, followed by intensive follow-up work for another 6 months – the results highlight the potential of the social farming model in working with young people. A study conducted by Hassink et al. (2011) indicates that there have been statistically significant positive shifts in behaviour and other relevant indicators amongst the 45 young people who participated in the study and crucially, that these have been maintained and are still present 6 months after the completion of the intervention. Table 1 overleaf highlights the shifts identified by the case managers working with young people from the beginning to the end of what they describe as a social farming trajectory.

Table 1: Youth behavioural indicators at beginning and end of Social Farming Trajectory (n=45)

Indicator	Start SF Trajectory	End SF Trajectory
% in school or work	15	81
% in contact with police	78	19
% positive use of spare time	2	42
% experiencing addiction	86	40
% demonstrating serious behavioural problems	68	11
Average well-being score	4.0	7.2
% reporting self-esteem as reasonable/good	6	63

Adapted from Hassink et al. (2011)

The experience of Jamie’s Farm in the UK (described in Box 1 overleaf) gives further evidence of the potential for social farming to improve the lives and the life-chances of disaffected and disadvantaged young people. Although the model of social farming is again somewhat different to that pursued in the Irish context – it involves participants spending a one week block on the farm rather than a day per week over a longer period – it does provide further insight into the kind of outcomes which can be achieved, in this case over a relatively short space of time.

Box 1: Social Farming at Jamie's Farm

Jamie's Farm, a charity based near Bath in England, is a traditional mixed working farm, which sells its produce locally. Established in 2010 with support from ethical bank, Triodos Bank, the farm specialises in engaging young people from challenging backgrounds who are at risk of social exclusion. Many of these young people are from urban areas with high levels of deprivation and often their five days spent on the farm are their first real experience of rural life. Jamie's Farm focuses on building their self-awareness and self-esteem, helping them to create positive relationships with both their peer group and adults.

Activities such as feeding and caring for livestock, fencing, cleaning the farmyard, or harvesting fruit, are combined with daily walks, food preparation, creative art, music and drama sessions as well as one-to-one sessions with the farm's psychologist. The farm provides a safe environment built upon mutual trust and respect, where a positive family culture is modelled. Teachers report significant behavioural changes in the young people, whose outlooks can shift dramatically following short stays at Jamie's Farm. Jamie's Farm uses a rigorous set of sources to capture the impact of the work they do with young people; young people themselves asked to complete the internationally validated Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale (WEMWBS) using bespoke electronic software. They also take ratings from teachers and data from school systems both 6 weeks and 6 months following a visit to ensure that they understand the complex long-term impact of Jamie's Farm. Evidence from the 2016/2017 academic cycle showed the following:

- 54% of young people showed improved behaviour 6 weeks after their time on Jamie's Farm.
- Almost a third of young people moved from being 'not on track' in terms of academic attainment to 'on track' or 'exceeding' in the 6 months following their time on the farm.
- Improvements in teacher-rated behaviour, engagement and self-esteem were also clear 6 weeks after the farm visit, with further increases seen 6 months later, affirming that the effects of a visit endure well beyond pupils leaving the farm gate. For example, 60% of young people showed improved self-esteem 6 weeks after their visit to Jamie's Farm, rising to 67% after 6 months.
- 68% of young people at risk of social school exclusion were no longer in that category six weeks after their visit

Adapted from information from: <https://jamiesfarm.org.uk/about-us/our-impact/>

And <https://www.positive.news/2011/lifestyle/wellbeing/4958/care-farming-natural-health-service/>

3. Social Farming and Young People: Case Study from Social Farming Ireland Research

Throughout 2017, Social Farming Ireland carried out extensive research on social farming activity on 15 farms around the country in a Project funded by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine. Of particular interest to us in this publication is the research carried out on one social farm in Co. Limerick where four young people participating in a Foróige Garda Youth Diversion Project undertook a 10 week social farming placement. The researcher from Social Farming Ireland interviewed the farmer and youth worker from Foróige at the beginning and the end of the 10 weeks and the participants on the last day of their placements. In addition, the researcher observed the activities and dynamics on the farm during a typical placement day and attended an Open Day on the farm where the participants were present and fully involved. The participants kept diaries of their progress over the 10 weeks and these were also analysed. All participants in the case study, including the social farming participants and/or their parents/guardians, gave their consent for this research to be undertaken and recorded. The Case Study below tells the story of this placement from a range of perspectives and under the headings of: background to and motivations for the placements; the placement experience; outcomes of the placement.

