



New Opportunities • Connecting People • Enhancing Lives

## A quick guide for those supporting people in mental health recovery

- Social farming gives people with a range of support needs, the opportunity to spend time and carry out activities on ordinary family farms.
- It uses the natural assets of people, place, environment, and community found on farms, to support people to achieve their own goals and to derive benefits and positive outcomes across many dimensions of health, occupation, and well-being.
- Social Farming is rooted in community-based, person-centred support, which is impossible to replicate in an institutional or clinical setting. It focuses on inclusion, self-determination, and recovery and the Social Farming Ireland model is wholly in line with the core values and principles of Sharing the Vision.



## What happens on a social farm?

Social farms are not specialised 'treatment' farms. They are ordinary working farms where the farmer is trained and receives ongoing mentoring to provide support to participants. Lots of different types of farms offer social farming opportunities, it is the personal qualities of the farmer that are most important!

Social farms provide an ever-changing mix of activities and opportunities for personal growth, for learning, and for simple enjoyment in a natural and 'live' environment. What happens will depend on the season, weather, type of farm operation, and the needs of the farm on a given day but also on the interests, capacities, and choices of the participants.

Everyday ordinary farm activity in a community setting is what makes the farm special and is the most valuable thing it has to offer.

## What might we do

- checking the stock
- feeding and bedding animals
- sowing seeds, weeding, or watering plants
- walking the land
- doing a new project like a chicken coop
- power-hosing
- sweeping the yard
- chopping wood
- making jam
- baking
- meeting the neighbours and wider family
- going for supplies
- having tea and a chat in the farm kitchen....



## What are the Benefits & Outcomes?

While responses to and outcomes from Social Farming are individual to each participant, research has identified a wide range of specific benefits and outcomes.

- Improved mental health and well-being from spending time in the fresh air, in nature, and working with plants and animals.
- The development of real and warm social connections and friendships outside of professional settings.
- Increased sense of belonging and social inclusion.
- Improvements in self-esteem and an increased sense of achievement, purpose, and motivation from having made a positive contribution.
- Reductions in levels of stress and anxiety.
- Significant progression in terms of self-care and self-efficacy.
- Discovery and development of new skills and interests.
- Improved physical fitness and vitality and improved sleep patterns.
- Reduced isolation for those living alone or having limited links within their local community.



## How does Social Farming Work?

- Our Social Farming model is flexible and always aims to respond to individual needs. For example, participants can come as part of a group or on their own. They may attend on a short or more long-term basis, referred to as an enduring placement.
- Participants usually come to a social farm one day per week. We call this a 'placement block', it is usually time-limited over a number of months but is flexible and regularly reviewed.
- There are usually between two and four participants present each day, providing opportunities for social connection, friendship, and peer support amongst participants and with the farmer and farm family.
- Each participant has their own Individual Support Plan (ISP) which sets out their SMART goals for the placement and which can link in with their person-centred care plan. This ISP is developed in a collaborative way and aims to identify support needs or particular risks or challenges.
- Depending on their needs, some participants will have support staff with them on the farm, but many will come to the farm independently. However, a support worker/key worker or advocate should be contactable by phone for the duration of the placement.
- The value embedded in Social Farming is substantial and multi-dimensional and farmers are paid for the valuable supports they provide on their farms, usually on the basis of a daily rate to cover costs. Working through Social Farming Ireland, placements can be commissioned by a person, a family, a funder, services, or agencies, and by mental health advocates /groups on behalf of the person/people they support.

## Best Practice in Social Farming

Social Farming Ireland have developed a rigorous set of best practice processes and procedures which are designed to:

- Ensure safe, meaningful, and enjoyable engagements/experiences.
- Provide continual opportunities for participants to shape their own placement.
- Provide a high level of governance and quality assurance for commissioners of placements and for participants themselves.

Key pillars of good practice include: farmer training, including on-farm health and safety mentoring; induction days on farms for all (potential) participants; the use of ISPs, the drawing up of a Memorandum of Understanding for placements; and end-of placement reviews. All farmers we work with must meet our standards for practice.



# How can I make Social Farming happen for the person/people I support?

As a first step, contact the Social Farming Ireland National Office or the Social Farming Ireland Regional Development Officer in your area. All contact details are on our website [www.socialfarmingireland.ie](http://www.socialfarmingireland.ie) or call the National Office at 071-9641772.

This contact will be your gateway to exploring and gaining information on:

- Social Farming generally (how it works, benefits, outcomes).
- Whether Social Farming might be a good choice for you or for the person/people you support.
- The social farms which are in your area and what they individually have to offer.
- How the placement can be funded and supported (placement costs, transport, staffing, etc.)
- Any other questions or concerns you might have.



## Social Farming Ireland

Social Farming Ireland provides a range of services which support the development of Social Farming nationally. We provide training and developmental support to social farmers to provide safe and effective opportunities for participants. We work with people themselves, with advocates, and with health, social care, and other support services/organisations to activate placements on these farms throughout the country. We provide operational and financial governance for the development of Social Farming. Alongside this, we provide ongoing research and evaluation of practice at a national level.

Social Farming Ireland is based in Leitrim Development Co., Drumshanbo, Co. Leitrim and is funded by the Department of Agriculture, Food, and the Marine. Regional Development Officers (RDOs) are based in four regional hubs, ensuring that there are local sources of support to social farmers, services, participants, and their families and to those interested in Social Farming. These 4 hubs support activity in all counties of Ireland and are based in Leitrim Development Company CLG (Border-Midlands-East), West Limerick Resources CLG (South-West), South West Mayo Development CLG (West), Waterford Leader Partnership CLG, (South-East).