

SOCIAL FARMING IRELAND NEWSLETTER

YEAR IN REVIEW



JANUARY-DECEMBER 2023

www.socialfarmingireland.ie



See page 8
for more

Award Winners

In this Newsletter we reflect on the year 2023!

- Social Farming Participants and Services Insights
- Social Farming Ireland Roadshow
- Farm Open Days
- Training Programme
- Policy & Research Activity
- National & International Activity
- Social Farming Around the Country

In the course of 2023, Social Farming Ireland has had one of its busiest years to date. Our active farm network has grown to over 140 farms. We have facilitated many more new and many returning participants with placements on farms. It's great to welcome new organisations, new farmers, and new participants into our network!

Social Farming Ireland is incredibly grateful for all the support that we have received in 2023. We would like to extend a huge thank you to our dedicated social farmers, supportive services, and participants. Your contributions have made a profound impact. Here's to a wonderful journey together!



An Roinn Talmhaíochta,
Éil agus Mara
Department of Agriculture,
Food and the Marine



South West Mayo
DEVELOPMENT COMPANY C.L.G.
Comhairle Riarthóirí
Santíocht Mhagh Eo C.T.S.



West
Limerick
Resources

Comhghairtíocht Leader
Phiont Láige
Waterford Leader
Partnership

SOCIAL FARMING PARTICIPANTS & SERVICES INSIGHTS

Three individual's from Avista day service attended a placement on Hanarahan's farm in North Tipperary

The Hanrahan Farm is located at the foothills of the Devil's Bit. It is a small farm where they keep sucklers, free-range hens, and their dog, Bounty. They have a kitchen garden and a large polytunnel where they grow a large variety of vegetables and fruits. They also have an orchard and flower gardens.



The individuals that attended the farm increased some of their skills which would give them opportunities to enter the world of work. Skills that they learned included: Timekeeping, timing, following directions, the ability to carry out tasks in a certain way, the importance of Health & Safety, and communication with two individuals increased, just to mention some.

The friendships that were created will be ongoing. The participants constantly talked about their placement and really enjoyed going each week.

One individual since this placement has secured a part-time job working in the local mart canteen, prior to this placement, the mart would not have been considered as an option, however seeing how many skills he learned on the farm, and how much he enjoyed it - it proved to be the perfect fit!



Feedback From Anusha Avista

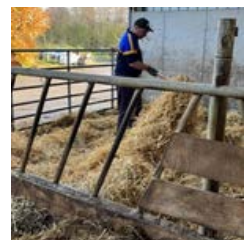
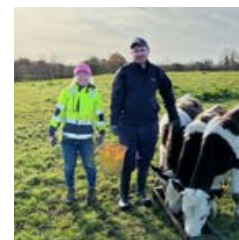


"I really enjoyed working with the animals, feeding them and looking after them. I learned a lot about how to look after the health and welfare of the animals, which was good experience to get. I always had good craic with the farmer and enjoyed having a coffee and a chat. I found being involved in social farming helped with my mental health also and gave me something to look forward to each week. I look forward to going again in 2024."

- Participant from the Southwest Region

"When you're doing social farming you learn lots of things, like gardening and about growing vegetables, taking care of animals- feeding and making fresh beds for them, and when to put them out or in. I really enjoy being at the farm, it was especially lovely to see new calves and feeding them. We also bake scones and get to sit and enjoy them together when they are made. I like helping the farmer out as it's a lot of work running one!"

- Participant from the Southwest Region



SOCIAL FARMING PARTICIPANTS & SERVICES INSIGHTS

Daniel from Kilmacthomas and the Down Syndrome Waterford and South Kilkenny branch travelled to Shelbourne Park, Dublin at the end of the summer to see his namesake Corbrack Dan run in the second round of the 2023 Boyle Sports Irish Greyhound Derby. Luck was not with them on the night, but Daniel got a great reception at the track and came over to the kennels to rub down his beloved Dan after the race. Everyone had a great time in Dublin that evening. Thanks to Rosemarie and Killian Power our Social Farmers in Kilmacthomas Co. Waterford for supporting Daniel throughout his placement over the last two years. There are great outcomes happening on the farm!



Creagh Training Centre were delighted to announce their continued participation in the social farming programme in 2023. Creagh Training Centre is a HSE-run centre in Ballinasloe which provides community-based services for clients with mental health needs and those with an intellectual disability. They recently supported three people for placements on the farm of Blaithnaid and Niall Gallagher near Aughrim.