Background to and Motivation for Social Farming Placements.

In the spring of 2017, a Foróige youth worker (R) working with young men on a Garda Youth Diversion Project approached the Social Farming regional development officer (S) based in West Limerick Resources to explore with her the potential of social farming for the young people with whom he was working. In a process similar to the pathway described in Section 4 of this publication, the various actors – the youth worker, the participants, the regional development officer and the farmer – worked together over a period of months to make the placement happen. That summer, four young men from various locations in County Limerick spent one day per week for 10 weeks on a small mixed farm near Limerick City run by M. In his first interview, the youth worker shared his original motivations for pursuing social farming on behalf of his clients. He hoped to achieve positive outcomes across four key areas; employability skills, impulsivity control, empathy and communication skills:

“I hope the lads will benefit in some way from their experience, whether it be a source of interaction through M and his family... I suppose increased empathy through the interaction with the animals would be good as well.... Around the impulsivities, taking directions from the likes of M and not just ploughing into things and going off on tangents.”

Three of the four participants had no previous experience of farming at all while one had carried out some casual farm work in the local area from which he was from. They had a variety of motives for participating, which ranged from curiosity about what farming involved and what a farmer’s life was like, to an interest in working with or getting over a fear of animals. In all cases, the placement was suggested by the Foróige youth worker as something to try;

“R suggested it to me and asked whether I'd like to do farming basically and said it would help with a reference so I said I might as well do it.” (P3)

The Placement Experience

Overall, this placement was very **positive experience** for the participants with very high engagement throughout. Analysis of the participant diaries reveal a level of nervousness at the beginning as participants did not necessarily know what to expect, but all seem to have become comfortable with the farmer and with the various on-farm activities and projects very early on. Their experience appears to have improved and deepened in value as the weeks went on; the following were typical of the comments written in the section of the diary where participants were prompted to share how the placement was going;

“I wish we did not have to have a 2 week break.” (P3)

“It's getting better every week.” (P4)

“Great, couldn't be better” (P1)

The placement experience in this case study addressed the three key elements of social farming described in Section 1, i.e. **meaningful activities, social context, and natural surroundings**. The activity on the farm for the 10 week block centered on three key areas; the everyday farm activities which largely consisted of working with and caring for the animals; preparation of the farmyard for further social farming placements from Disability Services and towards the end of the 10 weeks, preparation of the farm for the Open Day which would be held. There was some largely good natured banter with the participants about it being 'slave labour' in their early diary entries and in their early discussions with the youth worker. As the placement proceeded, a sense of pride associated with having carried out **meaningful and purposeful activities** and of having made a real contribution developed. The level of commitment was apparent in the entry of one participant in his diary on the second last day;

“I was upset that I didn't have time to prepare everything for next week [the Open Day]” (P1)

Two of the participants spoke of how they had enjoyed doing physical work and of a kind which they had not experienced before;

“There are a lot of things [I will miss] really but if I was just to pick out one it would be labour.... the way you sweat and if I wasn't coming here I wouldn't be doing any kind of labour.” (P1)

“Only for M I could never have done farm work...for the first week it was a bit hard because I was not used to it but during the second or third week I started liking it more and I got so used to it that I don't want to leave it, I want to keep working.” (P3)

All four participants were particularly enthusiastic about the **interaction with animals**, with each of them drawn towards and responsible for a different group of animals;

"I like spending time with the horses because I feel relaxed." (P4)

"... playing with the dogs, cleaning out the dog shed to give them a better lifestyle." (P2)

"I used to be afraid of animals and then I got so used to them and now I go into them and I am so happy that I did, that when I walk into the farm I could feed the sheep, I could rub the horses." (P3)

The farmer also observed this connection and the benefits which it brought;

"The different pace of life with the animals is very relaxing they love the interaction with the animals, they've all got their job. One guy looked after hens, one guy looked after pigs, one guy looked after sheep."

