

## Social Farming Newsletter – Issue No. 5

Welcome to our fifth edition of the SoFAB Newsletter from the Project team. We hope you find it useful and informative. Again it's been an interesting and very busy number of months through to the end of 2013 and this issue there are updates on :

- ◆ Pilots in Practice
- ◆ Pilot Farm Open Days
- ◆ Training Update
- ◆ Media Events
- ◆ Forthcoming Events

### Pilots in Practice

The late Summer through Autumn and into the Winter month of 2013 saw pilot practice up and running in full swing on all 20 farms. I don't know if it was the novelty of a new concept or the unusually high level of solar rays we enjoyed but there was certainly a sunny disposition on the farms visited during these months. We hardly had one wet day or if we had we didn't notice - was a frequently repeated comment by farmers.

The range of farm tasks which became part of the days of practice varied enormously. On Dessie's and Dorothy's farms the horses played an important part. This wasn't just learning new skills but taking responsibility for caring for an animal and getting a sense of connection with that animal was part of what emerged as a positive experience. Being part of the everyday work team on the farm and doing the everyday tasks together came across strongly from the two men with Seamus and family in Claudy. This was repeated with William in Malin - the only dairy farmer on the project where we caught on video the level of engagement his lads have acquired in a range of activities on the farm. The dry stock farms of Mabel, Michael, Liz and Jackie provided for a wide range of activity from fence mending and maintenance, to setting up domestic poultry coupes and getting stuck in to the animal husbandry practices around managing sheep and cattle. Our two tillage farmers Daniel and Richard again found that there are many tasks that can be safely shared through thoughtful planning which tie into that particularly male interest of 'men and their machines'.



The Aubrac's at Michael Heslin's Farm



While all the farms had a range of activities that changed and evolved as the months passed there is little doubt that the sense of being part of a family and its engagement with the land, its enterprises and its local community were other significant features. The openness of the family home was evident and a point which has been noted by service staff linked to the project. The presence of a new group at the farm added to the dynamic and story of the farm and we have had some wonderful capture of shared moments with young family members on the farms of Clodagh, Malachy, Clare, Barry and Marie to mention just a few.



The project staff having got to know many of the people attending the farms, have a strong sense that this has been a good choice for people. Family members of the participants have shared stories of people making sure they had all their bits and pieces organised days before hand.

A number of the farms took on a particular project that would be the legacy of the project experience. These included the restoration of an orchard and blacksmith workshop at Roberts to a rejuvenation project at Simon's gardens to the sinking of ponds and the construction of a bridge in Bailieborough.



Sheep husbandry with Seamus

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## Pilots in Practice.....continued

The community were also evident in the activities around these farms with a number of projects having community groups as part of the farm activity. Two notable examples being Larry and Seaghan's farms which both have other community garden projects associated with their farming activities. These have been significant occasions for participants to meet, work and share experiences with others.



Feeding the animals at Natascha's

Community volunteers have been a small but really important aspect and one where significant potential lies. Anna at Larry's has played an important role in introducing people to horses while Eugene with the support of his long standing volunteer Gerry has seen a bud which has been 15 years in nurture flower this summer. The Islaharnan experience



Taking care of the Rabbits at Seaghan's Farm in Armagh

which needs to be visited to be appreciated came to life through this combined team of family, participants, service staff and community.

Other pilots made deliberate efforts to include participants in their existing roles in community and farming life. Such effort saw the Cooley men in Matthews charge take a front line role in the launch on 'National Potato Week'.



Break time at Joan's farm in Bangor

Some of the changes which were noted back to the project were more subtle but not the less really significant. Having time to spend in a family home, in the kitchen and to be part of the conversation and activity has helped some people with planning in their own life. Natasha had such experiences with some of her participants. There was certainly a sense of the sharing of stories, and traditions across the generations in the kitchen at Marie and Pauls on the occasion where grandparents and 'everyone else' came together for this task in December.

