

SOCIAL FARMING IRELAND NEWSLETTER

DECEMBER 2025



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We were successful this year in tendering for the renewal of our National Network contract with the Department of Agriculture for another 5 years (renewable annually). This time around the contract has been increased to align with the work of the Network. The funding had remained the same since 2016 while the project had grown exponentially. With this increased level of funding we have brought on board four new team members who will help us to enhance and develop the Network further – more details are on our staff pages. We now have two development managers one North and one South who will be developing commissioning of placements, a new Regional Co-ordinator in the South and a new Finance Administrator to support the National team. We are excited as we now look forward to taking the Social Farming Ireland Network to the next level over the next five years!

Looking to the Future

Once again this past year was our busiest yet! The programme continues to grow and develop and broaden its reach, more people were supported and in response to individual needs many were supported for longer periods of time. Our network has a base of over 200 farmers both practicing and a pipeline of trainees, with this number about to grow again as we host further training in January 2026. Our farmers supported over 1,000 participants as our work stretched into every corner of Ireland from Malin Head to Bantry and Blacksod Bay to Kilmichael.

National Co-ordination Committee



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



PARTICIPANT STORY



Donegal Horizons participants – supported through the SICAP programme at Donegal Local Development Company. Placements on Harley’s Farm, Letterkenny.



“Our trainees have been having an absolutely fantastic time during their placement at the farm. This opportunity has provided them with valuable, hands-on experience in a completely different environment – one that has allowed them to learn new skills, gain confidence, and develop a real appreciation for the hard work and dedication that goes into farm life.

Working under the guidance of Patrick, the trainees have benefited enormously from his knowledge and expertise. Patrick has been a great mentor, showing them practical techniques and sharing his insights into farming and animal care. His support and encouragement have made the experience not only educational but truly enjoyable for everyone involved.

Throughout their time on the farm, the trainees have taken part in a wide range of activities and daily tasks, including:

- Feeding and caring for animals – ensuring that livestock are well-fed, watered, and comfortable.
- Cleaning out animal pens and stables – learning the importance of maintaining hygiene and animal welfare.
- Repairing fences and general maintenance work – developing teamwork and problem-solving skills.

The trainees have shown incredible enthusiasm, teamwork, and determination throughout their time at the farm. They’ve embraced every task, from the physical challenges of outdoor work, with a positive attitude and genuine excitement.

It’s been inspiring to see how much they’ve learned – not only about farming but also about themselves. Many have commented on how rewarding it feels to see the results of their hard work and how much they’ve enjoyed learning in such a different setting. Overall, this has been an invaluable experience that has helped our trainees build practical skills, develop resilience, and strengthen their appreciation for nature and teamwork. They’ve truly made the most of every moment on the farm and have come away with memories, skills, and lessons that will stay with them for years to come.”

Killian’s favourite day is always Tuesday, working at the farm! Great job Killian!

-Cluainin Resource Centre Crossmolina



NATIONAL NETWORK



Social Farming Ireland Presents in the Dáil

During Social Farming Awareness Week 2025, Brian, Helen and farmer Matthew McGreehan addressed the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Agriculture and Food, highlighting the growth, impact, and benefits of social farming in Ireland. They showcased how ordinary farms are transformed into inclusive, community-focused spaces that support participants' wellbeing and connection. They were delighted to meet many connections to our Network on the day including Matthews sister Deputy Erin McGreehan. View Presentation [here](#)



National Women in Agriculture Conference in Sligo

A representative group of our women social farmers attended the huge event with Mary and Helen. In social farming women are a key part of our network with over 40% of the farms led by a female farmer and another 25% lead jointly with women on the farms. We had Shirley Bateman - a dairy farmer from Cor, Angela Healy an organic mixed farm in Mayo, Bernie Whyte a dairy farmer from Longford and Adrienne Diamond a mixed farmer from Leitrim! There was great energy at the event we spoke to many about social farming and learned lots, from speakers on some very important topics such as succession, on the day!

From vision to action:

Empowering rural areas for the future

In September Brian Smyth attended the 2025 Rural pact conference 'From vision to action: Empowering rural areas for the future' in Kortrijk in Belgium and presented on the work of Leitrim Development company Social farming Ireland network as part of showcase of inspiring initiatives from across Europe, demonstrating how farmers and rural communities are tackling challenges and seizing new opportunities.

https://ruralpact.rural-vision.europa.eu/events/rural-pact-conference-vision-action-empowering-rural-areas-future_en

You can view his presentation is from 22.10mins here -

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LHKhL5SA_DU&list=PLG1wdIkpOOXOQpaltbm42HO8ilVc8pZyV&index=14

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LHKhL5SA_DU&list=PLG1wdIkpOOXOQpaltbm42HO8ilVc8pZyV&index=14



We were delighted to attend **Leitrim Women in Agriculture – A Celebration of Roots and Resilience** in Carrick on Shannon yesterday. This is the first event of The Hidden Half – Leitrim Women in Focus Project, supported by PEACEPLUS.

