



# Kerry Social Farming

## Social farming has wider societal and rural development benefits ...

I AM delighted to be able to support this very important initiative provided by Kerry Social Farming under the Rural Innovation and Development Fund (RIDF). This fund was set up following a report of the Commission for the Economic Development of Rural Areas (CEDRA) which recommended support for "innovative, small scale pilot initiatives that explore the diverse range of potential identified through the CEDRA process". Since 2015 my Department has provided for this fund of which Social Farming is one of the key initiatives.

Social farming is the practice of offering, on a voluntary basis, farming and horticultural participation in a farming environment as a choice to people who avail of a range of therapeutic day support services. The farm is not a specialised treatment farm; rather it remains a typical work-

ing farm where people in need of support can build relationships and take part in day-to-day farm activities in a non-clinical environment and can be used as a form of social support.

Participation in social farming has been shown to provide benefits such as improved community connections and relationships, increased self-esteem and capacity, improved health and well-being and the opportunity to learn new skills. It provides participants with the opportunity to do 'ordinary things in ordinary places' and is wholly in line with shifts in Irish Government policy in health and social care and in labour activation towards a social model of disability, person-centred planning and community inclusion. Social farming also has wider societal and rural development benefits, such as social and educational opportunities and further integration within the

wider community of people with disabilities or those at risk of social exclusion. In providing supports to individuals in areas such as health, social care and education or work activation, it further expands our understanding of the value of farming and farmers beyond the production of outputs for sale.

I congratulate Kerry Social Farming on offering a person centred approach to placing and providing on-going support for participants (and host farmers) and tailoring each social farm to the needs and wishes of each participant in enhancing the social farm offering.

Michael Creed,  
Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine



## Going farming every week gives me a purpose

MAGS O'DONOGHUE,  
PARTICIPANT

HI, my name is Mags O'Donoghue. I started social farming in 2013. My keyworker in Saint John of God's told me about a new project called Social Farming and I was very interested in trying it out as I come from a farming background.

I started farming with my friend Tim in Eamon's farm in Kilgarvan. I have learned so many new skills since 2013 and I still go to the farm every Wednesday. I really look forward to Wednesdays. Over the years my work has been a mixture of dosing calves, feeding hens, feeding pigs, checking the cows along with helping to fix gates, painting, cleaning up after hedge cutting, raking and everything else that needs doing. The best part is always working alongside Eamon and having the chat so that makes the jobs easier.

Going farming every week gives me a purpose and I love being out in the fresh air. I feel it's been so positive for my self-esteem and confidence and by learning all the new skills it shows my ability not disability.

Social farming has given me the opportunity to have been involved in making a video about Social Farming, sit on a Social Farming committee, I went to the Ploughing Championships, attended awards



ceremonies, visited the Dail, and I have spoken as a Social Farming participant on my experiences being part of Social Farming Kerry.

I love that I am still on Eamon's farm all these years,

Eamon his wife and 2 sons are like family to me and that's why I look forward to Wednesdays every week.

## Brendan loves social farming, especially getting to work outdoors with the animals and farmer George

BRENDAN  
O'SULLIVAN,  
PARTICIPANT

BRENDAN O'Sullivan from Letter, Cahersiveen has been involved in social Farming for approximately 6 years. Brendan travels on the bus from Cahersiveen to George Kelly's farm in Killarney every Wednesday.

Brendan loves social farming, especially getting to work outdoors with the farmer George and working with the animals. Brendan says his favourite thing is working with the animals, there are cows and sheep, two horses, a donkey, goats and ducks on the farm. Brendan likes to feed the animals nuts and grass.

Brendan says he really likes working with George and two of the other participants, he has made good friendships with all of them. Brendan says he has been involved in little projects on the farm, he helped to paint the doors on the stable and is involved in the setting up of the polytunnel.

He is looking forward to growing vegetables and doing some gardening. Brendan also said George has a John Deere Gator with 2 seats and George brings him in the tractor around the farm and he loves this.

Brendan says he looks forward every Wednesday to going to George Kelly's farm.



