

## Social Farming Across Borders Pilot Farm Profile:

### Section 1 – Your Details

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### Section 2 – Your Farm

#### **About Our Farm:**

My Farm is a small family organic farm in Doorin, close to the village of Mountcharles and Donegal Town. As well as arable crops and conservation areas, we have a flock of lambs and sheep, ponies, donkeys, hens and ducks and a small orchard, with raised beds, an open cultivated area of organic blueberries and a large poly-tunnel on the farm.



There are opportunities for all farm helpers to work with the sheep, chickens and ducks, ponies, donkeys or to get involved with vegetable growing and conservation work at our Hazel Wood.

These are activities which offer social and rehabilitation opportunities for every individual in a friendly setting.

We are surrounded by open countryside with its abundant flora and fauna and with laneways to the sea shore.

We use the organic commercial farm and agricultural landscapes as a base for promoting mental and physical health, through normal farming activity.

Blissberry Farm is an organic farm certified by IOFGA overlooking Donegal Bay, the farm is surrounded by rolling countryside with far reaching views. It comprises of green clover fields, hay meadows, walkways to the shore through our hazel woodland. There is a wide variety of native trees, wild flowers and wildlife.

Our location and environment is ideal for people to benefit from being and participating in the countryside, the natural environment, working with animals and involvement with associated development projects. Whatever your requirements are we welcome you and invite you to join in the action down on the farm and have fun!



Our philosophy has a strong bias towards conservation and sustainability which is expressed in the way the farm is managed.

We believe that access to this environment fosters an appreciation of natural beauty and inspires a sense of connection to nature and that in turn supports an increased respect for self, others, the environment and animals.

It also allows people the space and time to genuinely relax and recuperate.

In conclusion it increases a sense of wellbeing through emotional connection to the environment

### **Farm Activities offered to the Participants:**

At Blissberry Farm there are a variety of ways in which we can work with and support individuals. Each package will be specifically tailored for each individual dependent on need.

We aim to engage - encourage - enthuse, to bring about positive change for each individual.

Activities available at Blissberry Farm

- **Nature trail**

- + Gentle walk through acres of open countryside
- + Signed wild nature trail path
- + Hedgerow Wild Safari down a country lane to the sea

Associated activities

- +Collect berries—make jam
- +Collect elderflowers / berries – make wine, jams, cordial etc
- +Bird and animal watching



- **Work with a variety of animals in different settings and circumstances on the farm**

- + Watch and hang out with the horses, donkeys, chickens, ducks, lambs, and sheep. Just say hello - learn how they all communicate
- +Help at lambing time with the ewes and baby lambs
- + Equine facilitated learning opportunities
- + Catch and lead a horse or donkey
- + Groom a horse or donkey - body, mane & tail, feet
- + First aid – check for cuts, grazes etc – clean the wound, apply cream
- + Feed a horse, donkey, chicken, duck, lamb or sheep – fill a hay feeder; put together a feed in a bucket, collect eggs, clean out the hen house, watch the chickens chase insects, scratch for worms, have dust baths etc
- + Cart the hay into the field for winter feeds
- + Check water troughs summer and winter
- + Check/ change rugs in winter months on horses and donkeys

Associated horse or donkey activities

- + Clean tack
- + Repair /paint the stable doors
- + Wash the grooming brushes
- + Pooh pick paddocks
- + Bi monthly farrier visit



- **Growing fruit and vegetables undercover and in the open (raised beds and open plots)**

- + Plan and assemble raised beds
- + Cart and harvest sea -weed from the shore with donkey and creel for the raised beds
- + Sow crops
- + Tend Polytunnel crops

Associated activities

+ Plan for spring and winter planting using seed catalogues

- **Basic farm maintenance** (fence repairs, hedging, general repairs)
  - + In spring / summer cut back over growing plants – nettles, hedges by gateways
  - + Check and repair fencing
  - + Hedge laying
  - + Conservation work and tree management
  - + Help with seasonal farming activities like haymaking, harvest and sheep shearing



- **Woodwork** (e.g. bird boxes and garden furniture)
  - + Link in with local Men's Shed

- **Harvesting and cooking food produced from the farm**
  - + Make soup and meal from home grown veg and seasonal produce

- **Marketing fresh seasonal organic produce**
  - + Preparing produce for sale at local country market and farm gate



- **Clear your head**
  - + Enjoy the rural pace of life with sounds, sights, country air and a cup of coffee with a friendly farmer and neighbours.

