



Web: www.socialfarmingireland.ie



New Opportunities • Connecting People • Enhancing Lives

1st September 2020

**Draft Interventions for CAP Strategic Plan
Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine**

Social Farming provides the opportunity for **people who are experiencing challenges in their lives to receive support and carry out day-to-day activities on typical working family farms**. The natural assets of the people, place and community are used in new ways to provide non-clinical, personalised and outcome-focused supports which are in tune with participant's own choices, goals and needs. It also has a small but growing role to play in maintaining and developing the social and economic fabric of rural areas and in supporting a multi-functional model of agriculture. Social Farming is innovative in the Irish context as it activates and motivates latent rural assets and stimulates new collaborations by the agricultural / farming sector with state services in the Health, Social Care, Justice, Youth and others sectors. **Social Farming** has experienced significant growth and development in Ireland in the last decade; between 2017 and 2020, the Social Farming Ireland Network Project funded by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine supported some 700 participants to experience social farming placements and over 100 farmers from every corner of the country were trained and were either active social farmers or on the journey to becoming so. This work continues and will expand further in the Social Farming Network Project 2020-2025.

Research undertaken by Social Farming Ireland has found that **farmers who deliver on inclusion supports through Social Farming benefit in a variety of ways** and that many of these benefits also have a **wider societal and rural development impact**:

- Social Farming provides an additional or multifunctional income source; this is increasingly paid for by state services who see the value and benefits for their clients in a social farming placement. Health and Social care supports have fully commissioned (ie. fully funded) close to 50% of placements in 2020 and have partly funded the remainder in conjunction with the DAFM sampling fund provided through the SoFI network.
- There is enhanced use of the assets of the farm including personal, capital and labour assets which increases the financial and social sustainability of the farm.
- Farmers typically experience a renewed sense of purpose and strategic thinking in relation to the farm business. It can and does encourage further farm diversification and the pursuit of income generation opportunities outside of increased farm production - recent research found this to be the case for 57% of social farmers surveyed.
- It can have a positive impact on farm succession - 56% of social farmers of farmers in recent research stated that the experience of social farming had encouraged deeper interest or involvement in the farm from the next generation in their family.
- Social farmers report a strong sense of well-being and personal satisfaction from supporting the participants and from seeing the outcomes of the placement in their lives.
- It revitalises and builds understanding of farming in wider society and establishes connections between farmers and the wider community and between urban and rural areas



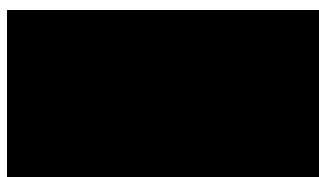
An Roinn Talmhaíochta,
Bia agus Mara
Department of Agriculture,
Food and the Marine



- There is significantly enhanced farm health and safety and active safety management which is promoted and supported by the SoFI team and consultants.
- Becoming a social farmer always involves some degree of farm improvement to prepare farms for social farming, from the relatively simple tidying and cleaning of yards, sheds, etc. to fencing, levelling of paths and roadways, etc to more significant capital investments in buildings in the case of a small number of farms.
- A very large number of environmental or biodiversity enhancements are associated with preparation of the farm for Social Farming and with Social Farming activity itself. All social farmers surveyed in a recent study have carried out general tidying and cleaning of the farmyard and sheds, waste disposal, etc. and significant activity has also happened in the area of woodland/forestry (38% of farms), vegetable growing (20%), encouraging wildflowers (13%) and the encouragement of wildlife habitats (11%).

Social farming has particular relevance and value amongst farmers operating small to medium non-intensive farms where there is a range of activities for participants and where there is typically a strong emphasis on the maintenance of traditional farming skills and equipment, on organic or chemical free agriculture, on animal welfare and on the heritage and ecological value of the farm landscape, buildings and operations. Support for social farming from within CAP can play a real role in enhancing the economic and social viability and sustainability of these types of smaller family farms and in supporting the agro-ecological approach which they are already modelling. Support from the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine under the Social Farming Network Project (2020-2025) provides funding for Social Farming Ireland to stimulate placements on social farms and to provide training and developmental supports for farmers to enable them to provide supports safely and effectively.

One gap which remains at the farm level is funding for carry out the kind of small-scale capital projects necessary to prepare and enhance the farm to optimise both the safety/welfare and the quality of the experience for participants in Social Farming. The kind of small capital projects which might be undertaken include: installation of facilities which make the farm suitable for those with physical disabilities or limitations (e.g. disabled toilets, ramps, railings, etc.); conversion/renovation of outbuildings for use as workshops or for refreshments; levelling of paths or roadways, etc. Other typical projects such as the installation of polytunnels or raised beds, projects which enhance biodiversity and encourage wild-life, etc. will also deliver an environmental dividend and contribute to a more sustainable food system. In light of this, **Social Farming Ireland request that a capital fund specifically dedicated to the development of social farms be included in the CAP Strategic Plan for the period 2023-2027.** We would envisage that such a fund, which would provide funding to a up to €5,000 per farm with a 75% level of funding. This would enable those farmers with limited access to capital but enormous potential as social farmers to make the kind of changes and enhancements which would support the very valuable practice of Social Farming.



Social Farming Ireland