

SICAP Case Study 2019

West Cork 18-5

October 2019

Goal 2: -

**People with Disabilities and /or Poor Mental Health
Identified as target group for Social Farming (SF)**

“Social Farming brings in so much activity, including fitness, health, fresh air, skills, motor function, day/night rhythm, sleep, promotes well-being, sense of belonging, coping ability, enthusiasm, happiness, creates the sense of self-esteem, self-confidence, contact with animals, personal responsibility, social relationships, communication and social skills development, social interactions, inclusion, vocational knowledge, practical skills, meaningful routine, time management and recovery.” - West Cork Community Mental health Nurse.



**Social Inclusion &
Community Activation
Programme**



An Roinn Tithíochta, Pleanála,
Pobail agus Rialtais Áitiúil
Department of Housing, Planning,
Community and Local Government



Ireland's European Structural and
Investment Funds Programmes
2014-2020

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**Cork
County Council**
Comhairle Contae Chorcaí



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The Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) 2015-2017 is funded by the Irish Government and co-funded by the European Social Fund and includes a special allocation under the Youth Employment Initiative.

The Role and Contribution of SICAP

The SICAP programme has taken the lead in introducing and managing the introduction of Social Farming into West Cork. Following a period of pre-development, the project commenced frontline services in July 2018 and grew substantially in 2019.

In initial period, WCDP recruited farm families who are interested in being hosts for the project. This involved targeting suitable farm families and providing training for the role. Fortunately after many years of providing supporting to low income farm families throughout West Cork, WCDP staff have a substantial network and relationship with a large number of farm families.

WCDP have extensive networks and contacts with service providers built up over the years and therefore were in a good position to engage with agencies and support services for referrals to Social Farming.

WCDP held meetings with the following organisations located in Bantry and covering the South West regions as part of the predevelopment process:

- National Learning Network,
- Home focus,
- Co-Action,
- Rehab Care Bantry
- HSE, Centre for Mental Healthcare and Recovery.

WCDP outlined the concept of Social Farming and the process involved with placing potential participants on the Social Farming project.

Training for Farm Families

An intensive training programme was developed to prepare to Host Social Farming Participants. This programme was developed in partnership with Leitrim Partnership and West Limerick Resources (WLR).

Social Farming Training was completed in April 2018 organised by WLR Regional Development Officer. The modules covered were:

- Induction and Background to Social Farming.
- Support Framework and Planning for Practice.
- Farm Health and Safety
- Mental Health Awareness

All Farmers and workers involved in Social Farming completed the training programme. And a Garda Vetting process. Health and Safety audits were carried out on the farms by Farm Relief Services. This covered elements such as access to the farm and facilities, safe working environment, chemical stores, machinery, animal housing and handling facilities.



Figure 1 A farm presented in a safe and suitable working environment.

All social farmers have an underlying commitment to Social Farming as a social good rather than any financial reward that they receive. The payment to host farms is minimal and will only cover additional costs for ensuring farm is suitable to host the placement in the first instance. However from a SICAP perspective we are interested in exploring whether an expansion of this role can augment the income of low income farm households in the future, only for those households that are suitable.

In the 2018/2019 pilot, we have utilised and availed of funding from the Department of Agriculture through the Social Farming National Office and West Limerick Resources. The host farmers are providing this service and are getting paid a small contribution for their time.

If Social Farming becomes a mainstream programme funded from Department of Health or HSE or other Government Department, it has the possibility to provide an excellent programme that matches the needs of society and provide a new income source for appropriate civic minded farmers.

All the host farmers have said that this service has widened their networks of people and has given them a great sense of satisfaction from the feedback that they have received from participants and the service providers.



Figure 2 some of our host farmers and a participant. (With sheep)

Open Day event November 2018



Peer Learning Training Day May 2019. Participant farmers visited a social Farm in Limerick and heard from a variety of host farmer about their experiences of Social Farming.



