

SOCIAL FARMING IRELAND NEWSLETTER

JUNE 2026



WWW.SOCIALFARMINGIRELAND.IE



Celebrating 10 years of Social Farming Ireland

Social Farming Ireland recently marked a significant milestone, celebrating 10 years of support from the Department of Agriculture. More than 200 delegates attended the national conference at The Heritage, Killenard, highlighting the programme's growth and increasing impact on communities across the country.

Social farming provides people with opportunities to participate in everyday farm life, supporting wellbeing, confidence, social inclusion, and personal development. The programme benefits a wide range of participants while also providing farmers with diversification opportunities and stronger community connections.

Minister for Agriculture, Martin Heydon TD, attended the conference and praised the programme's impact, noting the wide range of people who benefit from social farming. He reaffirmed his commitment to supporting the continued growth of the initiative and its role within Irish agriculture and rural communities.

The conference featured powerful testimonies from participants, service providers, and farmers, demonstrating the positive impact social farming has on people's lives. Speakers highlighted improvements in confidence, wellbeing, recovery, and social connection, while farmers spoke about the personal and community benefits of their involvement.

The event also celebrated Social Farming Ireland's recent success at the RDS Agricultural and Rural Awards, where the organisation received the Sustainable Award for Rural Social Impact.

Led nationally by Leitrim Development Company in partnership with South West Mayo Development, West Limerick Resources, and Waterford LEADER Partnership, Social Farming Ireland looks forward to another decade of growth and development. Closing comments from the management team of the project indicated that there is much to be done in further developing social farming opportunities as the network grows to support an ever widening cohort of people ".....we are only getting started!"

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



“From Physiotherapy to Farming”

Petrina Finn’s Social Farming Journey in the Cooley Mountains

For Petrina Finn, taking part in Social Farming Ireland was a step into the unknown, and one that quickly became “the best thing since sliced bread.”

With no farming background and having lived in a town all her life, Petrina joined two 10-week placements on Matthew McGeehan’s sheep farm in the Cooley Mountains. What she found there was more than just new skills, it was confidence, connection, and a sense of freedom.

From her first day, Petrina felt welcomed and supported. She learned practical skills like fencing and using tools she had never handled before, all while working as part of a team again.

“I knew what a crowbar was,” she laughs, “but had never really known how to use it.”

A once physiotherapist, now living with a vision impairment, Petrina experienced something truly transformative on the farm.

“The freedom I felt walking up the fields with nothing in my way was brilliant, I was even running and laughing.”

The open landscape and fresh air of the Cooley Mountains created a powerful sense of wellbeing.

“You couldn’t go up there and not feel happy.”

Beyond the work, it was the people who made the experience special.

Petrina built strong connections with the farmer, his wife Clodagh, fellow participants, and others in the local community. From sharing parenting stories to learning about food and farming practices, every interaction added to the experience.



There were also moments of pure joy, like holding a lamb for the first time. “It was hilarious, I even sent a video to my friends,” she says. While some initially questioned the value of the placement, Petrina is clear about its impact.

“I learned so much and had so much fun.”

Most importantly, the placement gave her structure and motivation. “It was a reason to get up in the morning.”

Now, Petrina is eager to continue her journey, try new aspects of farming, and share her story to encourage others to get involved. Petrina was supported by Peter O’Toole, Head of Counselling, Wellbeing & Emotional Support at Vision Ireland, in accessing Social Farming Ireland. Reflecting on the programme, Peter highlighted its impact: “We’ve had nothing but positive feedback from all our social farming participants. This project has been a perfect example of a service that offers independence, social connection, and personal fulfilment, alongside meaningful involvement in a new way of life and working.”

Petrina’s experience highlights the heart of Social Farming Ireland, creating opportunities for people to grow in confidence, build connections, and discover new possibilities in a supportive farm environment.



NATIONAL NETWORK



National Social Care Conference – Radisson Blue Hotel, Limerick



Helen, our Operations Manager, presented at the National Social Care Conference in Limerick. Leanne, Regional Coordinator(Mid-West), also attended. The conference was highly informative and featured a wide range of research-led and practice-based presentations.



Improving Standards

As part of our ongoing commitment to farm safety, Eircode signs have been distributed to our Social Farmers for display at their farm at a clearly visible location. Having the Eircode prominently displayed can help emergency services locate the farm quickly in the event of an accident or emergency, potentially saving valuable time when every minute counts.



Social Farming Ireland – National Council for Special Education - Transitions Pilot Showcase Day

Social Farming Ireland was delighted to be invited to deliver a presentation at the showcase event, which took place at Killeslin Hotel, Portlaoise on the 20th May 2026.