The whole social farming concept has huge potential and Creagh Training Centre hopes to offer this programme to more of its trainees in the near future.

Creagh Training Centre's involvement in Social Farming.
By Philip O'Connor

"P (participant) has really enjoyed this placement (which took place on Lynch's farm in Cavan) and counts down every week till he is going back. He is very proud to tell anyone who will listen about his job on the farm."

-Feedback from participants mother



"Malachy, Ross, Michael and Shane who attend SOS Kilkenny are currently completing a Social Farming placement with Eamon & Louise Maher near Callan in Kilkenny. For Ross and Malachy it is their first social farming placement however Michael and Shane are almost part of the furniture with the Mahers in Callan having attended for periods of time over the last 6 years. This is a testament to the value of this programme. The sense of self worth, acceptance and independence that the participants get from this programme is difficult to articulate. They cannot wait each week for their day on the farm to come, they all thrive on the opportunities afforded to them while with Eamon, Louise, Jim and George, learning new skills, having a sense of purpose and also forming friendships. A fantastic programme that they will be involved in for many years to come."



Feedback from SOS Kilkenny

RESEARCH & POLICY ACTIVITY

We were delighted to host our partners from Germany, the Netherlands and the Czech Republic for our final Project meeting of the Erasmus+ SoFarTEAM project which took place in Carrick-on-Shannon at the end of June. It was a great opportunity for the partners to experience the Irish family farm model of social farming on the ground. At Pat & Anne Bradleys, Tommy Earley's, and Paul Kelly's farms, we had it all! Sun, torrential rain, music, delicious food, exceptionally contented cows, bogs, nature, lakeside beauty and many, many fantastic exchanges of ideas and experiences.

The brilliant outputs from this Project have been distributed to our social farmers and are now available for all to use and benefit from on our website [here](#). Our farmer readers will be especially interested in the four-page guides to working with individual target groups – they are eminently practical and user-friendly and based on the real-world knowledge and experience of farmers and others working in the sector.



In 2022 our Policy officer Aisling was appointed as the Coordinating Expert of the EIP Agri/EU CAP Network Focus Group on Social Farming and Innovation. This Focus Group brought together 20 experts from 13 different EU countries and provided an opportunity to share learning and insights on Social Farming and to highlight its importance as a social and economic innovation at EU level. Brian Smyth, Social Farming Ireland Project Manager was selected as one of the experts. The Final Report and associated Mini-papers were published in December 2023 and are now available to download and read [here](#). We are thrilled to have been part of this process and to have been able to place the Irish perspective and experience right at the centre of the conversation at European level.

A key pillar of the work of our Policy Officer Aisling is building knowledge of Social Farming amongst the next generation of health and social care professionals. So far this academic year, she has delivered seminars to social care students at SETU Waterford as part of their Interprofessional Practice and Education week, at TUS (Athlone) and at ATU (Sligo). A huge thank you to the lecturers for facilitating this important engagement with students – these are lively sessions which bring innovative practice right into the classroom.



SOCIAL FARMING AWARENESS WEEK

Social Farming Ireland was delighted to have participated in the second annual all Ireland Social Farming Awareness Week from the 2nd to the 6th October!

During this week 5 Farms hosted exciting open days on their farms:

- National Social Farming Awareness Week 2023 kicked off very successfully in Carrigaline with an Open Day on Louise O'Mahony's beautiful and very diverse farm. Louise farms alongside her husband and three children and the whole family plus dogs, goats and assorted other animals were there to welcome a crowd of over 60 people to the farm on the day.
- On Tuesday for the second day of National Social Farming Awareness Week Richard & Áine Galway held a very successful Open Day on their beautiful farm outside of Thomastown in Kilkenny. It was a great gathering of participants, services, neighbours, friends and farmers, some of whom had travelled from as far as Waterford, Tipperary and Kildare. All were keen to gain an insight into what Social Farming is all about and to what the Galway's farm has to offer to participants.
- On Wednesday there was a wonderful atmosphere of positivity and inclusion at Alan and Vivian Wood's farm on the shores of Lough Conn in Crossmalina as they opened their gates as part of Social Farming Awareness Week 2023. Alan has been a farmer his whole life. Vivian is a great community person and baker, which the attendees at the Open Day can happily attest to having gotten to sample her delicious home-made scones.
- On Thursday, Social farmers Violet & Stephen Kavanagh opened their beautiful sheep farm. The weather was mixed but the dramatic unspoilt beauty of the location and warm hearty welcome more than made up for the persistent rain showers. The event was widely attended, attracting a range of people from participants, to service providers, to people wanting to become involved in Social Farming and even a large group of Transition Year students who travelled from Good Counsel College in New Ross, Co. Wexford with their teacher Kieran Barron!
- National Social Farming Awareness Week 2023 ended with what turned out to be the biggest event of the week, an Open Day at Quarryfield Farm near Tubbercurry in Sligo attended by almost 100 people. Gerald, Kelly and Michael Doherty opened the gates of their farm to share their story and to give the diverse group of attendees a real insight into what Social Farming is all about!