The Referral Process

Home Focus (National Learning Network project) referred a participant onto the social farming project in West Cork. Home Focus provide outreach, and individualised support to people with severe and enduring mental illness who are at risk of being isolated because of their inability or unwillingness to access traditional, centre-based models of service delivery. Our contact was the non-clinical mental health recovery officer.

The Participant had experienced many health problems and mental health issues. Participant went onto social farm placement.

Over a period of time, the participant opened up to host farmer and talked about the various challenges that participant had faced over the years. The farmer went on to provide a listening ear and built up rapport with participant. The training provided to the farmer in advance of the programme was invaluable in this circumstance.

The host Farmer provided considerable support and helped with other practical matters to improve the participant's quality of life.

The non-clinical mental health recovery officer commented that Social Farmer had restored the participants faith in humanity from what farmer had done for him, and from what social farming had achieved for participant getting life back on track and stabilising participant's personal life.

It was determined that due to participant going on placement his quality of life improved immensely.

Our WCDP 2019 social farming placement programme involved 4 placements so far.

3 out of the 4 completed the placement, with 1 participant dropping out.



7 more placement referrals are pending from HSE and Rehab Care and CoAction. We are currently negotiating host farms for these placements which should commence before year end.

What Happens on the Social Farm Placement: -

Describe a Day.

The day begins with a cup of tea, and a chat to discuss what is going on that day on the farm.

There are always tasks kept back for when participant is on the farm.

Most of participants enjoy working with livestock on our host farms two of the farmers are sheep farmers and the third is a beef farmer.

On the sheep farm work would be firstly observing stock in the field, identifying stock that required handling and stock are brought into holding pen and allowed through the sheep race to check what or if there was a problem .

The farmer would sort out the issue with the participant providing assistance, reading the sheep tag number recording details for paper requirements.

Participant B referred to how she had enjoyed the working with sheep, on the day that shearing was going ahead made arrangements with CMHN to attend and helped bag the wool and to herd the flock.

On all farms there would be yard maintenance, cleaning , at some times there would be some flower planting and usually jobs or tasks would be time limited in that they would be a finishing or conclusion stage so that participants would have the satisfaction of completing task.



Margaret O'Rourke of Scally's SuperValu, Clonsilla, presenting

No tractor work or power tools used by farmer while participant on the farm.

For days that might be wet indoor work such as tidying up shed areas was always kept to fill the day

One of the host farmers reported that on one wet day and they were having the tea and in no hurry to head out into the yard (because it was so wet)participant commented I taught farmers were hard working and out in all weathers, at that point farmer felt they had to go out.

Social farmer has recently won an award in the Sustainability & Diversification section for his involvement and diversification into Social Farming

Feedback from Participant A

Below are direct quotes and extract from a feedback from participant B – Female.

Loved the farming

Family lovely

Sheep on the farm

When on the farm in good form.

Had needed hospitalisation in wellness and recovery department of hospital (psychiatric). Social farming day was always a Wednesday so on the days running up to it feeling down but on the Wednesday it cleared away because of going onto farm.

No days on the farm were the same always variety of work on farm.

'dealing with animals there was no fight back or arguments with animals you know what reactions you get not so with humans'

*'What did go wrong for me was when it finishes you go down for week or so, because it means so much to me.'*¹

Made 2 good friends forever friends host farmer and wife.

Got to know other members of host family's son and his wife and grandson,

Sons wife is a Garda and this helped me there with my fear, realise that guards are normal.

The farmers that I met through Social Farming all nice and down to earth all want to help they want you to be the person you want to be.

They show you how to do things rather than telling you what to do.

Treated well by Family and treated as part of household.

Day always started with a cup of tea and a bite to eat always asked how I was and if I had any news hospitality great as well.

They asked if I minded doing the work planned was for the day.

Farmer actually pleasant with to farm animals.

Got to know people.

The work was always good.

Long term I would like to get a job or volunteer on a farm just to work with animals and the feeling it gives me.

It gave a routine and felt part of place, different job everyday always enjoyed it .

Social Farming was not about the work.