Great to meet with Minister Moynihan Minister of State at the Department of Education with special responsibility for Special Education and Inclusion and discuss our role with Special Schools

The National Council for Special Education is currently involved in a pilot project with 41 special schools throughout Ireland, aimed at supporting the transition of school leavers into the next stage of their lives, whether that be further education, employment, or other pathways they may wish to explore.



Class of 2026

In-person training sessions were also held in Mitchelstown, Moyvalley, and Carrick-on-Shannon, where social farmers completed the Support Framework and Planning for Practice and Disability Equality Training modules. Further on Farm Peer Learning sessions were completed in Kilkenny, Mullingar & Cavan.

The training provided farmers with practical knowledge and skills to support the delivery of high-quality social farming placements while promoting inclusive and person-centred practice. All sessions were extremely well received and proved to be a great success. Every day is a school day whether its in class or on the farm!



Minister Butler Farm Visits

Minister Butler joined us on a social farm in Dungarvan in April. Social Farmer Ger O'Grady and participants from Seabreeze mental health high support community residence spoke to Minister Butler about what happens on their Social Farming days and how much they enjoy helping Ger on his farm.



In Nenagh, Minister Butler visited the farm of Michael and Oonagh O'Connor in Shallee, Nenagh who have been social farmers since 2021. In that time they have supported people from disability services, mental health services, CAMHS, and family support organisations.

The focus of the visit was the HSE CAMHS North Tipperary team, who have supported young people to engage in social Farming. Deputy Butler and others in attendance heard from parents of young participants who spoke about increased confidence, routine, and the wellbeing benefits that their children have experienced.



SOCIAL FARMING AROUND THE COUNTRY

Border Midlands

Farmer Network Meetings

Charlotte started off the year with her first farmer network meeting in Ballyshannon, Donegal. Farmers met to discuss social farming, updates from the team and share with their peers about their year of social farming. All who attended were introduced to our new farmer Eircode signs.



Second farmer network meeting of the year in Virginia, Cavan. Again Farmers met to discuss social farming, updates from the team and talk to their peers about their year of social farming.



Farm Visits March 11th

Charlotte and Julianne hosted farm visits for the WorkAbility Programme staff, Sligo Leader Partnership. They went to Quarryfield farm and Tom McCann's farm. It was a great day showing the team the potential social farms have in providing a space for people to build on their skills, confidence, routine building before stepping into the workforce. Sandra Browne Employment Specialist, Michelle Lally Employment Specialist and a Social Care Student attended on the day.

Presentation

March 19th

Helen and Charlotte presented to a group of Teagasc farm advisors in their Teagasc office in Drogheda, Co. Louth. They shared information on social farming, the benefits to farmers and how they can get involved. Advisors from Dublin, Louth and Meath were in attendance. David Colbourne, Regional Manager for Meath, Dublin, Louth kindly invited us along on the day.



Open Days

In May Charlotte and Julianne hosted an Open Day on Patrick Harley's farm in Letterkenny, Co. Donegal. Participants from NorthWest Special Youth Club, Donegal Horizons and Project Wave ATU were in attendance. They had the chance to see first hand what Patrick's farm can offer to social farming participants.



Farm Visit

Charlotte and Julianne hosted a farm visit for staff from Fingal Leader Partnership, Prosper Meath and Eve to Hidden Acres Farm, Malahide, Co. Dublin. Farmers David and Albert showed staff what a typical social farming day may look like on the farm for participants and what past participants have gotten involved in.



Social Farms in The Border Midlands

- There are currently **44** Social Farms available for Social Farming participants in the Border Midlands Region
- More than **236** participants were supported by Social Farmers in the Border Midlands region so far this year.
- Participants from a range of services—including disability, mental health, youth, homeless, addiction, and dementia supports—spent time on family farms, taking part in activities that provide social connection and meaningful experiences.

Employment and Training Expo

May 28th

Charlotte and Julianne attended the Employment and Training Expo in Monaghan Institute, Co. Monaghan. This event was organised by Cavan Monaghan ETB.

It was a great opportunity to network with potential participants, services and some farmers too.



Dundalk Show

June 14th

Charlotte and Julianne attended the Dundalk Show, Co. Louth. It was great to meet so many farmers and services who were interested in hearing more about social farming and how they may get involved.

To contact the Border Midland Regional Co-ordinator



Bordermidlands@socialfarmingireland.ie



086 144 8796

SOCIAL FARMING AROUND THE COUNTRY

South Midlands

Farmer Network Meeting

The first South Midlands Farmer Network Meeting of the year took place in Mountmellick, Co. Offaly on the 4th Feb, bringing together Social Farmers from across the region. The meeting provided an opportunity to share updates on the Social Farming programme, discuss developments for the year ahead, and exchange experiences and ideas with fellow farmers. Caoimhe also introduced the new Social Farming farmer Eircode signs and outlined how they will support easier access to participating farms.