Ballea Castle Farm
Cork



Galway's Farm
Kilkenny



Wood's Farm
Mayo



Kavanagh's
Farm Wicklow



Quarryfield Farm
Sligo

SOCIAL FARMING ROADSHOW

Social Farming Ireland attended a number of Agricultural Shows around the country that concluded with a stand in the Organic Village at the National Ploughing Championship!



In the Midlands, a number of Social Farmers, and the Social Farming team attended agricultural shows in Dundalk, Finn Valley (Donegal), Longford, Castleblayney, Tullamore and Tinahely!

During the shows we had the opportunity to speak to farmers and potential participants who were interested in finding out more about Social Farming!

In the Southeast, Social Farmers and Gillian, the SE regional development officer, attended a couple of Agricultural shows—the Dualla and Iverk shows. They had the opportunity to chat with farmers, participants, and visitors keen on learning more about Social Farming as well as Minister Simon Harris!



In the Southwest and West, Regional Development Officers Eadaoin & Deirdre attended agricultural shows in Clonakilty, Athenry & Crossmolina!

It was a great opportunity for the social farmers and Social Farming Team to connect, share experiences, and build a network within the agricultural community!



We finished up our Agricultural Roadshow at the National Ploughing Championship in Ratheniska. It was a very exciting and busy couple of days. We enjoyed meeting so many different people and speaking about the benefits of Social Farming!

NATIONAL & INTERNATIONAL



We were absolutely thrilled to be featured on Virgin Media Ireland's Ireland AM, where we had the chance to speak about the incredible impact of Social Farming Ireland. It was an great opportunity for Helen, Richard, and Michael to share their experiences and shed light on Social Farming, which offers individuals the opportunity to spend time on ordinary working farms.

Michael's participation was made possible through the local support received from Cavan County Council's DPA fund, facilitated by Minister Anne Rabbitte TD. This collaboration exemplifies the importance of local support and community engagement in creating meaningful opportunities for individuals.

As a result of this support, Michael (who also attends Rehabcare in Cavan) has now embarked on a part-time role working on Moeran's farm.



In November, Social Farming Ireland was honoured with the **FBD Better Farming Award** for Best Public/Community Engagement scheme! We were accompanied to farmers Richard Moeran Cavan who has been around since the piloting days in 2013, local farmers and newer recruits to the social farming family Catherine Molloy Offaly, and Brendan Guinan Laois representing the Network. This award is a testament to the strength of our Network and the fantastic work of many, especially our over 140 farmers and the many parents and services we work with, our hardworking team and of course the fantastic participants! Here's to much more success together!



Social Farming Ireland also attended the [From the Ground Up | Cultivating Innovation and Growth Conference](#). Helen had the opportunity to present on the day discussing Social Farming and how Social Farming work in Ireland!

It was great to be able to contribute to the climate action conversation and offer a climate friendly diversification for farmers! [Click here to listen back](#)



Social Farming Ireland attend the [Gurteen Energy & Farm Diversification Show](#) in July! This event was a great opportunity to meet farmers and others in the Agri Sector. Minister for Agriculture, Food and Marine, Charlie McConalogue stopped by to chat to the Social Farming team, Social Farmers and participants that were there on the day!

Helen Doherty, the National Coordinator in Social Farming Ireland, was invited to take part in a great discussion panel on "How farmers can diversify into providing educational activities for schools, tourists and the general public"! It was a great opportunity to inform others on the potential diversification Social Farming is!



Social Farming Ireland was thrilled to be featured on RTE News in May, as it provided an excellent opportunity to raise awareness about the appeal for more farmers to become Social Farmers. The segment included insightful interviews with Social Farming National Coordinator Helen Doherty, Social Farmer Richard Moeran, and participants from RehabCare who have had placements on Richard's Farm.