We were welcomed by Assumpta Kelly, From The Hidden Half – Leitrim Women in Focus project, and the co-ordinator of North Leitrim Women's Centre. Speakers on the day included Teresa Roche, Owner and Producer of Kylemore Farmhouse Cheese, and Chair IFA Farm Family and Social Affairs Committee, Claire Brennan, Organic Farmer, agricultural advisor, and Project leader for EIP 'Making Farms Work for Women' and the final speaker was Helen Doherty, Social Farming Ireland (Leitrim Development Company). Helen spoke about her passion for volunteering in her local community, which led to her working for Social Farming Ireland.



SOCIAL FARMING AROUND THE COUNTRY

South Midlands



Farmers Journal – Stephen Morrison, Kildare

Social Farmer Stephen Morrison from Co. Kildare was featured this year in the *Farmers Journal*, highlighting the benefits of social farming for participants, farmers, and local communities. The article showcases Stephen's farm as a welcoming space where people can engage with nature, develop new skills, and enjoy meaningful experiences, reflecting the positive impact social farming has across the South Midlands and beyond!

Resilience Healthcare

- Lisa McCabe (Community Services Manager) and Rhoda Walsh (Community Coordinator) from Resilience Healthcare Kildare/Dublin Services recently enjoyed a day visiting three social farms across Kildare. They spent time with Social Farmers Stephen Morrison, Marc and Brid Óg Sagarzazu, and the Jordan family, getting a real feel for the variety of experiences on offer at each farm.
- With participant placements starting in the new year, the visits were a great chance to see the different farm settings and activities available!

Social Farming Awareness Week –

Caroline O'Shaughnessy Wicklow Social Farming Awareness Week 2025 finished with a visit to Caroline O'Shaughnessy's farm in Co. Wicklow. We heard from Caroline and Social Farmer Gráinne Whelehan, who shared insights into the positive impact of social farming for both participants and farmers.

We were also pleased to welcome Lorraine Dunne, Healthy Wicklow Coordinator with Wicklow County Council, who highlighted the value of collaboration with the Social Farming Ireland Network in the South Midlands!



Social Farms in The South Midlands

- There are currently **28** Social Farms available for Social Farming participants in the South Midlands Region
- More than **238** participants were supported by Social Farmers in the South Midlands region so far this year.

Good Luck Caoimhe!



We are delighted to share the news that Caoimhe is stepping into a new role within our team as Regional Co-ordinator for the South Midlands region. She will bring her knowledge and hands-on experience as Programme Administrator to this role and she is looking forward to getting to know you all and working with you over the coming months.

She is looking forward to the challenge and will spend the coming months visiting each farm and meeting with all the service providers we currently work with. We also hope to connect with you all at our winter discussion groups which she will be arranging shortly. Some of you may already have met her at this year's Open Day in Wicklow or at other gatherings throughout the year. Even if you haven't met her in person yet, you will certainly know her from her friendly and efficient support via email and phone from the National Office. Please join us in congratulating Caoimhe on her new role. We are confident she will make a fantastic contribution and continue to grow and develop social farming in the south midlands region and be a great support to all of you.

To contact the South Midland Regional Co-ordinator



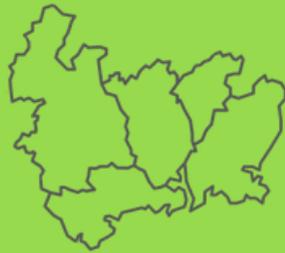
Southmidlands@socialfarmingireland.ie



086 0654136

SOCIAL FARMING AROUND THE COUNTRY

South East



Carlow Mart

Carlow's farming community was invited to take part in the Farmer Wellbeing Programme, a unique health and wellbeing initiative designed specifically for farmers and their families.

Event Details:

- Thursday, 2nd October, 5pm-9pm - Tullow Mart
- Thursday, 30th October, 5pm-9pm - Leinster Mart, Killeshin Road, Carlow

Each event included guest speakers, health checks, haircuts, along with an array of informative stands from local and community support organisations. These events were funded by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine and aim to address the often-overlooked challenges facing farmers, from physical and mental health to financial planning and farm safety. We were delighted to attend and to have a Social Farming stand at each event.



