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National Report: Social Farming in Northern Ireland

**Social Farming Support Service
SFSS (NI)**



- *Meaningful Activities*
- *Social Inclusion*
- *Personal Development*

028 8676 0040 07736158983
www.ruralsupport.org.uk



 

Aoibheann Walsh, Rural Support
Social Farming Support Service Coordinator

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SOCIAL FARMING IN NORTHERN IRELAND

This report provides an overview of the state of the art of Social Farming in Northern Ireland as of March 2019.

POLICY/BACKGROUND:

Farming overview

Agriculture is of key importance to both the economy and the cultural identity of Northern Ireland. In June 2018, there were 24,895 active farm businesses in Northern Ireland with the majority (19,188) classified as very small. Average farm size is 41.1 hectares. Grazing livestock – dairy farms and cattle and sheep – is the main farm type with relatively few farms depending predominantly on cropping. Almost all farms in Northern Ireland have owned land and just under half include at least some rented land. In 2018, the total income from farming was £360 million, a reduction of 23% from 2017, which resulted from a higher total cost for feedstuffs purchased by the sector (DAERA 2019). Farmers in Northern Ireland receive, on average, higher levels of subsidy payments from the European Union. This is due to a higher proportion of farmers being located in Less Favoured Areas (LFAs) and the higher proportion of cattle and sheep farms, which receive a higher subsidy (www.parliament.uk, 2018).

While rewarding, farming can involve many pressures related to the farm business, the farmer, the farm family home, and external factors (Rural Support 2019). Brexit has increased levels of uncertainty about the future of farming in Northern Ireland and how the family farm will be affected. Farm diversification or multifunctional farming are affected by pressures such as lack of access to finance, no interest amongst family members, and poor broadband (NFU Mutual 2018).

National policy on Social Farming/related to Social Farming

There is no specific national policy on Social Farming currently in Northern Ireland. However, as an initiative that delivers across a number of government departments' responsibilities including agriculture and rural development, health and social care, training, education and employment, there are various policies related to Social Farming.

Of most direct relevance to Social Farming are those within the health and social care sector and rural development area. In relation to rural development, the Programme for Government 2007-2011 contained a commitment for the development of a Rural White Paper to bring together all government departments to create a vision for rural areas and the actions needed to achieve that vision and to help ensure the future sustainability of rural areas. The Rural Needs Act of 2016 introduced a new duty on Northern Ireland departments, district councils, and other public authorities to have due regard to rural needs when developing, adopting, implementing or revising policies, strategies and plans, and when designing and delivering public services.



Health and social care policy and practice overview

Health and social care in Northern Ireland is governed by the Department of Health and the Health and Social Care Board and delivered predominantly by 5 geographical Health and Social Care Trusts – Northern, Belfast, South Eastern, Southern, and Western.

Health and social care policy developments since 2001 have advocated a person-centred, community-based approach to service provision. These policies listed below support the need for Social Farming as a service that focuses on the individual and is rooted in the rural community.

- Valuing People, 2001
- Bamford Review, 2007
- Valuing People Now, 2009
- Transforming Your Care: Vision to Action, 2011
- Day Opportunities, 2014
- Health and Wellbeing 2026: Delivering Together, 2016

The policy direction is focused on inclusion, supporting people, recovery, recognising behaviours that challenge/communicate, and choice and control. The model of Day Opportunities in particular highlights how policy is moving in a direction suited to the delivery of Social Farming in rural communities. Day Opportunities are defined as a menu of community-based day time activities which will engage and support adults with a learning disability in areas such as: paid employment; accredited further and higher education; volunteering; social enterprise activity, opportunities to meet and make friends, use local leisure and recreational facilities and pursue other interests. These services should be discrete from traditional buildings-based Day Services and access to day opportunities should be in non-segregated general transport provision. Day Opportunities should aim to empower individuals to access and participate in activities independently (Health and Social Care Board, 2014).

PRACTICE:

Social Farming in Northern Ireland

Definition of Social Farming

In Northern Ireland, Social Farming is promoted as an innovative use of agriculture to promote therapy, rehabilitation, social inclusion, education and social services in rural areas. The farm is not a specialised treatment farm; rather the farm remains a typical working farm where people in need of support can benefit from participation in the farm's activities in a non-clinical environment. It also creates the opportunity to reconnect farmers with their local communities through the opening up of their farms as part of the social support system of the community.