Being featured on RTE News allowed us to highlight the profound impact of social farming and the positive outcomes it brings to individuals involved. It was a fantastic platform to share our vision of expanding this initiative by encouraging more farmers to get involved and make a difference in their communities.



Southeast Region



SOCIAL FARMING AROUND THE COUNTRY

SOCIAL FARMS IN THE SOUTHEAST

There are currently 27 farms available for Social Farming participants in the Southeast Region

KILKENNY CITY RADIO

Southeast Regional Development Officer Gillian McCarthy discusses Social Farming with Regina Blundel on the Ramble Down a Country Road Show



[LISTEN HERE](#)



IVERK SHOW

Gillian, Southeast RDO, met with Alice Doyle at the Iverk Show when she was just beginning her campaign trail to become deputy president of the IFA which she achieved on the 12th of December 2023. It's the first time in the history of IFA that a woman has been elected to the role of Deputy President.

We would like to congratulate Alice on her achievement and thank her for her continued support of Social Farming!

SOCIAL FARMING OPEN DAYS IN SOUTHEAST

Colm McGrath in Tipperary hosted a Social Farming open day on his farm in 2023. Austin Flavin WLP and Teagasc welcomed everyone to the Open Day, Gillian McCarthy RDO spoke about Social Farming in the Southeast, and Martina Brophy MHS OT spoke about their recent placement and the benefits to the participants and their plans for another group! Dr Aisling Moroney attended also and spoke on the National perspective.

SOCIAL FARMING IN THE SOUTHEAST

It has been an incredibly busy year in the Southeast (Waterford South Tipp, Kilkenny, Carlow & Wexford).

The past year in our region we supported over 150 participants on ordinary farms in the Southeast.

Participants with disabilities, mental health challenges, elderly, refugees and asylum seekers and some who are socially disadvantaged, spent time on a family farm in a healthy, supportive and inclusive environment.

To contact the Southeast Regional Development Officer

☎ 087 231 1061

✉ southeast@socialfarmingireland.ie

FAREWELL!

Social Farming Ireland would also like to wish Jimmy Taffee, CEO of Waterford Leader Partnership CLG well in his retirement & we are looking forward to working closely with Christine Rossi as she takes up the role of CEO!



Southwest Region

SOCIAL FARMING AROUND THE COUNTRY

SOCIAL FARMING IN THE SOUTHWEST

It has been a busy year in the Southwest, with over 130 participants being supported by Social Farmers in the region.

Participants with disabilities, mental health challenges, those in LCA, youth services, homeless and addiction services, refugees and asylum seekers, acquired brain injury and some who are socially excluded spent time and carried out activities on ordinary family farms as a form of social support!

To contact the Southwest Regional Development Officer

☎ 087 366 3842

✉ southwest@socialfarmingireland.ie

SOCIAL FARMS IN THE SOUTHWEST

There are currently 29 Social Farms in the Southwest ready to deliver Social Farming Placements in 2024 with 6 new farms becoming fully trained and ready to welcome participants!

TIPP TODAY FM

Eadaoin O'Connell, Southwest Regional Development Officer, spoke with Fran Curry at the Gurteen Energy & Farm Diversification Show about all things Social Farming!



[LISTEN HERE](#)



Eadaoin attended a number of Little Kneader Autism & Disability Resource Fairs in Cork and in Limerick

SOCIAL FARMING OPEN DAYS IN THE SOUTHWEST

Aine Ní Chonaill in Limerick, Michael O'Connor in Tipperary and the O'Rourke's in Clare (Joint open day in the Southwest and West region) all hosted excellent open days in the Southwest! They brought together Social Farming participants, service providers, and farmers in the Southwest region and beyond!



Border Midlands Region



SOCIAL FARMING AROUND THE COUNTRY



SOCIAL FARMS IN THE BORDER MIDLANDS

There are currently 40 Social Farms in the Border Midlands available to deliver Social Farming Placements in 2024 with 5 new farms becoming fully trained and ready to welcome participants!

THE ANNUAL YOUTH DIVERSION PROJECT NATIONAL CONFERENCE

In November, Charlotte Kelly, Border Midlands RDO, along with Social Farming Policy Officer Aisling and Social Farmers Julie Powell and Mike O'Connell, delivered two workshops on Social Farming sharing Social Farming Ireland's experience of delivering extraordinary outcomes for young people on ordinary farms



SOCIAL FARMING OPEN DAYS IN THE BORDER MIDLAND

Patrick Harley in Donegal, Patrick Corrigan in Monaghan and Elspeth and Andrew Vaughan hosted open days in the Border Midlands in 2023.