One somewhat unusual aspect of this placement was that a proportion of the activities the participants did on the farm was to prepare the farm for placements that the farmer would be hosting for people coming from Intellectual Disability Services (Brothers of Charity) and who may have had mobility issues. The young men responded well to this element of the placement. As one participant noted;

"What I'm doing helps other people, it's good to be helping others. It makes me want to help people more often." (P2)

The youth worker is also anxious that this be built upon;

"They want to help other people you don't want to see that die awayIt would be very positive to give them that responsibility because not many people do or trust them to do things. They will show you that if you do trust them, that they will perform."

An Open Day was held on the farm at the end of the placement. It was attended by a wide range of people; staff from local services, other farmers, neighbours, local development company staff, family members of the participants, local Gardaí and the school principal of some of the young men. One of the participants took on the responsibility of acting as MC for the day and introduced each of the speakers. All the participants could be observed engaging confidently with the visitors, explaining the kind of work they had been doing and sharing information on the animals and how they cared for them each week. In their diaries from that week, P1 and P3 reflected on what they liked about the Open Day;

"Seeing a load of people...welcoming and telling people about the Project.... being recognised for my work." (P1)

"Explaining to people my role with the pigs and equipment during open day, giving out apples to feed the horse. I like that M calmed my nerves by helping with the pigs. I liked seeing familiar faces like my school principal." (P3)

In terms of **social context**, the warm, positive and trusting **relationship** which developed with the farmer was key to the success of this social farming placement. Participants established quite early on that M was someone they could get on with; the diaries from the very first day describe him variously as 'sound', as 'very welcoming' 'very helpful' and as 'a very nice man'. A key theme which emerged from conversations with all of the participants and from their diaries was that of trust; having someone whom they respected who in turn trusted and respected them was in most cases a novel and welcome experience;

"I like how he trusted us on his farm. It feels good to feel trusted." (P4)

"The farmer treats us with respect. He listens when we have an opinion." (P1)

M was clearly able to see the potential and the value in these young men and reflect this back to them, thus increasing their sense of self-worth and confidence;

"I think they are good lads and they need direction... they need a lot of direction.... We were at the Mart one day and we were buying two ducks and I was trying to teach them how to bargain but the one I was buying the ducks off of wouldn't give in.... I said look I only have €25 and one of the lads came up to me and said I'll give you a loan of €1.... you get loads of good stuff out of them like that...."

"I noticed once we got going and they trusted me and I praised them for the stuff that they did, you can see the difference in the lads. There was one particular day when P4 was here and I said to him 'you're a great young lad'.... and you could see his eyes lighting up like nobody ever spoke to him like that before I would say and that's why I found this an amazing experience. "

A key social farming value is seeing and treating people as individuals and as people rather than 'cases'; it is the very ordinariness of the farmer who operates outside of the world of professional youth workers, social workers, etc. which seemed to resonate with the participants. The approach of M as a non-professional appears to have been to just get on with the participants as people and to work alongside them;

"When they came I didn't really want to know what they had done or hadn't done. I just took them as for individuals and that's important. I didn't read their files until last night. I asked R when they came are there any health problems or something that I needed to know. He said no and I didn't read the files until last night. They are four good lads.... I just hope somebody gives them the chance and they're able to take it, it might be possible."

