

SOCIAL FARMING IRELAND



NEWSLETTER

JUNE 2025



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WWW.SOCIALFARMINGIRELAND.IE

A Message for our Network

2025 has been one of the busiest and most exciting years yet for Social Farming Ireland. Our active farm network has grown to over 150 farms, with farms now available in every county—a major achievement that reflects the strength and commitment of everyone involved!

People supported on social farms are referred from and supported by a wide range of sectors and organisations. While many placements on-farm continue to support people with intellectual disabilities, mental ill health, or those in full-time education, we see strong growth in interest from people across youth, homeless, addiction, eldercare, migrant and integration services – all achieving excellent outcomes from the personalised supports received on our social farms.

This success is only possible because of the dedicated work of all involved and belief of so many in what our farms can deliver:

- Participants, their families and advocates
- Service providers and their staff who commission placements
- Managers who recognise the value of social farming
- And of course, the social farmers and their families who open their farms to make a difference at community level.

Well done to all involved!

In this newsletter, we take a moment to reflect on the year so far!

Here's a look at what's inside:

- Participants voice
- Social Farming in the News
- Snapshots from the Regions
- Our Research and International Engagement
- Training Highlights
- Team news updates





THE PARTICIPANTS VOICE!

PARTICIPANT POEM



"Hi, my name is Bernard. I'm 4 years with social farming in Athenry with Mary and Niall Murphy. I love going up-and-down every Thursday. I learned to get the train to Athenry independently. I travel up-and-down in the train from Ballinasloe.

I lost my father in 2001, I loved farming with my father, my life was thrown upside down. I had a great knowledge of farm work, social farming replaced this loss. We get a breakfast in the morning and then we carry on with our jobs for the day. I'm involved with all kinds of farm work, cattle, sheep, hens, putting down stakes and gardening. I learn how to take care of animals and learn about different type of breeds of sheep and cattle. I like safety on the farm and adhere to safety rules.

I love it, it brings back all the memories from working with my father, the things I used to do. I love every minute 4 year and then please get another 4 years.

I recommend this to anyone with special needs. It would be great experience for them, to have an opportunity to work on a farm. Thank you to Deirdre for organising Social Farming."

Bernard – Murphy's Farm, Galway

TREASURES OF CHARIS GARDEN

The beauty of views.
With them, comes wonder.
The abundance of green.
With it, comes vibrancy.

The array of flowers.
With them, comes splendour.
The freshness of air.
With it, comes clarity.

The expanse of spaces.
With them, comes freedom.
The reclusiveness of environment.
With it, comes retreat.

The abundance of nature's offerings.
With them, comes gratitude.
The silence of traffic.
With it, comes serenity.

The nutrition of crops.
With them, comes health.
The scent of harvest.
With it, comes passion.

The laughter of children.
With them, comes joy.
The Family of Charis Garden
With it, comes love.

Louise, 2025



Louise – Charis Gardens, Laois

SOCIAL FARMING AROUND THE COUNTRY

BORDER MIDLANDS



SOCIAL FARMS IN THE BORDER MIDLAND

There are currently 47 Social Farms available for Social Farming participants in the Border Midlands Region

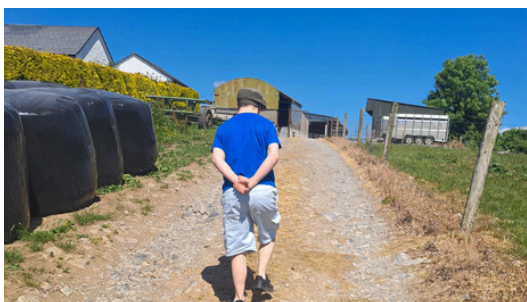
More than 180 participants were supported by Social Farmers in the Border Midlands region so far this year.

Participants with disabilities, mental health challenges, from LCA, youth services, homeless and addiction services, and people with Alzheimer's or dementia 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

✉ Bordermidlands@socialfarmingireland.ie



DIGGING DEEP: OCEAN FM'S THREE-PART SERIES ON SOCIAL FARMING

Ocean FM recently featured Social Farming in a special three-part radio series titled "Digging Deep", as part of their Ours to Protect initiative. This powerful and insightful series explores how Social Farming is creating positive change for individuals and communities across the Border Midlands region.

Across the three episodes, listeners hear directly from social farmers, participants, and coordinators who share their real-life experiences of the model in action—how working alongside farmers in a supportive, natural environment promotes wellbeing, connection, and inclusion.