Minister for Agriculture, Charlie McConalogue attended the Open Day on Patrick Harley's Farm!

SOCIAL FARMING IN THE BORDER MIDLANDS

More than 250 participants were supported by Social Farmers in the Border Midlands region.

Participants with disabilities, mental health challenges, from LCA, youth services, homeless and addiction services, acquired brain injury and and some who are socially excluded spent time and carried out activities on ordinary family farms as a form of social support!

**To contact the Border Midland
Regional Development Officer**

☎ 086 144 8796

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West Region



SOCIAL FARMS IN THE WEST

There are currently 20 Social Farms in the West available for Social Farming Placements in 2024 with 3 new farms becoming fully trained and ready to welcome participants!

TEAGASC GROWING ORGANIC FARM WALK

In July, Regional Development Officer in the West Deirdre Fahey, had a information stand at the Teagasc Growing Organics Farm Walk today on Social Farmers Oliver and Anna Dixons Farm in Mayo!



SOCIAL FARMING OPEN DAYS IN THE WEST

Angela Healy in Mayo, Blatnaid Gallagher in Galway and the O'Rourke's in Clare (Joint open day in the Southwest and West region) hosted three excellent open days on their farms. The open days saw lots of farmers, potential participants & services attend, as well as Minister Ann Rabbitte attending Blatnaids open day to announce the Social Farming Disability fund for 2023!



It is with deep sorrow that we share the news of Social Farmer Fiona Morrissey, a farmer in county Galway, who passed away in November this year. Fiona had been involved for a couple of years on Colm O'Dowd's farm close to her, and decided to take the leap and open her own farm and home to people at the start of this year. We extend our heartfelt condolences to Fiona's family, friends. She will be missed greatly by the Social Farming Community



SOCIAL FARMING AROUND THE COUNTRY

SOCIAL FARMING IN THE WEST

It has been an busy year in the West!

Well in excess of 100 participants were supported by Social Farmers across Galway Mayo and Roscommon. In 2023, we have worked with 18 organisations in the West. Participants with disabilities, mental health challenges, from LCA , acquired brain injury services and elderly people all had great farm experiences.

To contact the West Regional Development Officer

☎ 087 623 3862

✉ west@socialfarmingireland.ie

South Midlands Region



SOCIAL FARMING AROUND THE COUNTRY

SOCIAL FARMS IN THE SOUTH MIDLANDS

There are currently 23 Social Farms in the South Midlands available to deliver Social Farming Placements in 2024 with new farms becoming fully trained and ready to welcome participants!

NEW REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT OFFICER IN THE SOUTH MIDLANDS

We had a change of staff in this region and were sad to lose Emma Owens who had done a great job as our first RDO dedicated to this region. We were lucky to replace her with Shannon Ballantine and we welcome her to the team! She is already making her mark with a really busy end to the year!



NORTH/MID WEST KILDARE MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

A big congratulations to the North/Mid West Kildare Mental Health Services their hard earned Staff Recognition Award for the their work in arranging Social Farming Placements for participants in Kildare!



SOCIAL FARMING OPEN DAYS IN THE SOUTH MIDLAND

Catherine Molloy in Offaly, Deirdre Donohue in Offaly, Val and Una Cross in Kildare and Ciaran Duggan in Kildare all held Social Farming open days on their farms in 2023. The very successful open days seen participants and Social Farmers telling their Social Farming stories and experiences to the great crowds that gathered!

Minister Pippa Hackett also joined us at the open day Deirdre Donohue's farm!!

SOCIAL FARMING IN THE SOUTH MIDLANDS

It has been an busy year in the South Midlands, this was a new region created with a new post covering Wicklow, Kildare, Laois, Offaly, Westmeath & South Dublin.