I have told nurses OT's doctor about Social Farming .

Head Doctor asked me what special about Social Farming compared to other activities during the week such as centre or work placement in the community.

I told him that I have the animals on the farm, that it helped me an awful lot and that I had things to talk about to people, and to others that are on Social Farming placement.

Above all she explained that she had made two great friends in the couple that are providing this service in the Bantry Area.

¹ [Note: - For reasons of financial commitment and medical evaluation - Initially each placement consists of 10 weeks and then a period of evaluation of the placement takes place. We have since introduced a follow on 8 week placement period. A second placement was organised for participant B and another 10 week placement has since been completed and participant fully understood that there was an end date and this has ensured that on completion on the second occasion that there wasn't a downturn in mental health. We are striving towards the introduction of a long-term placement period.]

The HSE Community Mental Health nurse said that the social farming placement is keeping this person out of hospital and is a win win situation for everyone involved and is a great support and allows people the space to recover and build up their resilience and confidence.

The MH Community nurse (MHCN) accompanied the participant on placement at the start and after a few weeks CN stepped back and drove participant to farm and then left to allow participant to build up her own independence, and build confidence and resilience from placement this has worked well and so much so that the OT expressed that for the future with new referrals now that she has seen how the process works and the calibre of people that are involved with Social Farming that she would highly recommend it to others attending the Centre.



Participant B,

Loved going out on the farm and out of centre.

Always arrived to centre full of life and wanting to go right away, his support worker accompanying participant onto farm said that once they landed on farm he was bursting to get out doors and go and feed the cattle that were housed in winter.

At one point when cattle out in field there was an electric fencer across blocking the gate participant was not going to wait to take down wire but looking to hop over wire because of such rush to get to see or do work on farm.

Worker said it was great to see such enthusiasm and positivity from participant.²

On completion of placement participant returned to farm with mother, to show her where he had been and brought her on a tour of parts of the farm.

Mother explained that the chat about what was going on in the farm or what had happened was the talk at home on his return on each occasion after the social farming placement day.

It gave a new interest and provided a new outlet and interest and participant had felt a home from home.

² Feedback from care worked noted that such energy from this participant was most unusual.

Evaluation of Impact: -

Many of the participants were not suitable to be interviewed directly, so in some cases the care services provided the feedback on the impact of the social farming activities.

Benefits to Participant

Each of the participants that have availed of Social Farming have expressed that they have enjoyed their experience and would like to continue with the placement.

They have opted for Social Farming even on days that it clashed with other fun activities. Example of this recently was where participant when asked if wanted to attend a garden fete with students of REHAB Bantry opted instead to attend at host Farm.

Participant when commenced placement was very shy and reserved as the relationship built up and participant felt involved and more relaxed, engaged more with the family and talked and not overwhelmed by experience of being in the home. The person stated that that they felt more a part of household and not an outsider or visitor to farm.

Participants mental health improved. It was clear watching and seeing the improvement of participants on SF. Their self-confidence and self-esteem improved, they felt part of farm and that they had duties and work to do there. The Social farm placement complemented the various service providers, as well as the mental health recovery and wellness centres work in providing the a new experience for participants to engage socially with host farmers and family members, and to do farm work be it with animals or crop husbandry and general tasks on farms this was different to being in a service as it gave people a new setting to reduce or distract people from feelings of depression tension or fatigue. It changed peoples mind set and gave them a new interest and focus and over time improved the underlying mental health.

It was clear from talking with participants and there overall demeanour that SF had changed peoples outlook. Social Farming often referred to as non-medical treatment which has been shown to be the case and reduced in some cases the need for hospitalisation.

Feedback from HSE Mental Health Community Nurse....

"Participant Looked forward to Social Farming placement and it was the highlight of the week for the participant. I.e. The week revolved around Social Farming Placement. The day on farm was a Wednesday and the HSE CMHN said that the week was counted down to being back out on the farm and on Thursday count down began again.