Each episode offers a unique perspective:

🔊 Episode 1 – An Introduction to Social Farming

Learn what Social Farming is all about, how it works, and the difference it's making across rural Ireland.

🔗 [Listen here](#)

🔊 Episode 2 – Voices from the Farm

Hear from Social Farmers and participants as they describe the everyday realities and rewards of life on a Social Farm.

🔗 [Listen here](#)

🔊 Episode 3 – Looking to the Future

Explore how Social Farming is evolving, the growing demand for the service, and the opportunities for more farmers to get involved.

🔗 [Listen here](#)

DUNDALK AGRICULTURAL SHOW

We had a fantastic day at the Dundalk Show, Social Farmers Gerard Lynch and Pat Bobbett (pictured below with Charlotte) were on hand to talk to peer farmers alongside Charlotte & Caoimhe on our stand. It was a brilliant opportunity to meet and chat with farmers from across the region about Social Farming.



SOCIAL FARMING AROUND THE COUNTRY

SOUTH MIDLANDS



SOCIAL FARMS IN THE SOUTH MIDLANDS

There are currently 28 Social Farms available for Social Farming participants in the South Midland Region, including 4 new farms that have become available this year!

OVER 190
PARTICIPANTS
SUPPORTED
ON FARMS SO
FAR THIS YEAR

7 NEW FARMS TOOK
PART IN SOCIAL
FARMING TRAINING
AND ARE EXPECTED TO
START WELCOMING
PARTICIPANTS IN THE
COMING MONTHS

In the South Midlands, our continued collaboration with the HSE Mental Health Services in Laois and Offaly has had a meaningful and lasting impact in 2025.

Through this strong commissioning partnership, over 40 participants have already taken part in Social Farming placements so far this year. This ongoing collaboration highlights the positive impact Social Farming can have on mental health and wellbeing. Participants engage in meaningful activity on local farms, build routine and confidence, and form real connections with both people and nature.

Social Farming provides a sense of purpose and belonging—something that can often be lost during periods of mental health difficulty. It fosters connection and inclusion, particularly for those who may feel isolated from society. The routine, teamwork, and supportive environment facilitated by the farmers can have a profound and lasting impact on wellbeing.

Farmers, in turn, speak highly of the sense of community these placements bring to their farms, creating a mutually beneficial experience that strengthens rural life.

More than 190 participants were supported by Social Farmers in the South Midlands region so far this year.

Participants with disabilities, mental health challenges, youth services, homeless and addiction services, and elderly people spent time and carried out activities on ordinary family farms as a form of social support!

To contact the South Midlands Regional Development Officer

☎ 086 136 65 03

✉ Southmidlands@socialfarmingireland.ie



SOCIAL FARMING AROUND THE COUNTRY

SOUTHEAST



SOCIAL FARMS IN THE SOUTHEAST

There are currently 33 Social Farms available for Social Farming participants in the Southeast Region

SOCIAL FARMING IN THE SOUTHEAST

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

Since the beginning of the year we supported over 180 participants on ordinary farms in the Southeast.

Participants with disabilities, mental health challenges, elderly, and young people, 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



CONNECTING COMMUNITIES ROADSHOW

Our Southeast Regional Development Officer recently attended three of the Connecting Communities Roadshows, held across Waterford and Kilkenny. These vibrant, well-attended events provided a valuable platform to connect with local groups, agencies, and community members.

Through engaging conversations and information sharing, we were able to highlight how Social Farming supports participants from a wide range of backgrounds, while also benefiting host farmers and rural life. The events reinforced the importance of collaboration between local authorities, community organisations, and services in making our communities the best possible places to live.

AGRICULTURAL SHOWS

Our Southeast Regional Development Officer, Tanya, will be attending two major agricultural shows this July – the **Clonmel Show** in Co. Tipperary on Sunday, 6th July, and the **Bannow Rathangan Show** in Co. Wexford on Thursday, 10th July.

These events are a fantastic opportunity to meet farmers and community members interested in learning more about Social Farming. Tanya will be there to share information, answer questions, and chat about how Social Farming supports both participants and host farmers.

Be sure to stop by and say hello if you're attending either event – we'd love to connect!

Welcome Tanya!