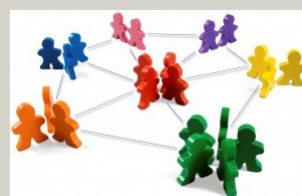
Looking at new ways of delivering service and working creatively has been probably an unexpected outcome from the project. Joan's farm and garden was busy spot over the Summer with team effort being very much part of the structure. Personal choice to take up the opportunity was the leading principle here as on all the farms. Delivering that opportunity at Joan's was a combined approach from family, participants, volunteers and service staff. Somewhat down the road in Dunleer the service support team at Liz's were keeping their eyes open on other 'outdoor opportunities'. They spotted and turned the 'opportunity' of a forgotten local orchard into a lucrative and social opportunity by selling apples at the Drogheda market for the month of October.

## SoFAB Network Development

A reminder for us all on the specific Project Network Development aim: *"To establish a network of service providers and users in the cross-border region to enable information sharing and act as a platform for engaging in public policy debate in agriculture and rural development and provision of care services."*

Following on from the completion of our Pilot Farmer Training six of our Pilots have volunteered to become Network Representatives. They will examine the various options available to them to develop a Network and also attend Project Advisory Committee meetings. Everyone who has registered an interest in with SoFAB office is considered a network member.

The current demand within this network is around how best can the farmers progress with health service commissioners / service providers towards on-going and sustainable delivery of social farming services in the region. From the farmer's perspective 'sustainable' means being contracted for continued delivery of social farming services in a way which is economically viable and maintains the quality standards required by the health service agencies. SoFAB have recruited a consultant to progress this work with the Network representatives. This will happen over the period to the end of March 2013 and will produce a report which will include a plan for the way forward (next steps), suggest a structure or structures for a network, identify key strengths and challenges of such a Network.



Thank you to Mabel Campbell, Robert Wilson, Malachy Dolan, Barry Kavanagh, Seaghan McDermott and Larry Masterson.

Keep in touch with us on

[www.socialfarmingacrossborders.org](http://www.socialfarmingacrossborders.org)

We are also on Facebook & Twitter

'like' and 'follow' us.



# Open Days on the Farm's

The project held five 'Network meetings' across the region during the first 18 months of the project. At the suggestion of the pilot farmers and in agreement with the project funders we have reshaped these network and awareness raising opportunities into more local focused occasions drawing on the availability of our pilot farmers as local hubs of activity.



The group gather to hear about Social Farming at Mabel's Farm in Tyrone

To date we have held events at Robert Wilson's farm November 21st, Barry Kavanagh's farm November 29th, Larry Masterson's farm December 10th, and Liz Hughes farm on January 3rd 2014, Mabel Campbell on January 23rd and Marie Kelly on 31st January.

The sense we have from farmers is that actually visiting the farm, meeting people associated with the project and experiencing the activities and enterprises of the farm is a more worthwhile engagement at this stage of the project. As the project moves on farmers have also expressed the need to stay connected and become a natural support network with a focus on encouragement and shared learning if the practice is to continue to evolve. We have had an extensive range of visitors to these open day from politicians to school children all thoroughly enjoying their experience. There has been much learning for the Agriculture and

Healthcare sectors who were well represented also, getting a great opportunity to see for themselves how Social Farming works in practice.

Some filming took place at the open day on Larry's Farm in Donegal



Paul Kelly with his group on his farm in Hilltown



## Media Events

### Project Video Capture:

During the Summer of 2013 a decision was made to make a video record of key aspects of the project. The aim of doing so is to have an audio visual capture of the experience of the project from the perspective of all key contributors and partners to the project. The project has recruited a professional company to work with us during the piloting phase to produce five video which can be used as a future resource for awareness raising and training. Two videos will focus on the experience from the participant (service user) perspective. One will focus on the Farmer's perspective, one will be an introductory video and a final one on policy and service provision perspective.

