

Social Farming Support Service Northern Ireland Update March 2019



Update March 2019

The first newsletter of 2019 will update you on progress and activity within the Social Farming Support Service for Northern Ireland during January-March 2019. It has been a busy and exciting start to the year with a Presidential visit to a Social Farm a real highlight! Through the Social Farming Referral Fund, more farms have got their first experience of delivering Social Farming, offering more opportunities for individuals in need of support to participate. Different funding routes have been secured to enable farmers to continue to deliver a Social Farming service.

Within this newsletter, you will find an update on the Social Farming Referral Fund and detail on the Presidential visit, the SoEngage project and collaboration with Social Farming Ireland, and an update on the development of Social Farming Standards for delivery in Northern Ireland.

As the first newsletter of 2019, it is important to look forward to the year ahead and build on the significant developments that occurred in the development of Social Farming in Northern Ireland during 2018. Throughout 2019, the work of the Social Farming Support Service will continue to promote the concept and practice of Social Farming and support existing and new Social Farming initiatives within Northern Ireland.

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Social Farming Referral Fund Update

The Social Farming Referral Fund is a partnership fund between the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB), the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) and the Public Health Agency (PHA). The cross-departmental fund was established to increase Social Farming activity on a regional basis through providing opportunities across the 5 Health and Social Care Trusts.

The Referral Fund has been in place since October 2017 and ??? sessions have been delivered on ?? farms by the end of March 2019. Participants referred for this opportunity are individuals receiving support from a Learning Disability or Mental Health service who have expressed an interest in engaging in farming activity. Farmers have increased their Social Farming delivery, returned to delivering a service or had the opportunity to deliver sessions for the first time under the Referral Fund. This increased delivery and participant engagement is key to the development of Social Farming in Northern Ireland.

The Referral Fund opportunity ended in the Western, South Eastern, and Southern Health and Social Care Trusts at the end of March. It will continue in the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust until sessions are fully delivered and utilised by participants. Funding has been secured to continue Social Farming delivery beyond the Referral Fund on some farms, with efforts ongoing to achieve this on all farms available to deliver a service.

President Michael D. Higgins visits An Tobar Social Farm



A fantastic event was held in March to welcome President Michael D Higgins and his wife Sabina to An Tobar Community Wellness Centre and Social Farm in Silverbridge, South Armagh. Situated within the well-established horticulture business and farm of the Finnegan family, An Tobar was established as a social enterprise in April 2018 and is led by sisters Margaret and Kathleen and their father Pat.

Since January 2019, the Finnegans have been delivering Social Farming sessions twice a week for six Learning Disability and Mental Health service users. The Social Farming participants are supported to get involved with the normal farming and horticulture activities on-site. Participants get the opportunity to work with the cows, tend to plants in the polytunnel and garden areas, cut wood, and do general maintenance. The activities are varied and seasonal, allowing participants to develop a range of skills in a socially inclusive environment.

From April 2019, the Social Farming sessions at An Tobar will be extended to a third day each week to enable more service users to benefit from participation.

Rural Support have been supporting the Finnegan family in their Social Farming delivery and promoting its development across Northern Ireland through funding support from the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA).

At the event, Kathleen Finnegan told the crowd assembled, "Mondays and Wednesdays are Social Farming days. We have six adults over the two days who come to experience a working day on a real working farm. This provision will be increased to three days per week from next month. Thank you to Aoibheann Walsh of Rural Support NI and the Southern Health & Social Care Trust for this contract".

President Higgins expressed his pleasure at being in Silverbridge and praised the work of An Tobar. He also described his passionate interests in biodiversity and the environment as well as community development, "I wish all of the participants every success and happiness into the future and may you have the peace and tranquility that all of this place makes possible and that every blessing fall on those who made the decision to make this possible."

Continued Collaboration



Social Farming
Support Service
SFSS (NI)



The collaborative efforts of Rural Support's Social Farming Support Service in Northern Ireland and Social Farming Ireland continued during the January-March 2019 period.



Social Farming Ireland launch of research report



SoEngage – ERASMUS+ Project 2018-2020



SoEngage project meeting, Krakow February 2019



Aoibheann & Jude, Rural Support presenting at SoEngage project meeting

In February 2019, the SoEngage team met in Krakow, Poland for the second project meeting. Rural Support through its Social Farming Support Service are a project partner alongside representatives from 6 regions: United Kingdom, Ireland, Spain, Poland, Germany and Romania. SoEngage – Engaging Farmers in Social Farming – is funded through Erasmus+ KA2 Strategic Partnership in the field of Vocational Education and Training with the objective to develop training to support farmers to engage in Social Farming for economic benefit and sustainability of the farm and the rural community.

Further updates on the project will be provided in newsletters throughout 2019.

Social Farming Standards Development

Work has been ongoing with the development of Social Farming Standards, led by Annie Mullan of Butterlope Farm, Plumbridge on behalf of Rural Support.

A farmer group consultation meeting was held in February, which offered an opportunity for the farmers to see the proposed structure and content of the Standards and provide feedback to Annie. The intention is for the Standards to be operational within 2019. This will increase the governance behind Social Farming delivery in Northern Ireland.



Farmer group consultation meeting

Get in Touch

Please visit the Social Farming section of the Rural Support website: www.ruralsupport.org.uk or follow Rural Support on social media (Twitter: @RuralSupport; Facebook: Rural Support) to keep up to date on developments. You can also contact the Social Farming Service Coordinator on the details below.

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