Social Farms in The South Midlands

- There are currently **31** Social Farms available for Social Farming participants in the South Midlands Region
- More than **172** participants were supported by Social Farmers in the South Midlands region so far this year.



Kildare West Wicklow Mental Health Service – Open day 20th Feb

We were delighted to host an open day for the Kildare West Wicklow Mental Health Service, welcoming both multidisciplinary team (MDT) professionals and service users to experience Social Farming first-hand. Through guided farm walks and information sessions, attendees learned about the benefits of Social Farming, what a placement involves, and how to access the programme through the referral process. The day was a great opportunity to strengthen connections with the service and showcase the positive impact Social Farming can have on health and wellbeing.



Longford Careers, Training and Information Fair

Caoimhe and Julianne attended the Careers, Training and Information Fair in the Longford Arms Hotel as part of National Work and Skills Week. The event provided a great opportunity to engage with jobseekers, employers, and members of the community, raising awareness of the Social Farming programme and its many benefits. Throughout the day, we spoke with attendees about how Social Farming supports health, wellbeing, skill development, and social inclusion, while also building valuable connections with local organisations and services.



Laois Live Well Expo

Caoimhe also attended the Laois Live Well Expo, where we had the opportunity to meet members of the public, community organisations, and local services. Throughout the day, we promoted the benefits of Social Farming, shared information on how to get involved, and spoke with attendees about the positive impact Social Farming can have on wellbeing, confidence, and community inclusion. The event was a valuable opportunity to raise awareness of the programme and build new connections across the county.



Conference Highlights



To contact the South Midland Regional Co-ordinator



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SOCIAL FARMING AROUND THE COUNTRY

South East



Farmer Network Meeting

We held a network event for our Social farmers in the Southeast in January amidst a storm, a good number gathered in person and those

who couldn't make it joined online. Meeting in person lends itself to a lot of information sharing and relationship building - key network activities!



MTU Farm Visit

MTU Social Care student's joined us on Breda Mulcahy's farm in east Cork as part of their nature based module. They learned about Social Farming and how it can be of value to their future clients.



A Social Farm in County **Wexford** (Nuala Slevin and David Reck) were recognised for their commitment to Social Inclusion in Agriculture with a **civic award by New Ross Municipal district council**.

A big thanks to Councillor Brídín Murphy for nominating our Social Farmers after seeing their work in action at our Social Farming Open day on David and Nuala's farm last October.



Social Farms in The South East

- There are currently **33** Social Farms available for Social Farming participants in the South East Region
- More than **152** 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.

Conference Highlights



To contact the SouthEast Regional Co-ordinator



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SOCIAL FARMING AROUND THE COUNTRY

South West

Mart Event

Event in Corrin Mart, Fermoy on the 9th of June. There were a number of exhibitors in the Mart on the day, in partnership with the North Cork HSE Health Promotion Department. It was run as part of mens health week.



Farmer Network Meeting Cork

This was the first of the farmer meetups for the Southwest region. It was a great day of sharing and learning



Field Of Dreams

Marie visited Debbie in the Field of Dreams, in June. There she met some of their students and spoke about social farming for the class. It was developed by Down syndrome Ireland to meet the learning needs of adults with Down syndrome across Cork.



Social Farming in action with Corlann on Ballea Castle with Louise O'Mahoney.



Social Farming with Corlann on Shirley Bateman's farm in Crookstown



Social Farms in The South West

- There are currently **9** Social Farms available for Social Farming participants in the South West Region, with **4** farms recently activated
- More than **70** participants were supported by Social Farmers in the South Midlands region so far this year.



- 10 new developing farms, with a growing number in West Cork, so this region is in full development mode!

In Person training was held in Mitchelstown this year so we are looking forward to getting new farms up and running over the remainder of the year!

Farmer Training



To contact the SouthWest Regional Co-ordinator



southwest@socialfarmingireland.ie



087 366 3842

SOCIAL FARMING AROUND THE COUNTRY

Social Farming Ireland – New to social farming in Clare and Cork

This month, we were delighted to welcome new participants onto farms in Clare and Cork as they began their social farming placements. The visits also included the arrival of new animals to the farms, which was a very exciting experience for participants. Seeing new life on the farm created a strong sense of interest and positivity, with participants showing curiosity, enthusiasm, and engagement throughout the visits. The opportunity to observe the animals settling in helped foster connection, learning, and appreciation for farm life.



