

Factsheet 6

The Rural Network for Northern Ireland

August 2010



Sharing & Exchanging Information

Sharing and exchanging information is key to the work of the Rural Network for Northern Ireland. We will share and exchange information in a number of ways.

These include:-

- A dedicated website www.ruralnetworkni.org.uk
- Newsletters, publications and fact sheets
- Events, meetings and visits

This Factsheet provides information on the growing concept of Social Farming (or Care Farming as it also known).

Please Note: The information contained within this Factsheet is for information only.

Social Farming

A growing concept across Europe

What is Social Farming
Social Farming, or Care Farming, utilises farming and agriculture as a therapeutic tool to provide health, social or educational care services for one or a range of vulnerable groups of people.

Who can avail of the service?
This can include people suffering with mental health problems, physical disabilities, learning disabilities, and drug/alcohol addiction as well as adults and young people on probation.

What are the benefits?
A study in 2008 by the University of Essex (Hine et al) presented evidence that vulnerable clients utilising care farm services in the UK experience statistically significant improvements in self-confidence and mood. Economically speaking, research has shown that social/care farms provide new employment opportunities to rural communities while generating millions for rural economies. In terms of society, social farming provides new links to agriculture and rural communities while providing the opportunity for a joined-up government approach to address an issue.

What is the situation in Northern Ireland?
Whilst a small number of social/care farms operate in Northern Ireland, the concept of social farming is relatively new and emerging. Rural Policy Division of DARD was keen to further explore the need and appetite for social farming as another form of farm diversification and fitting with their role of Rural Champion. Adam Harbinson, MSc Rural Development student, conducted a study on behalf of DARD into the opportunities that Social Farming could present for Northern Ireland. This report is available for download from www.ruralnetworkni.org.uk and its findings indicated that there was a need for and support for social farming in NI while pointing to a call for further recognition of the concept across the country.

What are the barriers encountered?
Several potential barriers have been identified, including lack of awareness and understanding of the concept, funding, bureaucracy, farmer buy-in, lack of skills and support for farmers, NIMBY issues and matching supply and demand.

What is the situation elsewhere.....

...across Europe?

Social Farming is a growing concept across Europe. In 2006, the EU Commission funded a research project entitled SOFAR with the specific goal of supporting the building of a new institutional environment for social/care farming. The study involved 7 nations of Belgium, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands and Slovenia and estimated that over 4,200 social farms of differing types existed within the 7 nations studied. For example, 'Cooperative Agricoltura Capodarco' is a multifunctional farm on the outskirts of Rome that supports those who are socially excluded or have disabilities. Visit their website www.agricolturacapodarco.it for further information. The European Network for Rural Development (ENRD) has established a Thematic Working Group on Social Farming with an objective of improving the implementation of RDPs in support of social farming initiatives. Visit the ENRD website for further information: <http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/>

...across the UK?

The National Care Farming Initiative (NCFI) is a national network for the UK with the

mission of providing a voice and supportive services for care farmers, inspiring decision makers and to develop policies and actions that will support care farming in the UK. Currently, there are over 120 care farms registered with NCFI across the UK primarily from England, with smaller numbers in Wales and Scotland and 2 registered from Northern Ireland. Visit www.ncfi.org.uk for further information. NCFI is currently engaged with the Rural Network in England (RDPE Network – www.rdpenetwork.org.uk) in a joint project to examine the framework of support under the Rural Development Programme for England in relation to social/care farmers and identify practical examples of where RDPE funding has been used to support care farmers expand and diversify their business. Projects identified will be included within the RDPE Network database and available to view on their website.

...across Ireland?

The use of agriculture and horticulture in care settings has a long history in Ireland. A report by **Deirdre O'Connor and Aideen McGloin** of University College, Dublin, estimated that 90 care farms were in operation across the Republic of Ireland in 2007, including cross border projects.

What next?

The study conducted by DARD concluded that social farming is a potentially viable option for social service delivery, farm diversification, and rural development in Northern Ireland. Proposed recommendations for the advancement of social farming across Northern Ireland included the presence of a champion organisation to bring players together; Social Farming Network NI; guidebook, training and support for interested and active social farmers; pilot/demonstration projects; develop and finance a business model and develop an integrated engagement and marketing strategy.

News You Can Use

Do you have information worth sharing? Help us to contribute to the transfer of information sharing practice within and across the Northern Ireland Rural Development Programme.

Contact the RNNI:-
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The Rural Network for Northern Ireland is a member of:
UK National Rural Network:
www.uknationalruralnetwork.org.uk

And European Network for Rural Development: <http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/>

The Rural Network for Northern Ireland has also established links with the **National Rural Network for Ireland:**
www.rdsu.ie



The Rural Network for Northern Ireland is managed by the Northern Ireland Rural Development Council (RDC) through the Agri Rural Form as part of the Northern Ireland Rural Development Programme co-financed by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development on behalf of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD).

References and links to any external websites or publications shall not be taken as an endorsement by the Rural Network for Northern Ireland of the opinions expressed or services provided by those sites and publications.