Again in this region we supported some 135 participants on Social Farms. In 2023 we have worked with 14 organisations in the South Midlands with participants from ID services, mental health services, LCA, youth services, and Social Inclusion project

**To contact the South Midland's
Regional Development Officer**

☎ 086 136 6503

✉ Southmidlands@socialfarmingireland.ie

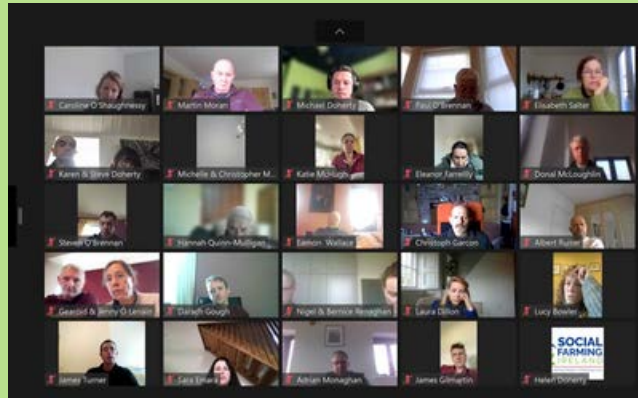


Training

We have continued to offer our training programme, which is free of charge, running 16 training sessions in all in 2023. New farmers, as always got great insights in particular by getting out onto a number of our practicing and experienced farms for some Peer Learning this year.

Some of this years cohort of farmers have already commenced practice and accepted their first participants while others will begin practice in 2024. All are joining the network of fantastic farms and enhancing the social farming offering all over Ireland!

Training Social Farmers is instrumental in ensuring the success, safety, and effectiveness of the Social Farming Ireland network, enabling them to provide invaluable support to participants while contributing positively to the community!



Our network continues to grow and evolve with some farmers also stepping back after a number of years activity to retire or in some cases care for family members



IN THE NEWS

The
Clare Echo

IRISH
FARMERS JOURNAL

Limerick's Newspaper since 1888
LIMERICK LEADER

AgriLand
THE HOME OF UK AGRICULTURE

Louthlive

Dungarvan
Leader


THAT'S FARMING

Irish Independent

Kilkenny People

AgriLand
THE HOME OF UK AGRICULTURE

IRISH
FARMERS JOURNAL

 **Irish Examiner**

Eadaoin O'Connell, Regional Development Officer for Southwest, spoke with [Clare Echo](#) to raise awareness about Social Farming and encourage farmers in Clare to get involved. In the interview, O'Connell shared valuable insights into social farming, highlighting its benefits and the positive impact it can have on both farmers and the participants

Social Farmer Shane Keavney hosted a Roscommon Macra farm work on his farm, which he discusses with **Irish Farmers Journal** reporter Shane Dobson. He also discussed Social Farming and how he got involved three years ago. [Read it](#)

The **Limerick Leader** featured Social Farming in a recent paper. They discussed Social Farming and how to get involved. They also promoted Social Farmer Áine Ní Chonail's Open Day. Read the full article [here](#)

"Behind every farm gate is a whole new world which can be opened up to benefit communities" according to Minister for Agriculture Charlie McConalogue at the recent Social Farming Ireland Open Day in Donegal. He expressed thanks to the host farmers for the great gift they give people through social farming. Hearing the lived experience of participants is so important, he said.

Read the full AgriLand report [here](#)

Calls for more 'social farmers' in Louth: Louth Live featured Social Farming Ireland's call for Farmers in Louth to become Social Farmers - more info [here](#)

The Dungarvan Leader Featured the Launch of the Social Farming Healthy Waterford Funding

That's Farming featured an article highlighting the five farms to open gates to public as part of second annual Social Farming Awareness Week [Read here](#)

The Irish Independent featured multiple Social Farming Awareness Week Open Days "Sharing an Social Farming Story on a country farm in Sligo" ([Read here](#)) and "Tinahely farm hosting open day to showcase benefits of social farming" ([Read here](#))

The Kilkenny People newspaper featured the Social Farming Open Day on Galway's Farm "Social Farming Awareness Week comes to Thomastown" [Read here](#)

AgriLand ([Read here](#)), the Irish Farmers Journal ([Read here](#)) and the Irish Examiner ([Read here](#)) highlighted the recent announcement from the Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine of funding for the extension of contracts for social farming model projects and the National Social Farming Network

Announcing the funding, Minister for Agriculture Charlie McConalogue said that he is "pleased to be able to continue to support this initiative which provides an important service throughout rural communities for disadvantaged groups availing of a range of health service supports"

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regular news & updates**



MEET THE TEAM



Brian Smith
Social Farming Project
Manager



Helen Doherty
Social Farming
National Coordinator



Dr. Aisling Moroney
Social Farming Policy
Officer



Charlotte Kelly
Border Midlands
Regional Development
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Deirdre Fahey
West Regional
Development Officer



Eadaoin O'Connell
South West Regional
Development Officer



Gillian McCarthy
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Development Officer



Shannon Ballantine
South Midlands Regional
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Caoimhe McKeon
Social Farming
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