OT expressed the opinion that Social Farming was keeping this participant out of hospital and that it was the work with animals and the freedom that it provided that improved the sense of well-being and has literally kept person out of hospital and wellness and recovery.

The nurses remarked that come Tuesday participant B's health improved from looking forward to the Wednesday farming day.

Feedback from a Parent...

Another previous participants parent explained that on the return from the farm, the participant had new stories to tell about the work they had been doing, animals on the farm and people that they had

met. It gave participant a new interest and things to talk about to other members of the family and filled their conversations with experiences to talk about.

**Interview with Community Mental Health Nurse - Bantry Sector,
Centre for Mental Health Care and Recovery.**

The CMHN suggested that Social Farming joined many aspects of peoples health in the “one go” from physical health, physiological health and mental health all combining effectively within Social Farming.

Social Farming connecting people back into community.

Host farmers and families always so welcoming, and treat participants as part of family. These relationships are a big part of the benefit. Being so warm and so genuine was a profound positive outcome. The outcome of social farming was that it reduced participant need for in patient admission.

Other nurses on duty within the centre noticed how various participants form and outlook changed on the day prior to going onto Social Farm. CMHN said that she would love to give other people the opportunity to avail of Social farming.

The CMHN accompanies the participant on the journey to the farm in their car. This journey enabled a very positive conversation to happen between the participant and the nurse in a different environment and this conversation was very different that the kinds of conversations that were taking place in the recovery centre.

Both CMHN and participant loved being part of project and going onto host farm as well you get a sense of what is happening on farm and the chat to participants about what is happening on farm.

It allows participant to talk of normal stuff and away from the condition and treatment.

Speaking about the outcomes for participant B

MHN felt that it had helped to get a sense of herself overall well-being and lessened the level of resources needed. Participant was still in contact with service but that needs where much less and no requirement for in patient stays. Has given a better place mentally. It's impact is really strong, getting people out to nature and community.

Walking and moving are tied into so many aspects of human health and is better than institutional care/treatment.

Consultant Psychiatrist would support this and is fully aware of outcomes to participants from Social Farming.

Interview with Rehab Care Bantry staff post Placement completion

The interview took place in a group format with two members of staff, Community support worker and a Programme Facilitator with SICAP development officer project leader.

On discussing the benefits that they have seen that participants have gained with being involved with Social Farming they expressed the opinion that participants had gained a lot from it in so many ways. That there has been many aspects to it. Key to these are: -

- It brings structure to the day,
- Burnt off energy
- Helped participant in their dealings with other service users.
- Brought calm and good mood into the day
- Provided a sense of place,
- Enjoyment.

One staff member explained that participants mother reported that the Social farming placement was life changing for participant. It had given him the motivation and enthusiasm to do more and to go out in the fresh air and was also more involved on their own home farm and showing the types of work that had been done on host farm.



Challenges for Social Farming as WCDP see for the future.

Currently we have participants on placement who want to continue with the placements. WCDP have new referrals seeking to get a placement onto Social Farming. While this is a good sign that programme is demonstrating its success, it also highlights that we need to increase the numbers of farmers providing Social Farming. Our greatest problem is the financial commitment required from HSE or other care service providers. The budget for this service falls between 2 key departments – Health and Agriculture. However if we go and recruit widely it will be harder to support it financially going forward. The Department of Agriculture budget is a 3 year funding stream with one year remaining. For the last year WCDP have availed of funding from Department of Agriculture pilot funding and has linked into this funding stream through West Limerick Resources. Future plans for individualised personal budgets for service users may open up future funding opportunities when this evolution takes place.

WCDP see the opportunity for some farmers to generate an alternative income source from Social Farming while it is not being promoted as such it does have the potential to be a significant alternative income source (sufficient to alter the core economics of the farm).

While WCDP in this SICAP delivered pilot have concentrated on working with people with disabilities and/or poor mental health, the project is suitable for wider community such as long term unemployed, young people, probation services.

At WCDP open day in November 2018 Minister Jim Daly committed to secure ongoing funding for project as he could see the good work that project has done.