Timeline of development of Social Farming in Northern Ireland

Social Farming is about people. The farmers delivering a Social Farming service are committed to using their farm and their skills to improve lives. The participants making the choice to engage are being supported in rural communities to learn, to connect, and to achieve their potential. The progress made to date has established a strong foundation for further growth.

Figure 1 highlights key elements in the development of Social Farming in Northern Ireland.



Figure 1: Development of Social Farming in Northern Ireland

Overview of development

The Social Farming Across Borders (SoFAB) project (2011-2014) piloted Social Farming in Northern Ireland and the border counties of the Republic of Ireland. The project resulted in practising Social Farmers and provided an evidence base that the concept works in a Northern Ireland context. In October 2015, the Social Farming Support Service was launched within the charity Rural Support and exists to support existing and new Social Farmers to provide an effective service that referral organisations are aware of. This service is funded by the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA).

Social Farmers and farmers interested in the concept is growing as awareness is increased and the benefits are understood. In 2016, Social Farming taster sessions were facilitated through Rural Support with funding received from the Public Health Agency. A Social Farming Capital Grant Scheme was made available by DAERA in 2016 and 2017 to enable farmers engaged in the concept to adapt their facilities and improve accessibility with the aim of benefitting Social Farming service users and the farm enterprise.

A Social Farming Referral Fund was developed in 2017 to increase Social Farming on a regional basis with each of the 5 Health and Social Care Trusts receiving an allocation to fund sessions in their area. This Fund is a partnership between DAERA, the Health and Social Care



Board and the Public Health Agency to support the sustainable development of the practice in Northern Ireland.

DAERA Support for Social Farming

DAERA continues to fund Rural Support's Social Farming Support Service through its Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation (TRPSI) Framework to further develop the network of service providers and users. They also provide advice to farmers on Social Farming best practice and they also have a coordination role with stakeholders including the Health and Social Care Board, the Public Health Agency, the Health Trusts and the agriculture sector. DAERA provided a Social Farming Capital Grant in 2016 and 2017 of up to £4,999 to farmers to complete capital works and/or provide equipment for the benefit of social farming service users and the farm enterprise.

Cross-departmental funding for a Social Farming Referral Fund was also secured in September 2017. The funding partners are the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB), the Public Health Agency (PHA) and DAERA. This fund has enabled an increase in Social Farming activity on a regional basis through engagement with the 5 Health and Social Care Trusts.

Catherine McCallum, Director of DAERA's Rural Affairs Division noted in 2018, "Social Farming can have a hugely positive impact on farmers and their families, as well as making a real difference in the lives of those who spend time on the farms. A lot has been achieved since the early research and social farming now has a solid foundation in Northern Ireland. I am confident that it will continue to grow and develop in the years ahead."

DAERA have also funded a PhD study in Social Farming, which commenced in 2017. The aim of this study is to strengthen the evidence base for the practice in Northern Ireland for the farmers delivering a Social Farming service and participants choosing to engage.

Health service support for Social Farming

In 2018, Iolo Eilian, Social Care Commissioning Lead within the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) noted "Social Farming adds to the current range of Day Services available to individuals receiving support from a Learning Disability or Mental Health service and promotes greater involvement in community life, allowing them to expand their social contacts and improve their health and wellbeing."

Rural Support's Social Farming Support Service

The Social Farming Support Service acts with these two main roles:

1. Support existing and new Social Farming initiatives
2. Promote Social Farming

The function of the service in Rural Support has changed since it was initially funded in 2015. Highlighting the need for and securing regional funding support for Social Farming has become an important element of its work.



Number of farms

Social Farming is being delivered by farmers regionally in Northern Ireland. Its development is linked to support for the practice in the 5 Health and Social Care Trusts areas, as outlined in the table below. Social Farming is currently being delivered on 18 farms across Northern Ireland, a significant growth from the 10 farm involved in the SoFAB project. Table 1 provides detail on where the farms are located on a per country and Health and Social Care Trust basis.

Table 1 – Social Farming practice in Northern Ireland

County	Number of farms	H&SC Trust area	Number of farms
Antrim	2	Northern	1
Down	5	Belfast	1
Armagh	3	South Eastern	3
Tyrone	3	Southern	5
London/derry	3	Western	8
Fermanagh	2		

The number of farms is directly related to the funding being available for the farmers to deliver a Social Farming service. An additional 9 farms have either experience in delivering Social Farming or have had the necessary preparations to do so. A further group of farmers have expressed an interest with Rural Support about doing so.

