

Calls for more 'social farmers' in Louth

NO TWO days on a farm are the same and its experience Louth farmers are being encouraged to share with others. Social Farming Ireland provides people who use services with the opportunity for inclusion, increased self-esteem, and better health, by taking part in day-to-day farm activities on a family farm.

Social Farming Ireland are asking more farms in county Louth to get involved. Farms in Carlingford and Dunleer are currently participating in the nationwide programme funded by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine and the CEDRA fund.

Charlotte Kelly, regional development officer with Social Farming Ireland, Border Midlands Area region, says interest in social farming is growing all the time. "We have over 120 farms taking part nationally and that is growing every month. In Louth, we have two great social farmers. It's probably one of the areas where we could do with a few more farmers getting involved. Social farming also provides an opportunity to diversify the income earning capacity of a farm. According to Social Farming Ireland, sources of funding and payment arrangements vary hugely but there are potential opportunities to make a level of income from social farming enterprises.

Participants can choose to go to the farm from one to five days per week and a typical social farming day begins at about 10 in the morning with a cup of tea, a chat, and a review of the day's activities. Every social farm and farmer is unique and offers its own mix of activities and opportunities. Equally, participants have an input into the activities they wish to take part in on a given day. Activities vary from day to day and season to season and can be weather dependent. Charlotte explains that Social Farming Ireland works a lot with social care services, disability groups, local schools, and newly arrived asylum seekers and refugees who are looking to learn about life on an Irish farm.

She says, "We offer family run farms as a place people can visit, work on and learn about. It's a form of social support. You're talking about people who maybe have felt isolated from society or cut off or who are vulnerable, or may have been out of work for a while. Social farming gives them an opportunity to meet new people. It's a fun, active way of making a connection with someone in an outdoor setting."

Social Farming Ireland
Leitrim Development Company,
Church Street,
Drumshanbo, Co Leitrim,
Tel: 071 9641772
Email: charlotte@ldco.ie



Web: www.socialfarmingireland.ie

There are benefits, both mental and physical, to spending a day on a busy family farm. Charlotte explains, "A big part of the day is just sitting down and having a cup of tea and a chat with new people, making that connection. That social connection is hugely important and it gives those people taking part an opportunity to make new friends. It's an opportunity to expand their social circle. At the same time, there are mental health benefits, and it is good for self-esteem.

There are lots and lots of different activities you can do on a farm, so these visits are engaging and they're a lot of fun. The groups that take part get an awful lot of enjoyment out of it". "No day is the same as the next on a farm and that definitely applies here! One of the huge benefits is obviously from a physical health point of view. Farming is a very physical job. You find that out very quickly! But that has all sorts of other benefits such as improved sleeping patterns. At the same time, you are learning about where our food comes from, growing food, and all the health benefits associated with that. The big thing in Louth is getting more farms involved. It's something that is growing all the time. The people we have going to farms range in age from 14 to older people in their 70s and 80s. Social farming has a broad appeal and we're looking to meet that interest!

More information available on socialfarmingireland.ie or call (071) 9641772.