### **RTE Nationwide**

RTE aired a ten minute programme on the SoFAB Project on November 29th 2013. The recording for the piece was taken on a bright and breezy day in October. It was a morning of great activity at the farm of Malachy and Miriam Dolan on their farm above lough Melvin near the village of Garrison in Co. Fermanagh. The two 'coolest' participants on that morning were definitely Noel and Michael who had been coming out to the Dolans since late summer. There was a certain air of familiarity and comfort in the conversations and interactions that were evident on the farm that morning. Members of the two men's families had come along for the occasion and they mingled with ease with the young Dolan children and the others who were part of the occasion. The camera did justice to that sense of comfort and belonging which has emerged in the relationships across many of the pilot farms. It probably belied the truth for the producer who while appreciating the relaxed nature on the gathering was conscious of a second group waiting on Michael Heslin's farm in Gortletteragh some 50 miles to the south. Despite lunch at the steering wheel for the RTE crew it was still mid-afternoon by the time we arrived at Michaels. While he and his two men Seamus and Thomas had been waiting patiently since 2pm the prize for patience in Gortletteragh had to go the herd of Aubrac cattle who had been waiting their 'action moment' – a transfer move from stale pasture to a fine fresh field of grass. Our afternoon with Michael concluded with the loading of some fine dry turf from the local bog and a welcome cup of tea and scones with Michael his wife Siobhan and family in the farm house. The link on our website is available for viewing to all.



[Nationwide Film Crew in Fermanagh & Leitrim](#)



## Training and Development

The pilot farmers have completed 8 days of training with the project in the last quarter of 2013 in Leitrim Development Company's offices and in Greenmount College Antrim.



Training in Leitrim

Key areas covered over the eight days were— Background and history and the evolving changes in service provision, Values for Practice, Risk Management, Activity planning, support planning, communications and reporting (project specific), Farm safety Management, The Recovery Model in Mental health & Business planning.



Training in Greenmount

### Further Training in 2014

As part of the project brief training will be offered in 2014 to 30 people from a 'farming interest' and 30 people from 'other stakeholder' interests on the concept and practice of Social Farming. The course will be run at two locations in the project region over circa 12 evenings. It will be of interest to people from the farming community who may be considering 'social farming' as a farm activity. It will also be of interest to people from a service development, delivery and commissioning background, and to those who work in advocacy and service user representative roles. Full details of the training will be available on the SoFAB website.

## *Events Attended by the SoFAB Team*

During the last quarter of 2013 and early 2014 events the SoFAB team attended included the following



Let Nature Feed your Senses

- "Let Nature Feed your Senses" conference in the UK in November 2013 was attended by Paul & Aoibéann, for more information on this conference see their website—<http://letnaturefeedyoursenses.org/conference2013.htm>
- Many of our NI Pilots attended consultations with the board of the HSCT on the future direction of Day services in Northern Ireland.
- Genio ROI focused event—Reforming Social Services through Public Private Partnership 2013, This event brought together stakeholders from the public, private and non-profit sectors to focus on how social investment can be harnessed to refocus large public service expenditure programmes to achieve better outcomes more cost effectively for those in need.
- Cavan Macra hosted a positive mental health awareness evening in the Slieve Russell Hotel, Cavan was attended by Paul and our three Cavan Pilots.
- Seminar on Suicide Prevention and Building Community Resilience—This seminar was the result of a partnership initiative between Leitrim Development Company, Mental Health Ireland and STOP Suicide.



Cavan Macra—Positive Mental Health

## *Forthcoming Events:*

**Open Days**—up-coming provisional dates for Michael Heslin's farm in South Leitrim 20th March and Dessie Harrington's Farm in Cavan on the 29th March

**UK Trip**— A group of Network representatives will be visiting the West Midlands to examine the provision of Care Farming / Social Farming in that area in early April.

**Balmoral Show**— We will be at this years show in the Agri Pavilion, 14th to 16th May 2014.

**Conference**—Our final Project Conference will be in Belfast Castle on the 10th September 2014, SAVE THE DATE!