Farm type

The farms delivering a Social Farming cover a range of farming enterprises as outlined in the Table below. There are no exclusions or requirements in relation to farm type when delivering Social Farming beyond the need for meaningful activities that are ordinarily completed as part of a farming day, week or year.

Table 2 – Social Farming and farm type

Farm type	Number of farms
Sheep	5
Sheep & beef	1
Sheep & equine	2
Beef & equine	3
Horticulture	2
Beef & plant	5

While the farm types outlined above highlight the main enterprise of the 18 farms currently active, all have some additional element that means they could be described as mixed enterprises which offer a variety of activities for Social Farming participants.



Profile of farmers delivering Social Farming

The farmer is key to the provision of a Social Farming service. In their role they supervise and guide the participants in the farm environment and while engaging in the farm activities. For their time and the resources they input to Social Farming sessions, they are remunerated as service providers. Farmers are not required to have any specific qualifications or background experience prior to commencing a Social Farming service on their farm. The main focus is their commitment to provide meaningful activities in a supportive environment for people in need of support. No distinct profiling of farmers delivering a Social Farming service has been undertaken in Northern Ireland as yet but the general points below apply:

- Farmers are motivated by a recognition of what they and their farm can offer people who wish to be involved in farming;
- There is typically a 'lead farmer' providing the service who may be supported by family members or volunteers in delivering sessions;
- The farmer or a member of the farm family may have professional or personal experience in supporting individuals with a disability or Mental Health issues;
- Farmers structure their working week around their Social Farming provision – typically one or two days per week – to ensure activities which participants can't be involved in do not happen during sessions.
- The farmer experiences satisfaction from supporting participants to learn new skills and grow in confidence; has company when working; achieves projects/tasks that are much easier to complete with the help of enthusiastic participants; witnesses their family and community play a part in helping others to have a rewarding experience in a farm environment.

Social Farming participants overview

Social Farming participants in Northern Ireland are predominantly individuals with a Learning Disability and individuals recovering from a Mental Health issue. A proportion of the collective group of participants have a dual diagnosis (both Learning Disability and Mental Health recovery) or have an additional support need (eg. sensory disability or impairment, physical disability, dementia) but are referred for their primary support need.

One funded project with refugees and asylum seekers as Social Farming participants commenced in January 2019 on one farm.

The standard ratio is for 3 participants to be supported during a Social Farming session to ensure that the farmer can adequately supervise activities. It is possible for more participants to engage if the farmer has additional support from family members or volunteers.

A Social Farming participant benefits from being in a natural, outside environment; learns new skills; has the opportunity to care for animals and plants; develops new relationships with people; grows in confidence as they achieve and learn on the farm; have a role on the farm and a feeling of doing something worthwhile; is integrated into the local community.

Participants travel to farms in a variety of means related to transport availability, cost, and their support needs. Farmers do collect participants from local villages if transport cannot reach the farm. Participants are encouraged to bring their own lunch with the farmer providing tea/coffee for breaks. Some farmers do offer food as part of their service provision or if baking/cooking is an activity during a session it can be eaten by the participants.



Activities offered

Farmers offer a variety of meaningful activities to Social Farming participants including:

- working and caring for animals – feeding, bedding, health checks, etc.;
- planting hedges/trees;
- maintenance of farm hedges and native woodland;
- cutting wood;
- horticulture activities – working in polytunnels or farm gardens planting, watering, weeding or harvesting produce;
- general farm maintenance – painting, repairing fences, machinery restoration;
- woodwork or crafts;
- baking or cooking;
- visit to hardware or veterinary practices to collect supplies.

This list is not exhaustive and activities on offer vary per farm. Participants are encouraged to get involved in all activities but can input as to their preferred work area. The Social Farming sessions are intrinsically social as the farm can have visitors during a typical working day related to the enterprise and the time around the table for breaks and lunch is an opportunity to catch up.

Training in Social Farming/related to Social Farming available for farmers

The farmers who were the pilots of the SoFAB project engaged in training as part of their development to and during delivery. This included health and safety, awareness of disability and mental health issues, and business planning.