New farmer Carmel Morrissey with Participants from Reachability Wexford

A participant from St. Raphael's in Youghal painted a picture for social farmer Rosemarie.



Social Farms in The South East

- There are currently **31** Social Farms available for Social Farming participants in the South East Region
- More than **259** participants were supported by Social Farmers in the South East region so far this year.
- Participants with disabilities, mental health challenges, elderly, and young people, spent time on a family farm in a healthy, supportive and inclusive environment.

The Wexford Open Day on 25th October was attended by the WLP CEO, board members, IFA Deputy President Alice Doyle, and other guests.



To contact the SouthEast Regional Co-ordinator

 Southeast@socialfarmingireland.ie



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SOCIAL FARMING AROUND THE COUNTRY

South West



Social Farming Awareness Week

Murphy's Farm, Co. Limerick

Murphy's Farm proudly hosted a Social Farming Awareness Week event, and it was a truly inspiring and successful day. The event brought together a wide range of attendees, including community members, support organisations, participants, and those curious to learn more about social farming. A major highlight was hearing directly from social farmers and participants, who shared their personal experiences of working on the farm and the positive impact it has had on their lives. Their stories were powerful, authentic, and deeply moving, offering real insight into the value of inclusion, connection, and purpose within farming environments.

Agricultural Shows

• National Ploughing Championships

We were delighted to meet so many wonderful people at this year's National Ploughing Championships. Thank you to everyone who took the time to stop by, chat with us, and learn more about Social Farming Ireland.



• Limerick Agriculture Show

We had a fantastic day at the Limerick Show, proudly representing Social Farming Ireland alongside the LEADER programme through West Limerick Resources. It was inspiring to connect with so many attendees, share stories, and raise awareness about the impact of Social Farming. Thank you to everyone who stopped by and showed interest in our work.



Social Farms in The South West

- There are currently **26** Social Farms available for Social Farming participants in the South West Region
- More than **151** participants were supported by Social Farmers in the South West region so far this year.
- Participants with disabilities, mental health challenges, from youth services, homeless and addiction services and some who are socially excluded spent time and carried out activities on ordinary family farms as a form of social support!

Mental Health Fair - TUS Thurles

Social Farming Ireland was delighted to be invited to the Mental Health Fair at TUS Thurles. The event provided a valuable opportunity to connect with mental health advocates in a welcoming and supportive setting.

Mid-West Mentoring Network - 10-Year Celebration

Regional Co-ordinator Leanne was delighted to attend the Mid-West Mentoring Network's 10-year celebration at the Maldron Hotel on October 1st. The event fostered meaningful connections as members shared business insights, explored collaboration opportunities, and welcomed new participants. It was a powerful reflection of the network's ongoing commitment to mentorship and professional growth in the region.



Social Farming & Mental Health Services - Glanmire

Leanne was delighted to join the Mental Health Services team in Glanmire, Co. Cork. The visit included a presentation on the benefits of Social Farming — a person-centred approach that promotes wellbeing, inclusion, and meaningful participation in farm life.

To contact the South West Regional Co-ordinator

 southwest@socialfarmingireland.ie

 087 366 3842

SOCIAL FARMING AROUND THE COUNTRY

West



Social Farming Awareness Week - Open Day

We had a fantastic day at Emer Quinn's Shore Farm in County Mayo as part of Social Farming Awareness Week. The event brought together participants, farmers, and community members to celebrate the many benefits of Social Farming.



Delivered 1,736 placement days across farms in the three counties.

Social Farms in The West

Mayo/Galway/Roscommon

Social Farming in the West Region is going from strength to strength

- 21 farms currently have placements, providing meaningful opportunities for participants.
- 4 additional farms are preparing to welcome placements soon.
- 8 new farmers have begun Social Farming Training and are on track to be operational by June 2026.

134 participants completed Social Farming placements

New Social Farm in Co. Mayo

Participants from Western Care Services in Knock, Claremorris, and Ballyhaunis enjoyed a visit to Grauen Farm near Ballyhaunis.



New Social Farm in East Galway



Ministerial Visit to Social Farm in Oughterard

Minister Hildegard Naughton TD visited Martin O'Malley's Social Farm in Oughterard, where she met participant Patrick and representatives from Ability West, Galway Rural Development, Forum Connemara, Galway City Partnership, South West Mayo Development Company, Western Care, and Thomas Fitzpatrick, Chair of the Local Development Companies Network.