There was a strong social element to this relationship and to the placement with the participants appearing to really enjoy being in the company of the farmer and his family and each other. There were some initial fears amongst some of the participants that they would not get on with each other, in one case because of issues between one participant and the sibling of another. In the end, there were substantially unfounded and the inputs of all of the interviewees indicate that relationships were solid, with the good natured banter or 'slagging' which was observed amongst

participants and between the participants and the farmer reflecting a level of comfort and ease with each other. Subtle but important **social learning** seems to have taken place from being in a positive and pro-social environment and family culture, where participants could both observe and be part of a variety of social scenarios. The following diary entries reflect this;

"I liked learning about the cows at the mart and talking to different people and seeing other people getting on with one another."

"I enjoyed lunchtime because we all sat around the table and had a laugh and the craic."

"It felt good giving S [regional development officer] flowers for her wedding."

"I enjoyed going out for breakfast with M and the lads."

The youth worker agreed that this has been a very constructive aspect of the placement experience;

"I think that they have got to see the family life and maybe their family life is different.... they have got to see a different view and how things can be."

From the perspective of the youth service, the **support** which was required and provided to the participants by the youth worker was quite high in this placement block, not least because this was an innovative and previously un-tested project. Participants were collected by car and brought to the farm, their lunch was provided and they were driven home afterwards. The key youth worker and a colleague remained at the farm throughout the day but stayed in the family home doing their own work. They were there as back-up and support for the farmer and participants but did not get involved in the activities on a daily basis.

Outcomes of the Placement

As noted previously, the youth service was seeking to achieve positive outcomes for the participants across four key areas; employability skills, impulsivity control, empathy and communication skills. As the list of key outcomes described below demonstrates, the participants achieved significant progress in each of these areas but also on others which will be of ongoing benefit. Since the placement finished, one of the participants has moved away but has just completed his Junior Cert, while another has returned to the education system to do this Leaving Certificate after a period of withdrawal. A third participant is employed in retail and hopes to begin a sports course in September while the fourth is linked with the Rural Social Scheme and is working towards full employment.

The key outcomes which the placement delivered were:

1. A new interest in farming life and work and the development of new practical skills and knowledge. The participants learned from the farmer and his family about many of the key farming tasks, especially working with the animals and had an opportunity to contribute practically

themselves. From the farmer's perspective, the young men were very engaged and capable and learned quickly.

"After the first morning when they came they just went into their jobs and I didn't have to tell them what to do. I watched over them, I helped them but they knew what to do."

He felt that such was their capacity and interest, he would focus on the farm work more strongly if he were to do a social farming placement with this group or another group of young people in the future;

"Instead of getting the place ready I think it has to be working more with the animals and that type of stuff I think that is the secret in it and I think that's what made it successful. When you talk to the lads and say 'lads why are we doing this to the animals' and that kind of stuff they were interested.... or you talk about spreading manure in the field and why you spread manure. The next time I would stick to totally farming."

Three of the young people expressed strong interest in further future work within the broad farming/horticultural sector; one in taking a horticulture course and working in a garden centre and two on working with horses or other animals. The fourth participant expressed his intention to join the army.

2. Increased self-esteem and sense of self-worth. One of the most important aspects of this placement experience is that the inherent skills and potential of each participant has been both uncovered and valorised. They have learned in a very real way that there is valuable work to be done in their own communities – outside of the classroom – which they can both do and perform well at. One of the participants spoke of his new sense of belief in his own capacity and of his great interest in this kind of work;

"The first time I came here I enjoyed it and I learnt so many things from the farm that I thought I could never do. Now I know that there are jobs out there for boys like me. I feel like I want to do more and now I am interested in it. I am hoping that I will get a reference and someone else might take me on for a job on a farm. Now I am so addicted I do not want to leave it." (P3)

3. Improved levels of social confidence and an increased capacity to interact and communicate with others. As noted by the youth worker;

"We had a young person who would not go anywhere 6 months ago and now he is coming in every day..... even P4, he would not talk to somebody strange and S came in the other week and she sat down and there was great banter going on.... Normally they would have got up and left because they would have been uncomfortable in the room."