- **Coming soon**
  - + Buddy Allotment - Social Enterprise
  - + Sensory Garden

#### **Blissberry Farm approach to our activities**

- Make it varied – sensory, creative, imaginative, practical, adventurous...
- Be flexible
- Get people out all year round making the most of the seasons
- Make it fun

We believe this approach is applicable with a wide range of audiences, whether young or old, urban or rural, disabled or socially excluded; the idea is to find something for everyone.

#### **Preferred days of the week;**

Any day would suit except for Tuesday. Thursday would be the most suitable day.

#### **Projects on-going at the moment:**

1. Organic Blueberries and Gardening with the Country Market movement – Work in progress
2. Innovative development in collaboration with the Community & Voluntary Sector of a Social Enterprise Project – Work in progress
3. Mental Health Stigma and Recovery 'The Countryside, Mindfulness and Green Prescription' Project – funding partnership opportunity bid through CFI - Work in progress
4. North Donegal Mental Health Team outing and social visit to The Social Farm – Planned for next month
5. Liaising with South West Donegal Community Mental Health Team

### **Section 3 – Your Locality & Community**

Nearest Services: Mountcharles

Nearest town: Donegal Town

Nearest public transport or rural transport initiative: Mountcharles Village

My locality and community interests :

There is a farm that is seated in the local community that respects the natural environment in which it is set and that produces great quality food from the fields. Farming is a tough job that doesn't follow normal hours but we love every minute. Larry has lots of ideas that with the help of the ever growing Social Farming volunteers will come to fruition. Watch this space!

Member and participate with the Mountcharles Community Development Group.

Member of Irish Country Markets Ltd and vendor at our local Country Market at Clar Leghowney outside Donegal Town

Participate with local communities and parish activities within Inver and Mountcharles.

Member of GYI Donegal Group

### **Section 4 – You, the Farmer**

Me (Family) and my (Our) Farm:

Joint owner of The Organic Farm with my wife Winifred McNulty (Writer and Life Coach) and our son (enthusiastic young farmer).

Worked 35 + years in health, community & social services settings.

Left work with the HSE two years ago, took early retirement to follow the dream (Social Farming - organic farming, horticulture and husbandry to promote happiness, social education, mindfulness, reduce stress and create wellbeing). Spent the last few years developing the organic small holding and we now grow a wide range of vegetables and produce with some amazing Organic Blueberries that are regular favourites at our local Country Market in Leghowney and with our local restaurant in Mountcharles Village.

Like many other organic farmers, we are all particularly proud of the population of our wildlife that inhabit on our farm, in our hazel woodland and blow at the waterfall.

Other information:

I'm delighted to be involved with the SoFab pilot as a farmer who has been involved in the health system for over 30 +years and I can see very well how work on a smallholding might help those rebuilding their lives after illness or other problems. Social Farming throughout Europe uses commercial farms, woodlands, community gardens and market gardens centres, to offer people worthwhile activity, within a supportive environment. It can benefit people with learning difficulties or people recovering from long term illness, including depression, stress or drug related issues. Routine activity like livestock keeping also benefits those returning to work after a long absence.

Have you ever felt overworked (with the full time day job and farming part time), helpless in the face of all the pressures you are under and unable to see a way out? I can relate to that. I was working long days and weekends whilst also looking after many other commitments; not a good recipe. I knew that something had got to change. I had to address and change my own work- life balance. During this time I met Aideen McGloin and the team from UCD on the SoFar European project. They got me thinking, travelled over to Italy, presented at the International Community of Practice Farming for Health Conference, did some site visits, came across and linked with some very interesting people and suddenly I was excited and felt 100% alive again . . . I could do this SOCIAL FARMING and follow the dream – farming, horticulture and husbandry to promote happiness, social education, mindfulness, reduce stress and create wellbeing. The time was right for us - Winifred, Patrick and I felt that the National Early Retirement package from the HSE was for me! I handed in my notice to the HSE two years ago and began visiting venues all around the UK and Europe to research the opportunity and take the best elements from all of them. This is only the beginning; the concept will grow and evolve with time. I hope that you will join me us on this journey, and will see you at our farm soon.

