

COFARM



CASE STUDY: Kerry Social Farming

Introduction

Social farming (also known as care farming) is one of the most common forms of green care or nature-based interventions, where nature underpins the care service. It is based on concepts of multifunctional agriculture and community-based social and health care (Di Iacovo and O'Connor, 2009). Social farming refers to the therapeutic use of farming landscapes and practices on part or all of a working farm in order to provide health, social, educational and/or vocational supports to a small number of people at risk of social exclusion. Social farming activities can be targeted towards multiple groups within society - disabled, elderly, NEETS; ex-offenders; addicts / substance abusers. All social farming activities are organised within a supervised, facilitated and structured programme of farming-related tasks involving livestock, horticulture, crops, machinery or woodland (Crowley et al. 2017).

Kerry Social Farming (KSF) is a voluntary, community-based, shared service that provides farming and social inclusion opportunities to people with disabilities, all within their local communities in Co. Kerry, Ireland. The vision of KSF is to 'promote Social Farming as a viable option for achieving improved quality of life for people who use health and social services and for farm families, through enhancing social inclusion and connecting farmers with their communities' (SKDP, 2016).

Basic information



Cahersiveen, Co. Kerry, Ireland

Name Kerry Social Farming

Year of establishment 2013

Kind of cooperation Social farming/green care

Number of farmers/ landowners/ entrepreneurs/ enterprises involved

14 Farm holdings 22 Farmers 1 Employee

Internet links

Website: www.kerrysocialfarming.ie

Video Clips: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=voB4gAjQuLs&t=19s>

E-Book: [An Evaluation of Kerry Social Farming](#)

Facebook: [//www.facebook.com/KerrySocialFarming/](https://www.facebook.com/KerrySocialFarming/)

Twitter: [@kerrysocialfarm](https://twitter.com/kerrysocialfarm) or <https://twitter.com/KerrySocialFarm?lang=en>

Cooperation Process Data

A social farm can be defined as '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' (Rural Support, no date). The focus is not on agricultural production during the sessions for service users, but rather on the needs of participants. Varying from therapeutic, care, educational or vocational. It is essential for the farmers to effectively engage with participants and lead them through the activities at their own pace (Johnston, 2016). In other words, the focus is on person-centred outcomes (Di Iacovo and O'Connor, 2009). In Ireland, there is a tendency for social farming to operate around a small number of participants per family farm, in many instances just one or two.

The establishment of support organisations and networks for care farming leads to increases in the number of care farmers. More broadly, support organisations help to stimulate government interest, connect the agricultural and healthcare sectors to increase mutual understanding, and promote, legitimise and professionalise care farming. Kerry Social Farming is an excellent example of a support organisation, which promotes a voluntary model of social farming, and its volunteer ethos is a core value.



Kerry Social Farming operates under the aegis of South Kerry Development Partnership (SKDP), a local development company. The Partnership has almost 30 years' experience in rural development, and has deep-rooted networks and credibility with agencies and with local citizens. Specifically, SKDP has been working with the farming community over many years, and farmers have always been directly represented on its Board of Directors. In 2016 and 2017, Kerry Social Farming secured funding from the Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine through the CEDRA Fund to pilot a Social Farming Project in Kerry with national benefits. Through that funding, a full-time social farming facilitator was hired to enhance the delivery, development and expansion of the project. Kerry Social Farming has also benefited from the government funded Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP).

Kerry Social Farming is governed through a working group and it is chaired by a representative of SKDP. It also includes representatives of civil society organisations with experience of, and a vested interest in, supporting and empowering people with special needs; and farmers. The working group also includes representatives of support services, whose clients / participants are offered placements on the farms. In addition, a number of participants

(farmers and individuals with intellectual disability / acquired brain injury) are also represented on the working group and can share their experiences and offer recommendations with respect to the implementation and delivery of social farming in Co. Kerry.

Farms in South Kerry and parts of North Kerry are more mixed and extensive, and are smaller in scale than is the case nationally. Pluriactivity is more prevalent. As a result, some farmers have greater capacity to devote time to mentoring social farming participants. Across the 14 social farm enterprises, no two farms are the same. There are suckler cows, sheep, dairy cows, fowl or pigs, and one also includes goats, horses and a donkey. Dogs and cats are common on the farms. Two enterprises are organic and a third is pesticide- and chemical-free. All farms include livestock apart from one that specialises in market gardening. One farm has forestry. Farm sizes range from less than 0.3ha (1 acre) with intensive horticultural production up to 45ha (111 acres) of extensive hill farming; land resources vary from wide to limited uses.



When a participant first attends a social farm, they are accompanied by a support worker from one of the service providers (agencies which support persons with an intellectual disability / acquired brain injury). Support workers are also known as job coaches and these care professionals work alongside the participant and the farmer, helping the participant to settle into their new environment and learning experience. Support workers provide advice to the farmers in how to communicate and work with people with a range of abilities and communication styles. While most participants go on to attend their social farm without the assistance of a support worker, a number of service users with higher levels of need require a job coach on a continuous basis. One of the unique features of Kerry Social Farming is that farmers are not paid for the time that they spend with social farming participants. In this way, it is classified as a voluntary model of social farming. The KSF model emerged out of its founding principles of equality, social inclusion, voluntary community development and collaboration. The KSF ethos is to support people with disabilities to achieve full and meaningful lives of their choosing within their own local communities. Similarly, participants are not paid for their time on the farm. Thus, the focus of the initiative is to develop genuine relationships and promote social inclusion in ways that are not underpinned by any form of payment for services rendered by either the host farmer and their families or the social farming participant.