Two of the participants told the Social Farming Researcher that they would not have felt comfortable being interviewed prior to the social farming placement but chatted comfortably in interviews on the last day. As one put it;

“Before I went there I would not be able to sit here and do this interview. I would not be able to talk to you because I did not know you.... but when I went there I did not really know M, I did not really know anybody that was there except for the boys. He started talking to me and we copied him and started talking to everybody else.” (P4)

Six months after the placement finished, one of the participants was asked and agreed to take part in a panel discussion on social farming alongside the farmer and youth worker at a National Social Farming Conference held in Dublin in March 2018. This conference had a large attendance of 140 people and there was strong consensus amongst attendees that his contribution was one of the most articulate, significant and memorable of the day and drew significant media attention. This was an enormous step for this individual who when asked to take part, said that *“no one has ever picked me to do anything before.”*

4. Improved capacity to commit to something and to see it through. Attendance was excellent overall and one of the best which the youth worker has experienced. On the day he was interviewed, he noted that he had received a phone call from one of the participants the previous evening – which was a Sunday – *“to check the time for coming today.... that in itself for us is huge.”* He added that *“the fact we can get them out of bed during the holidays to come down and do it speaks volumes.”* Participants themselves noted improved impulsivity control and perseverance, which would have been one of the goals of the placement;

“I learned things like patience and to finish the job that I started.” (P4)

This was supported by the youth worker:

“In fairness they have seen tasks through... what they may normally do halfway is move on to the next thing. Certainly in that respect I think they have proved it and will take it out of it.”

5. Improved capacity to make positive choices. As has been noted, the placement itself provided multiple everyday opportunities to make positive choices in terms of showing up every week, following directions and completing tasks, caring for and taking responsibility for the animals and engaging positively with others socially. In all of these aspects, the participants appear to have exceeded their own and perhaps everyone else’s expectations. Participants were also given the choice to invite whoever they wished to the Open Day event at the end. They chose to invite their local Gardaí and their teachers; as noted by the youth worker;

“I think the reason they wanted to do that was to show these people that they are not bad people.”

The farmer also noticed positive shifts in the behavior and attitudes of some of the participants in their choices outside social farming;

I noticed [P 3] when he started was going out to a certain town every weekend drinking but in the middle of the thing I said to him ‘were you out last night’ and he said ‘no, I haven't been out, I'm trying not to go out, trying not to drink’. He is just 18.... you're trying to teach them that there's more to this than drinking.”

Overall, this case study provides clear evidence that this social farming placement has supported these young men to uncover and develop a range of occupational, social, life and relationships skills which will enhance their chances of meeting their own life goals. It did so in a very natural, ordinary and culturally relevant way which seemed to resonate strongly with the participants.

4. Pathway to Social Farming for those Working with Young People

The previous three sections have provided learning and insights on the potential for social farming as a support for young people who may be experiencing behavioural and social difficulties and who are at risk of becoming or who are categorised as Not in Employment, Education and Training (NEET). This final section sets out the pathway which a service or group or advocate working with young people can follow if they are interested in exploring social farming. Based on experience over a range of funding programmes¹, Social Farming Ireland has developed **best practice processes and procedures** which underpin activity at all levels. From the point of view of services and those commissioning social farming placements, these processes and procedures are designed to:

- Ensure safe, meaningful and enjoyable experiences for participants
- Provide opportunities for participants to shape their own placement experience
- Provide a high level of governance and quality assurance for commissioners of social farming placements
- Ensure that all stakeholders *work together* to maximise the benefits from the social farming experience for individual participants

This sub-section focuses on two key elements of what services working with young people and those contemplating commissioning social farming placements need to know about social farming:

- 1) The 'basics' of how social farming works and
- 2) The pathway which is typically followed to activate and manage social farming placements.