We are delighted to welcome our new Regional Officer in the South East region **Tanya Murphy**! Tanya will be based in Waterford Leader Partnership in Lismore. She grew up on a small farm in Wexford and now lives in East Cork. Her passion for supporting people led her to study International Development in UCC and make the move to Cork. She has had experience working with an organisation who support males reintegrating into society after prison and also as a Community Development Worker for the Traveller Community for nearly three years. She has also taught a Community Development module to adult learners with the ETB and has experience working with R&H Hall organising the import and export of grain.

We look forward to Tanya becoming an integral part of the team and working with her to progress our Social Farming Ireland Network in the South East area!

SOCIAL FARMING AROUND THE COUNTRY

SOUTHWEST



SOCIAL FARMS IN THE SOUTHWEST

There are currently 25 Social Farms available for Social Farming participants in the Southwest Region

AGRICULTURAL SHOW

Our Southwest Regional Development Officer, Leanne Higgins, will be attending the Limerick Show on Saturday, 24th August!

The show is a brilliant opportunity to connect with local farmers and community members who are curious about Social Farming. Leanne will be available on the day to chat about how the model works, the supports available, and how to get involved — whether you're a service provider, potential participant, or farmer.

If you're at the show, be sure to stop by for a chat — we'd love to meet you!



SOCIAL FARMING IN THE SOUTHWEST

Another busy start to the year in the Southwest region, with over 110 participants supported on Social Farms!

Participants with disabilities, mental health challenges, youth services, homeless and addiction services, 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

OVER 110
PARTICIPANTS
SUPPORTED ON
FARMS SO FAR
THIS YEAR

Welcome Leanne!



We would like to welcome **Leanne Higgins** who is the newly appointed Regional Development Officer for the Southwest based in West Limerick Resources. Leanne will be based in the office in Newcastle West close to where she comes from in west Limerick. Leanne comes from a farming background, and has thoroughly enjoyed the farming way of life. She holds a Degree in Applied Social Studies and also a Certificate in Applied management in Human services. Leanne has predominantly worked in the Health & Social care sector in her career to date, and has over 15 years of experience with a number of disability services in the South West. We look forward to working with Leanne over the coming months and years, she brings a passion for empowering individuals, promoting inclusion and community development in turn creating positive change and supporting individuals in a unique and meaningful way.

SOCIAL FARMING AROUND THE COUNTRY

WEST



SOCIAL FARMS IN THE WEST

There are currently 24 Social Farms available for Social Farming participants in the West Region

OVER 50 NEW
PARTICIPANTS
ATTENDED A
SOCIAL FARM SO
FAR THIS YEAR

MORE THAN
10 FARMS
ARE IN
DEVELOPMENT
IN THE WEST !



Great news – funding has been secured through the Oweninny Community Benefit Fund Scheme 2024, under Category 4: Small-Scale Capital Projects (Rest of County). This funding will support the enhancement of Social Farming opportunities for individuals living in North Mayo.

With two Social Farms currently operating in the North Mayo region, this support will improve accessibility and enable more participants to benefit from meaningful activities in a farm-based, inclusive environment.

Both farms are enthusiastic about welcoming new participants and continuing to foster community connection, personal development, and wellbeing through Social Farming experiences!

SOCIAL FARMING IN THE WEST

It has been an busy year in the West!

Over 100 participants were supported by Social Farmers across Galway, Mayo and Roscommon so far in 2024!

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

RESEARCH & POLICY ACTIVITY

EU CAP Network Thematic Group – Valuing Farmers' Wider Contributions

Social Farming Ireland was proud to be part of the EU CAP Network Thematic Group on Valuing Farmers' Wider Contributions to Society. This group, made up of 40 members from across the EU (including four from Ireland), met four times over the past year, concluding with a final in-person meeting in Brussels.

We were especially encouraged to see the work of Social Farming Ireland highlighted by CAP Network members during a presentation focusing on the roles of farmers as food producers, regenerative actors, and community builders. This recognition reinforces the wider societal value of the work social farmers do, both in Ireland and across Europe.



Social Farming Ireland continues to reach new audiences through presentations and collaborations:

- A talk was delivered to the Older People's Council in Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown, exploring Social Farming as a support model for older adults.
- Presentations were held in UCC (Occupational Therapy undergrads and MSc students in Agri-Food & Sustainable Development), University of Galway (Occupational Therapy), and UCD (Master's in Sustainable Agriculture & Rural Development).
- We had a strong presence at the Irish Rural Link Conference, with an information stand on Social Farming. Keynote speakers included Ireland's first Professor of Remote and Rural Medicine and TD Dr. Martin Daly, FF Spokesperson on Health.
- We attended the "Women Step into Farming" in the EU Commission in Dublin on March 4th, 2025. The event, held during International Women's Day celebrations, aimed to highlight the crucial role of women in the Irish farming sector. The event held in collaboration with the Dept of Agriculture turned the spotlight on successful women farmers, and sharing of innovative ideas and women's crucial role in a sustainable Irish farming sector.