According to Crowley et al (2017), the key strengths associated with Kerry Social Farming approach include:

1. Person-centredness
2. Positive and targeted intervention
3. Realisation of farm family social capital
4. Partnership approach and collaboration
5. Innovation and potential to mainstream
6. Community integration
7. Social inclusion.

Furthermore, the facilitator for Kerry Social Farming has stated that the initiative has had positive benefits for both the participants and farmers:

Participant: enhanced social inclusion in rural community via voluntary effort of farmers, also enhanced wellbeing and opportunity for new skills and training.

Farmer: enhanced social inclusion and community participation; opportunities for new skills training and knowledge transfer; excellent health and safety initiative on farm'.

Kerry Social farming offers benefits to the host farmers involved in the voluntary model of social farming. It gives host farmers the opportunity to deliver alternative services and new types of activities on their farms. For instance, Johnston (2016: 4) emphasised that "although Social Farming should provide benefits for the facilitators, it is primarily an altruistic venture, which is often a lifeline for the vulnerable adults who avail of their services."

Threats / Challenges

The lack of suitable funding, excessive bureaucracy and over-regulation are the most significant challenges facing Kerry Social Farming. In Ireland, the lack of funding for social services has meant that projects are shoehorned into labour market participation initiatives while successful social farming pilot projects have been left stranded after their short-term funding streams ended (McGloin and O'Connor, 2007). Johnston (2016) has suggested that direct payments be explored for subsidising social farming as a form of farm diversification in Northern Ireland and Wilcox (2008) recommended adjusting the Single Farm Payment in the UK to support farmers for achieving social objectives, such as inclusion through social farming. Corporate Social Responsibility is another potential funding source whereby companies could be called upon to provide funding for social farming to fund placements or hours per year (Wilcox, 2008). But while sponsorship and support from corporations or a philanthropic model is good in the development phase, those experienced in social farming believe that it needs sustainable funding long-term.

In addition, Kerry Social Farming has witnessed significant growth in the number of farmers and participants getting involved in this initiative. The project now requires more than one person (facilitator) to ensure proper consolidation and growth (i.e. growth does not hamper best practice due to not having enough dedicated staff). According to the facilitator: 'there needs to be a small team of staff that are fully assigned/dedicated to project as it is getting too big'.

Training and Skills

According to the facilitator, the training required for social farming varies according to the different stakeholder groups:

Farmers: Safeguarding for vulnerable Adults; safeguarding for vulnerable children; first aid; and a general course examining the various aspects of disability awareness.

Participant: Farm safety; general introduction to farming; and manual handling.

Working Group: development and delivery of farm walks in order to enable knowledge transfer; safeguarding for vulnerable Adults; and safeguarding for vulnerable children.

According to Crowley et al (2017), the main training sought by the host farmers participating within Kerry Social Farming includes: working with participants' needs and abilities; and how to communicate effectively, especially with participants who are non-verbal. While most host farmers would be satisfied with sufficient training to meet their current requirements, a small number of farmers are interested in vocational training leading to a qualification. Furthermore, it is important to develop training for participants, such as a qualification in social farming for adults with learning disabilities, thereby teaching farm skills and life skills through farming.

In order for a farmer to engage in social farming activities, he / she has to have excellent communication, interpersonal and intrapersonal skills. Furthermore, the farmer has to have a keen interest in assisting the participants to reach their full potential in regards to personal development. The farmer also needs to be a reflective practitioner, insofar as he /she has the capacity to refine and develop work activities / tasks on the farm in order to meet the needs of participants. The best practices / lessons also need to be shared with other farmers. This has been achieved through the Kerry Social Farming model vis-à-vis farm walks.

Advice/Recommendation

The project facilitator offered the following advice to individuals (including farmers) who are interested in establishing a social farm group / project similar to Kerry Social Farming:

- Look at other models of social farming and apply a local/bottom up approach to develop a model to suit local led development in your area/jurisdiction;
- A lead partner should already have a good relationship with local farmers – trust in the lead partner is essential for farmers to know that they will be supported throughout the process;
- Form a relevant working group in the initial stage and this working group should consist of representatives from key stakeholders – participants and their families, host farmer, service providers; local municipalities / councils; Local Development Companies / Local Action Groups; and civil society organisations.
- A strong Chairperson is crucial to bring different groups / stakeholders together in a collaborative manner;
- Combine existing programmes for seed funding in order to get a small number of social farms operational.
- Establish a small team or recruit a staff member to operate and deliver the programme. The individual(s) require a good knowledge of rural development; farming; disability issues; funding and administration. The person should also have excellent communication; interpersonal; and intrapersonal skills.

Growth: “ Adapt a bottom up local led approach to manageable sustainable growth – start with a few farms and allow for steady growth ensuring maintenance of best practice and ongoing training provided that suits the needs of farmers ”

“ Ongoing consultation with farmers and participants is crucial insofar as dedicated coordinator(s) are required. ”

Queries/Questions

- What personal qualities and logistical supports does a farmer need to possess in order to engage in social farming?
- What are the training requirements for farmers pursuing social farming activities?



Key Words

Cooperation Key Words

Social farming/green care
Voluntary

Partners



Limerick Institute of Technology:
(Ireland)
www.lit.ie/rdi



Hof und Leben GmbH
(Germany)
www.hofundleben.de



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