To contact the West Regional Co-ordinator



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RESEARCH & POLICY ACTIVITY

Social Farming Ireland National Network Conference 2026

In 2026, Social Farming Ireland will mark a significant milestone: 10 years of the National Network, funded by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine. Over the past decade, the network has gone from strength to strength, growing from 7 social farms in 2017 to 159 today. In 2025 alone, our social farmers provided more than 10,300 placement days, supporting participants across a wide range of health, social care, and community settings.

To celebrate this achievement, we will host our National Conference in April 2026. The event will bring together stakeholders from health and social care, agriculture and rural development, social farmers, participants, academics, researchers, and policymakers. It will showcase the impact of social farming for participants, highlight its role in sustaining family farms, and explore wider benefits for rural communities and health and social care services.

Planning is already underway, and we will share more details in the coming weeks. The conference will be a valuable opportunity to reflect on the progress of social farming over the past ten years and to look ahead to the future. We look forward to keeping you updated as plans develop.



Farmer Mentorship Sessions with support from the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine

We were delighted to receive funding from DAFM's Farmer Health, Wellbeing and Safety Call 2025, which enabled us to deliver wellbeing mentorship sessions for our social farmers. In partnership with the wellbeing team at Community Wellness, this one-to-one mentorship initiative provided our social farmers with a confidential and supportive space to discuss personal, occupational, and socio-economic stressors and concerns. The mentors, Mairead and Keane, provided tailored and practical guidance to farmers to help strengthen their wellbeing and build resilience.

Thank you to all of our social farmers who participated in this mentorship initiative, and we hope you found it beneficial!

Autumn Seminar Series

Our Research and Policy Officer, Dr. Mary Brennan, delivered presentations on Social Farming practice and research to MSc students in Sustainable Development, Agri-Food & Co-operatives at UCC, MSc Social Sciences (Social Work) students at Maynooth University, and 3rd-year Occupational Therapy undergraduates at Trinity College Dublin. These sessions offered a fantastic opportunity to connect with students across agriculture, rural development, and health and social care, highlighting the strong synergies between their fields of study and the principles of Social Farming.



Study Visit - Ferme Nos Pilifs, Brussels

We were delighted to share our research on Social Farming at the ESF+ Support Centre's study visit to Ferme Nos Pilifs in Brussels. The visit showcased how inclusive projects foster empowerment, independence, and sustainable skills development for young people with disabilities.

TEAM UPDATE



Brian Smyth

Social Farming
Project Manager



Helen Doherty

Social Farming
Operations Manager



Dr Mary Brennan

Social Farming
Research & Policy
Officer



Charlotte Kelly

Border Midlands
Regional Co-
Ordinator



Darren Gilmartin

Social Farming
Administrator



Caoimhe McKeon

South Midlands
Regional Co-
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Yuliia Kutsehub

Social Farming
Finance Administrator



Deirdre Fahey

West Regional
Co-Ordinator



Leanne Higgins

Southwest Regional
Co-Ordinator



Tanya Murphy

Southeast Regional
Co-Ordinator



Marie O'Leary

South Regional Co-
Ordinator



Eilís Cooney

South Development
Manager



Julianne Brady

North Development
Manager

IN THE NEWS

10 years of Social Farming in Northern Ireland

In October 2025, Social Farming Awareness Week was celebrated across Northern Ireland to mark 10 years of social farming, with events, open farm visits, and activities highlighting the benefits of social farming for participant wellbeing and social inclusion.



Leitrim Integrated Development successful for Social Farming Network

Our Social Farming Ireland Manager, Brian Smyth, spoke to Shannonside Radio about the exciting news that Leitrim Development Company has secured the tender for the National Social Farming Network. Brian highlighted what this achievement means for the future of social farming in Ireland and the positive impact it will continue to have on participants, farmers, and rural communities. Listen [here](#)



Congratulations to the 2025 Farming for Nature Ambassador Award Winners!

A special shoutout goes to two of our very own Social Farmers who were recognised this year: Sean Butler from Roscommon and Janet Power & Jenny Watkins from Wexford. Well done to all the winners and everyone involved!



In September, we were delighted to welcome former Minister of State with responsibility for Disability, Hildegard Naughton T.D., to Martin O'Malley's farm in Connemara. Social Farming is one of the many offerings on Martin's multifunctional farm, Connemara Eco Skills Training.

During her visit, Minister Naughton met with support services and participants, seeing first-hand how Social Farming can support people and the significant benefits that can be gained from an ordinary farm setting.

As Hildegard embarks on a new role in the area of Education, we wish her every success and look forward to working with Emer Higgins T.D. as we continue to provide opportunities for people who are disadvantaged to improve their lives.



Follow Social Farming Ireland on our social media for regular news & updates