Erasmus+

The AgroSocial Erasmus+ project continues to progress, aiming to break down barriers and promote inclusion through ecological urban gardens. On 20th May, we hosted an Irish workshop at the Organic Centre in Rossinver, Co. Leitrim, attended by over 20 people including social farming participants. The event featured presentations by Social Farming Ireland, as well as social farmers Tommy Earley, Adrienne Diamond, and Graham Robertson, and included planting activities and a garden tour.



National Engagement

We also supported DCU's FarmFamHealth research project, contributing to an online focus group focused on mental health among Irish farming families and how to design interventions that encourage help-seeking and build mental health literacy.



SOCIAL FARMER TRAINING

So far in 2025, Social Farming Ireland has successfully delivered seven training sessions aimed at preparing farmers to take part in social farming.

At the end of last year, we hosted 2 online training sessions (9hrs each) –an essential first step for all new social farmers—followed by additional in-person training. All sessions, currently offered free of charge, are designed to build farmers' confidence and understanding in working with individuals who have support needs. The training ensures farmers are well-equipped to create a safe, inclusive, and welcoming environment on their farms.

Framework for Practice & Disability Equality Training

This year, over 65 farmers have participated in our training sessions, marking an exciting step forward in expanding the Social Farming network. Several of these farmers have already begun to welcome participants onto their farms, putting their training into action and creating inclusive, supportive environments.

In addition, we're delighted to see a growing number of farmers actively working towards becoming practicing social farms. These farmers are taking meaningful steps—drawing on the skills and insights gained during their training—as they prepare their farms to offer enriching, person-centred experiences to individuals with support needs.



Their commitment and enthusiasm reflects the heart of social farming and the positive impact it continues to have in rural communities across Ireland.

As part of our comprehensive training programme, key sessions such as HSE Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults and Children First continue to form an essential foundation for all participants.

Our on-farm 'Peer Learning' days remain a firm favourite among farmers. These hands-on sessions, hosted on active social farms, offer valuable real-world insights and foster meaningful peer-to-peer learning and connection.

In addition, our Disability Equality Training workshops continue to be both well-attended and energising, encouraging farmers to step outside their comfort zones and broaden their perspectives on inclusion and support.

Supporting and training new farmers is always a rewarding experience, and we are excited to see how each one progresses on their journey into social farming.



Peer Learning

TEAM UPDATE



Brian Smyth

Social Farming
Project Manager



Helen Doherty

Social Farming
National Coordinator



Dr Mary Brennan

Social Farming
Research & Policy
Officer



Charlotte Kelly

Border Midlands
Regional
Development Officer



Caoimhe McKeon

Social Farming
Administrator



Shannon Ballantine

South Midlands
Regional
Development Officer



Yuliia Kutsehub

Social Farming
Finance
Administrator



Deirdre Fahey

West Regional
Development
Officer



Leanne Higgins

Southwest Regional
Development Officer



Tanya Murphy

Southeast Regional
Development Officer



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



IRISH
**FARMERS
JOURNAL**

AgriLand
THE HOME OF UK AGRICULTURE

"Social Farming provides benefits beyond the farm gate." Social Farmer Stephen Morrison spoke to The Farmers Journal about their farm and their social farming experiences

Click [here](#) for the full article

Social Farming Ireland spoke with Agriland about encouraging more family farms across Ireland to join its network, aiming to expand the availability of placement opportunities that connect people using health and social services with everyday farm life

Click [here](#) for the full article

GARDEN PARTY AT ÁRAS AN UACHTARÁIN

Social Farming Ireland was proud to represent our network and collaborators at a garden party hosted by President of Ireland, Uachtarán na hÉireann Michael D. Higgins. The event celebrated the ongoing work across the country in promoting equality, inclusion, social justice, global solidarity and the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

President Higgins has been a powerful advocate for these values, many of which underpin our work, throughout his 14 years in office, and his continued leadership provides inspiration as we work together to build a more inclusive and sustainable society.

Helen & Brian were joined by long time champion of Social Farming Theresa Peacock who works in HSE Mental Health Services based in Sligo-Leitrim



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