Social Farming: The Basics

- Working via Social Farming Ireland, individual social farmers are commissioned to provide social farming supports to participants. The commissioners of social farming supports come from a range of groups and bodies, including government services and agencies, development organisations, charities, voluntary groups, advocates groups, families, etc. In the case of youth, the commissioner may be Foróige, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS), the Department of Education and Skills, regional or local youth services or community groups, social inclusion organisations, charities or an advocate group or even in some cases family members, using individualised supports or budgets. For simplicity, the term '**commissioner**' is used throughout this document to describe the service, group, individual, etc. who is commissioning social farming supports from the social farmer on behalf of and with a youth participant.
- Social farming supports are provided by the farmer / grower via a **placement** which involves participants going to the farm for a defined period which is usually one to two days per week for between 10 and 20 weeks. The length of time spent on each of these days varies;

¹ The EU SoFAR initiative (2006-2008), the Social Farming Across Borders Programme (SoFAB 2011-2014) and the current national level programme to develop a Social Farming Network.

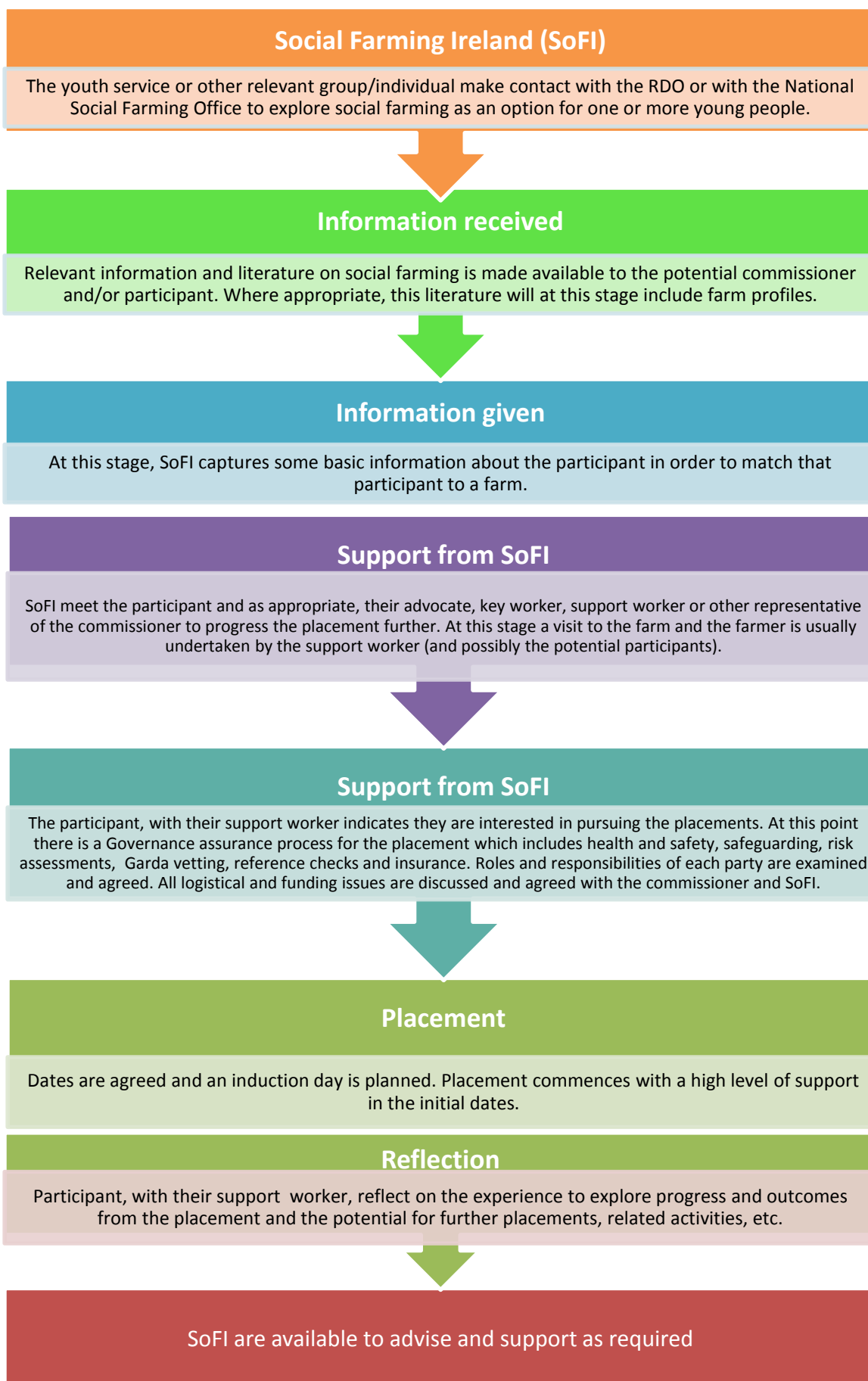
sometimes participants will start off doing a small number of hours and build up to 5 or 6 hours.