Social Farming Ireland – Connecting for Life Limerick

Leanne attended the Connecting for Life Limerick multi-agency meeting on the 12/02/2026 at Roselawn House which focused on collaborative suicide-prevention planning and partnership working across the Mid-West region. We connected with Dr Noreen Moloney from the Crisis Resolution Team and Ian Hackett from Solace Café present in person, providing updates on their respective services in Limerick. The meeting included discussions on local initiatives, community supports, and coordinated actions aligned with the national connecting for life strategy

Social Farming Update - Celebrating Success at the End of the Social Farming Placement

On the final day of their Social Farming placement on Murphys Farm in Limerick, participants completed a significant piece of work on the Social farm. As part of their contribution, they planted a total of 1,000 plants to establish a 600-metre hedge. This task required teamwork, planning, and sustained effort, and provided the participants with valuable hands-on experience in environmental and land management practices. The activity also supported the development of practical skills, confidence, and a sense of achievement, marking a positive and productive conclusion to their placement.

Farmer Network Meetings

This year got off to a great start with the first round of our Social Farmer Meet-Ups, bringing social farmers together in seven locations across the country. These gatherings provided a valuable opportunity for connection, conversation, and shared learning, with farmers networking, exchanging experiences, and supporting one another.



MidWest



Social Farms in The Mid West

- There are currently **17** Social Farms available for Social Farming participants in the Mid West Region
- More than **79** participants were supported by Social Farmers in the South Midlands region so far this year.



Conference Highlights



Eithne Egan from mental Health Services jumped lots of hurdles and everyone especially enjoyed her visual images cows jumping hedges!!

To contact the SouthWest Regional Co-ordinator



southwest@socialfarmingireland.ie



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SOCIAL FARMING AROUND THE COUNTRY

Launch of Making
Farms Work for Women
- Supporting Women in
Farming



Welcome Davinia!

We are delighted to welcome new administrator Davinia Martinez to the Social Farming Team; her help and support has become invaluable.

Social Farming in Galway



We attended the **Intreo Work and Skills 2026**
Disability and Carers Engagement Event



Farmer Network Meetings

The farmer meetup for the West was held in Claremorris. This was a great evening of learning and support for all involved



West



Social Farms in The West

Placements

- **25** farms currently have placements, providing meaningful opportunities for participants.
- **2** additional farms are preparing to welcome placements soon.

Farmer Training

- **24** Farms are mid-way through their social farming training. This growth is a testament to the dedication of our farming community to fostering inclusion and social connection. A heartfelt thank you to everyone who has played a part in making this happen.

Social Farming Conference

Social Farmers and Participants from the West pictured at the Conference



To contact the West Regional Co-ordinator



west@socialfarmingireland.ie



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RESEARCH & POLICY ACTIVITY

National Social Farming Ireland Conference

Thank you to everyone who attended our National Social Farming Ireland Conference in April. We were delighted to welcome over 200 attendees to the Heritage Hotel, Portarlington, Co. Laois, including social farmers, participants, health and social care professionals, researchers, academics, and policymakers.

Minister Martin Heydon delivered the opening address, highlighting the valuable role of social farming in supporting agricultural sustainability. He also emphasised its importance as a diversification option for farmers, a community-based support for participants nationwide, and a means of supporting farm succession and generational renewal. Our panel speakers shared valuable insights into the practical outcomes of social farming. Throughout the day, we heard powerful stories from participants, social farmers, and support organisations about the positive impacts of placements. We also explored future plans and reaffirmed our commitment to growing this important service in the years ahead.

Conference Highlight!



Our special thanks to our **academic advisor Professor James Kinsella from the School of Agriculture and Food Science in UCD** for acting as MC for our conference. Prof Kinsella has been a pioneer in advancing the research and development of social farming in Ireland for almost 20 years, and it was fitting that he helped to lead an event celebrating the continued growth and impact of social farming in Ireland.

Winners! RDS Sustainable Rural Social Impact Award

We were delighted to receive the Sustainable Rural Social Impact Award at the RDS Agriculture & Rural Awards 2026. These awards recognise the contributions of individuals, farm families, and organisations to the economic, environmental, social, and cultural development of rural Ireland. Congratulations also to the social farmers recognised for their work in supporting sustainable agriculture and forestry.



Third Level Seminars

This year, our Research and Policy Officer had the opportunity to connect with third-level students, delivering engaging seminars on social farming's impact and outcomes to Occupational Therapy students at the University of Limerick, and to students on UCD's MSc in Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development programme.