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Seated left to right: Mags O'Donoghue Social Farm Participant, Joseph McCrohan SKDP, Michelle Angland, Noel Spillane CEO SKDP, George Kelly, Chairman Kerry Social Farming, Lisa Kevney Department Rural Community Development, Niall Kelleher Mayor of Kerry, Paul Geraughty Department Community Rural Development, Michael Cremins, Social Farm Participant, Brendan O'Sullivan Social Farm Participant, Helen Mahony Host farmer, Patricia Kellher Host farmer.  
Standing left to right: Joan Lynch Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, Michelle Ann Houlihan, Kerry ETB, James Doyle, Down Syndrome Kerry, Belinda Gascoigne UCC, Irene Kavanagh SKDP Social Farming Facilitator, Ashling Darcy O'Sullivan SKDP, Kevin Griffin Board SKDP, Eamon O'Reilly, CEO NEWKO, Eadaoin Moynihan SKDP, Batt Healy Support Worker KPF, Julie Brosnan SKDP, Eamon Horgan Host Farmer, Patricia O'Neill Disability Service HSE Kerry, Niamh O'Sullivan LCDC, Helena Switzer KCC, Jacquelynne Murray Kerry Parents and Friends, Rena Blake Social Farming Facilitator.

## Step forward to become a host farmer

WHEN Kerry Social Farming was established in South Kerry by South Kerry Development Partnership in 2013, it did so to innovatively target an increasingly marginalised farming community within the county and to include participants, people with a range of disabilities in the life of their own local community. These two ideas have been the forefront of Kerry Social Farming as it has evolved and grown.

Enhancing the social inclusion of people with disabilities in rural communities is a core objective of Kerry Social Farming. The bottom-up, voluntary-based model of Kerry Social Farming aims to tackle the barriers to social inclusion that people with disabilities in rural communities face, by harnessing the innate community and voluntary spirit in our rural communities. In particular, the farming community is at the heart of rural life in Ireland and thus is ideally placed to facilitate people with disabilities becoming more engaged in their local rural communities.

The vision of Kerry Social Farming is to promote and operate social farming in Kerry as a viable option for achieving improved quality of life, greater inclusion and community networking for people with disabilities.

The Kerry Social Farming project works as a collective in a shared service with the social care service providers, people with disabilities, local communities, local development companies, national and local government, the business community, farm organisations & farm families, to develop and provide social farming opportunities in Kerry. A dedicated working group comprised of these key stakeholders provides the management and operational oversight for the project. I want to take this opportunity to thank the Kerry Social Farming working group members for their dedication and commitment to the project. It would not function without their combined collective efforts.

Funding provided by the Dept. of Agriculture, Food & the Marine through the Rural Innovation

Fund provides the core funding for our project and without this funding our project would not be operational. I want to thank Michael Creed T.D. Minister For Agriculture Food & the Marine and his Dept. for their financial support. It is very much appreciated.

Central to the operation of this project is that the host farmer and families offer their time on a voluntary basis to enable individuals engage in farming life. The Kerry Social Farming Project would not be possible without the very generous voluntary commitment of our host farmers and their families. The commitment and dedication that our host farmers have in supporting and providing opportunities for people with disabilities, across County Kerry, cannot be underestimated and I want to acknowledge and to sincerely thank them for their generosity in providing social farming opportunities for our project participants. I am delighted that this supplement tells their social farming stories.

A special word of thanks to our project participants. You are at the heart of our project and we have been enriched by your participation and contributions in the daily life of our farms. We look forward to your continued participation and positive engagement.

Over the past five years, Kerry Social Farming has achieved steady and sustainable growth increasing from 4 host farmers in 2013 to 19 host farmers to-date in 2019 and increasing from 76 social farming days in the period July to December 2013 to 461 social farming days in the period January to June 2019. Kerry Social Farming participants have also increased from 4 in 2013 to 36 in 2019.

The Kerry Social Farming Working Group has recently completed a five year (2020 - 2024) Development Plan for the project. Our aim is to grow the project to support 100 participants with 50 host farmers. We need to grow the project to meet the level of demand from people with disabilities who wish to avail of Kerry



Social Farming opportunities. Unfortunately despite our growth, we have a waiting list of participants and this list will continue to grow unless we can secure more host farmers to participate. We really need more farmers to become involved in the project and I would urge the farming community in Kerry to get involved in the project by becoming a host farmer. Dedicated Social Farming staff members on-the-ground at an operational level working with the disability service providers, along with funding provided

by our funders ensures supports are in place for both the farmer and the participant.

It is my sincere hope that the stories of our current host farmers and their participants in this publication will encourage more farmers to step forward and become host farmers. We need your support.

George Kelly, Chairperson Social Farming Working Group & Host Farmer



### Kerry Social Farming Contact Details

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