Rural Support's Social Farming Support Service supports the farmers active delivering a service and those preparing to do so in relation to their training needs. Farmers are encouraged to complete safeguarding and First Aid training, which Rural Support annually funds or signposts farmers to complete on an individual basis. Rural Support also facilitates a Health and Safety Executive inspection on farms delivering or preparing to deliver a Social Farming service. Rural Support have recognised the need to support farmers in their delivery by providing Self-Care training. Relevant training courses such as Mental Health First Aid, safeTalk (suicide prevention) are shared with farmers also.

An Introduction to Social Farming training course was developed and delivered by Rural Support in 2017, which was the first opportunity since the SoFAB project to specifically promote the elements of the practice and its delivery. This involved both classroom-based content and a visit to a farm delivering Social Farming. It is planned to deliver this training again in 2019 for interested stakeholders – farmers, staff who could make referrals, and potential participants' family support.

How Social Farming is driven

Social Farming in Northern Ireland is driven in a number of ways:

- Its development and provision are supported by Rural Support's Social Farming Support Service, which acts as a contact point for interest and promotes it regionally across government departments for funding support.



- The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs and the Department of Health through the Health and Social Board and the Public Health Agency have championed its provision as a service that meets the needs of both participants and farmers.
- The farmers delivering a service or keen to do so push its development through their commitment to its benefits.

Commissioning of and support for Social Farming participation

Social Farming can be commissioned through Rural Support's Social Farming Support Service or directly with individual farmers. This depends on the funding source and how it was acquired. Rural Support's role in the development of Social Farming has evolved to include securing and coordinating funding for activity. In this scenario, Rural Support commissions the farmer to deliver an agreed number of sessions and manages its delivery in terms of participant referrals, record keeping, and acts as a contact point for queries/concerns. Farmers have also secured funding to deliver Social Farming through funding bodies and in this scenario, they promote the number of places available for referrals which Rural Support can assist with.

In one Health and Social Care Trust, farmers have a Service Level Agreement for the duration of a financial year. These farmers are directly commissioned to provide a Social Farming service but receive support from Rural Support in doing so.

Funding for Social Farming delivery

Social Farming in Northern Ireland can be funded in a variety of forms as outlined below:

- Government or funding body funded coordinated by Rural Support;
- Funding body directly to a farm or farm partnership, eg. European Social Fund;
- Health and Social Care Trust contracting farms through a Service Level Agreement;
- Self-Directed Support payments whereby the participant has control or is supported to have control over their individual budget.

Future for Social Farming

Social Farming in Northern Ireland has grown from early adopters recognising the potential for farmers and the farm environment to provide choice for people in need of support to a viable option regionally. The number of farms delivering a Social Farming service has doubled from the group of farmers who piloted activity during the SoFAB project. This is particularly significant as farmers are now funded to deliver a service.

The future of Social Farming requires a sustainable funding and referral model to ensure that farmers are able to provide a service which participants can avail of and benefit from. Such a model will allow for all those farmers experienced, prepared, or interested in delivering a service to do so. Moreover, additional farmers could be recruited. This would provide a better geographical spread of farms delivering Social Farming across Northern Ireland.



Training needs identified

The need for training resources for farmers interested in providing a Social Farming service at the initial stage of expressing an interest with Rural Support has been identified. This would allow farmers to better understand what is required to provide Social Farming before making any further commitment. Such training resources could also be adapted for other stakeholders such as health and social care staff who refer service users to a Social Farming service.

The need for each farmer to have a training portfolio that documents the courses completed and scheduled renewal dates has also been identified. This would be of key benefit for ensuring that all farmers delivering a service have the necessary courses completed and in-date. Rural Support is currently developing Social Farming Standards, which should address this need.

Best practice sharing

Rural Support through its Social Farming Support Service supports the sharing of best practice within Northern Ireland and at a European/international level.

- Social Farming Advisory Committee – meets twice a year and has representatives from Rural Support, the farmer group, the participant group, health and social care staff, the Ulster Farmers' Union, and Social Farming Ireland.
- Farmer group – peer group meetings are facilitated at regular intervals to allow for support and sharing of news.
- Study visits – both undertaken by Rural Support's Social Farming Support Service Coordinator and Chief Executive and hosted by Rural Support to farms in Northern Ireland.
- Social Farming Ireland's National Coordination Committee and Advisory Committee – Rural Support sit on both these committees to ensure strong cross-border working.
- European projects – Rural Support have been contributed to Erasmus+ projects related to multifunctional farming (CRANE) and Social Farming (PROFARM) and are now a partner in the Erasmus+ SoEngage project.



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