



Kerry Social Farming



David Cronin and James Moriarty with John Flynn Support Worker Irene Kavanagh Kerry Social Farming and Irene Brune on her farm at Kimego East, Cahersiveen.

'It's a voluntary and mutual relationship that values the person...'

I HAVE been running a small holdings for people with intellectual disabilities in Camphill and I've worked for Kerry Parents' & Friends assisting people on farms who needed assistance. I believe people with special needs like everybody else need to have some meaningful work and Social Farming is a great model for that.

Most of the people on the autistic spectrum I work with, who may have difficulty communicating, enjoy being outside. I find the participants

feel more valued as ordinary citizens and not so much as a person with a disability. It's meaningful work, it's a social event and it's perfect for people who find it difficult to get work in society.

Often the progress is slow and it's self-confidence that slowly emerges first. The participants build up confidence and they feel valued. From my experience it's the sense of reward the participant gets from it. They thrive in a farming environment.

The working and social relationship is diverse, interesting and creative. You start thinking in a different way and you build up a communication awareness that transfers to other people. The participants are very pure in their behaviour on the farm, they're not masking anything, and I think that's what I personally feel is the most rewarding bit, compared to many other environments. I also can be myself.

People who may be thinking of getting in-

voled should talk to other farmers and see the great personalities of the people they are meeting through Social Farming. Often there is a fear of not knowing how to interact, but go to a farm on a day when a participant is there and get a feel for it. I would also like to see Kerry Social Farming extending to the crafts sector. It's a voluntary and mutual relationship that values the person and not the productivity.

Irene Brune, Kimego East, Cahersiveen



Farmers supporting their local communities



Willie Reidy of Castleisland Community Garden teaching Martin Murphy (Castleisland) the art of setting flowers at Castleisland Community Garden.

'For farmers working on their own, it brings great company...'

MY involvement came about when we were asked to take on participants. Claire is with us and she loves the hands-on aspect. It's a very special project and I'm learning about people with special needs because of it. Many of us are enrolled in a course with UCC that is also helping to broaden our understanding of caring and Social Farming.

We have a lot of perceptions about people with special needs that are often far from true. It's not until you're actually working with someone with special needs that you realise this.

For example, Claire is a fantastic participant and her personality is developed by working as part of a group or on an individual basis. Social Farming creates different dynamics for people with special needs to learn from. It has benefits for a participant that are both mental and physical.

Claire loves being a part of our garden and she loves the poppies and eating poppy seeds the most. She waits for them to turn to seed and I often joke to her that if she keeps eating all the

seeds there will be no poppies next year! There is a huge fun aspect to Social Farming.

I would say to farmers that it's a way of giving back something. A lot of farmers lead hectic lifestyles working on the farm, whereas Social Farming is a way of making you slow down and appreciating your surrounds while doing some good. You'll soon discover that giving some time to Social Farming is the best part of the week. There is a social dividend to be gained from it, and a great sense of self-fulfilment from know-

ing that for those couple of hours it is not about trying to make money or earn a living. Giving something meaningful back to society and an individual is very rewarding. Many farmers work on their own and Social Farming is great company for them.

Willie Reidy,
Castleisland Community Garden