Policy Engagement

Engaging with policy and contributing to discussions on agriculture, rural development, and health and social care is a key focus of our Research and Policy Officer. This year, Mary contributed to several research and policy initiatives, including: The BioDirect Industry Roundtable at UCD Lyons Farm, which connects industry, researchers, funders, and policymakers to advance circular bioeconomy value chains. The All-Island Pathways Project, a cross-border initiative led by the Centre for Advanced Sustainable Energy (CASE) at Queen's University Belfast. This project brings together stakeholders from across Ireland and Northern Ireland to explore how agriculture can respond to climate challenges, evolving markets, and the growing bioeconomy, while ensuring a just and inclusive transition.

We look forward to continuing our collaboration with these and other initiatives throughout 2026.



IN THE NEWS

JULY 2026

Brian Smyth was interviewed by Chris Ashmore on Highland Radio to discuss social farming in Co. Donegal



Social farming partnerships are forging life-changing collaborations across the country, between working farmers and vulnerable children and adults, the national social farming conference hears.

<https://www.farmersjournal.ie/life/features/life-changing-connections-forged-through-social-farming-913320>



The positive impact that participating in social farming is having on young people has been highlighted.

<https://www.agriland.ie/farming-news/pilot-programme-shows-positive-impact-of-social-farming-for-youth/>



Ireland a 'leader' in social farming as network marks 10 years
<https://www.agriland.ie/farming-news/ireland-a-leader-in-social-farming-as-network-marks-10-years/>

tipperaryliver

Minister visits Nenagh farm to highlight benefits of social farming initiative -
Tipperary Live

<https://www.tipperaryliver.ie/news/nenagh/2068649/social-farming-initiative-in-tipperary-shows-major-benefits-for-young-peoples-wellbeing.html>



Free Health and Safety Training for Open Days and Events
On farm training:

<https://www.eventbrite.ie/e/health-and-safety-training-for-social-farming-farm-open-days-and-events-tickets-1994016680569>

Online training here:

<https://www.eventbrite.ie/e/health-and-safety-for-social-farming-and-farm-open-days-and-events-tickets-1991991038820?aff=erelpanelorg>

Farm Health and Safety Training
How to safely run Farm Open Days, Farm Events & also Social Farming.
6 Locations available to choose from
limited availability

Locations & dates
August 15th Kildare
August 27th Cork
August 30th Wexford
Sept. 4th Roscommon
Sept. 10th Galway
Sept. 30th Cavan


www.socialfarmingireland.ie
or call 086 8395516 for booking assistance





Farmer Health + Safety Training For Social Farming, Farm Open Days + Events

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

Health & Safety Awareness
10 online repeat sessions
6 on farm trainings

July - September

Limited availability
scan and book here


www.socialfarmingireland.ie
or call 086 8395516 for booking assistance



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news & updates



Social Farming Ireland National Conference 2026

*A decade of connection, inclusion, and
community impact*



**"We Know we are
changing lives with
whats happening in
Social Farming"**

**~Martin Heydon, TD, Minister for
Agriculture, Food and Marine**



Farmers Alan & Helena Carlow with Carlow Youth Services



**Farmer Louise
with parent
Helena from
Cork and Trevor
from Reach
Ability Wexford**



**LDCN Panel Máirín Ó Cuireáin
LDCN with Prof Jim Kinsella UCD, & CEO's of SoFI
Network Companies**



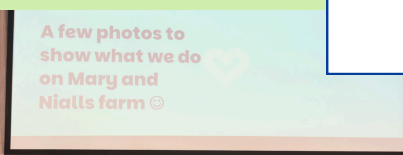
**SoFI Policy & Research
Officer
Dr Mary Brennan**

**"There is not a bottle
with the medication
in it that is as good as
going out to that
farm"**

~Peter Brady, Social Farming Participant, Westmeath



**Farmer Michael from
Tipperary with Bianca &
Theresa from HSE CAMHS
Mid-West and Leanne SoFI**



**Farmers Mary & Niall Galway with Mary & Pascal
Brothers of Charity Galway**



**Charlotte-SoFI, Colette Clarke & Emma Jane
Clarke Social Farmers, Tanya SoFI & Eilís SoFI**



**SoFI Management Team with
Orla Brady & Peter Johnston DAFM**

**Farmer Gerard
Westmeath with
Mental Health
Services
Westmeath**



**From 1 farm and 1 programme to 11 programmes
across the Mid West, Eithne Kennedy's
presentation demonstrated the lasting impact of
social farming, celebrating "9 years of consistent
work from all involved" and encouraging
stakeholders to continue "getting the word out
there" about this "remarkable intervention."**

~Eithne Kennedy, OT Manager, HSE MHS Mid West