- Social farming takes place on a farm / horticultural setting in reasonable proximity to the service and/or participants.
- There will usually be between 1 and 4 participants present on each day and they engage in activities and projects alongside the farmer and sometimes other members of the farm family. The farmer is commissioned to provide support placements for the participants on the farm on a given day by a single service or source. Occasionally participants on a farm will come via two or more commissioning sources and will be mixed but this will be managed carefully to ensure a good dynamic, compatibility, etc.
- The level of support provided to participants during placement days by support staff who may be working with them is highly individual and depends on factors such as the capacity and confidence of participants, the perspective of the farmer and the stage in the placement. Typically, the level of support required is highest at the beginning and many commissioners find they are able to leave participants at the farm with the farmer after the initial weeks or otherwise take a step back. There is a requirement however that a support worker/ key worker, advocate, etc. is, at the very least, available by phone for the duration of the placement.
- The kind of activities which the participants will pursue on any given day vary according to the type and scale of farm and the time of year, the weather, the stage in the placement and most importantly, the capacity and interests of the participants. Most social farms are small to medium sized mixed operations which offer variety and choice in terms of what the participants get to do. Some of the more common activities include: feeding/foddering animals, planting and tending vegetables and fruit, collecting eggs, grooming horses, cleaning out sheds, weeding, painting and restoring gates, machinery, planters, etc., general maintenance, ploughing, and harvesting and cooking/preserving home-grown food.
- Farmers / growers who become social farmers have gone through a rigorous process of recruitment, vetting, induction and training and receive ongoing support from Social Farming Ireland and its regional development officers to enable them to provide supports safely, effectively and confidently with a range of participants. Farmers complete 'Training for Practice', a minimum of two days training which contains the following key elements; social farming practice, safeguarding and working with vulnerable people and farm health and safety.
- From the point of view of commissioners of social farming supports, the first and most significant contact with Social Farming Ireland will usually be via one of four Social Farming Ireland regional development officers or RDOs (full contact details in Appendix 1). They are the key local intermediaries or interlocutors between farmers, commissioners and participants. Commissioners may also have contact with the National Social Farming Office, based in Leitrim Integrated Development Company CLG in Drumshanbo, Co. Leitrim, which

has a contract from the Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine (DAFM) under the CEDRA Innovation and Development fund for the development and progression of social farming at national level, including provision of farmer training, dissemination of information on social farming, development of policy, research, etc.

Social Farming: The Pathway

The chart overleaf summaries the typical pathway which is followed when a commissioner, guided by the wishes and choices of potential participants, wants to give interested young people the opportunity to spend time on a social farm. Appendix 1 contains the contact details for SoFI at national and regional level for anyone wishing to explore social farming further.



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Appendix 1: Social Farming Ireland Contact Details

Social Farming Ireland National Office

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Tel: 071 9641772
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E-mail: coordinator@socialfarmingireland.ie

Social Farming Policy Officer and Researcher

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Social Farming Southwest Regional Hub

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E-mail: southwest@socialfarmingireland.ie

Social Farming Southeast Regional Hub

Waterford Leader Partnership CLG
Tel: 087 2311061
E-mail: southeast@socialfarmingireland.ie

Social Farming Southwest Regional Hub

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Social Farming Border Midlands Regional Hub

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Notes

