

## Social Farming

Social Farming is an innovative use of agriculture to promote therapy, rehabilitation, social inclusion, education and social services in rural areas. It is a service delivered by farmers, providing the opportunity for individuals with support needs to get involved in farming in a supportive way. Social Farming activities are structured, meaningful, part of a typical farming week and include a wide range of farming tasks, from caring for livestock to growing vegetables and maintaining the land.

The farm must be operational without Social Farming – Social Farming is delivered for a proportion of the typical working week meaning the farm remains a working farm where people who need support benefit from participating in farm activities in a non-clinical environment. Income from Social Farming delivery can support the sustainability of the farm and a range of different farm sizes and enterprise types can be used for Social Farming delivery.

### Social Farming in Northern Ireland

Since 2015, Rural Support has been responsible for the Social Farming Support Service (SFSS) for Northern Ireland as one element of its broad support to farmers. The SFSS operates with a vision of Social Farming being widely recognised and understood in Northern Ireland, with farmers providing high-quality Social Farming services across the region for individuals in need of support, that are valued by all, accessible for all, and supported through sustainable resources.

#### Social Farming Values:

- It is fundamentally person-centred and individualised, with a strong focus on providing new and innovative opportunities and choices for participants to meet their own goals through spending time on ordinary working family farms.
- It is progressive, aiming to achieve a range
- of positive and life-enhancing outcomes for participants.
- There is a strong focus on providing opportunities for natural connections both with other people and with the natural environment.
- It is providing accessible and real opportunities for social inclusion in communities rather than segregated specialist or clinical settings.
- A high quality of support is fundamental.
- It is underpinned by rigorous governance systems and processes which provide assurances to participants, advocates and the referral organisations that the experience will be valuable, enjoyable and safe for all.

#### Who can use Social Farming services?

A participant is a person availing of a Social Farming service. To date in Northern Ireland, Social Farming participants have been individuals with a Learning Disability and individuals recovering from a Mental Health issue. Individuals from both service user groups have benefitted from the opportunity to engage and contribute by choice in farming and related social activities in rural communities.

As Social Farming delivery expands in Northern Ireland, the range of service user groups participating will grow. Some piloting activity has offered Social Farming to refugees and asylum seekers and other service user groups who can also benefit from participation, including: physical and sensory disability; elderly; elderly with dementia; youth; youth with additional education or supervision needs; long-term unemployed; drug/alcohol rehabilitation; and prisoner rehabilitation.

### **What are the benefits of Social Farming services?**

Social Farming recognises the natural assets of farmers and the farm environment in supporting a person to achieve some of their own chosen goals. It has wide-ranging and far-reaching benefits that are primarily experienced by the participant and the farmer, but which also positively impact rural communities.

- The participant – benefits from being in a natural, outside environment; learns new skills; has the opportunity to care for animals and plants; develops new connections with people; grows in confidence as they achieve and learn on the farm; has a role on the farm and a feeling of doing something worthwhile; is integrated into the local community.
- The farmer – uses their farm and their skills to improve lives; achieves projects/tasks with enthusiastic participants; expands their income with a new service on the farm which has community and social benefits; reconnects with their local community; witnesses their family and community play a part in helping others to have a rewarding experience in a farm environment.

### **Social Farming Standards**

In 2020, Rural Support introduced Social Farming Standards to enable Social Farmers to provide clear evidence of service quality excellence and to practically demonstrate their professionalism in delivering Social Farming. Farmers delivering a Social Farming service will be required to demonstrate that they meet standards under the pillar headings of A Person-centred Service; A Place for All; A Safe Farm Environment.

### **What do I do if I'm interested in Social Farming?**

Rural Support coordinate the Social Farming Support Service in Northern Ireland. Whether you are a farmer, service user, staff member, family member/supporter of a service user, you can make contact on the details below.

**Rural Support's Social Farming Support Service**

Tel: 028 8676 0040

[www.ruralsupport.org.uk](http://www.ruralsupport.org.uk)

