

Social Care Farming



The Volunteer's

5 Minute Introductory Guide

to becoming a
part-time Area
Farm Co-ordinator

Choose your own area
Flexible time commitment
No training or qualifications needed
Support available



Social Care Farming
SOUTH EAST NETWORK

KEY MESSAGES

- ❖ **The number of farms in England offering a therapeutic service (full-time and part-time) has increased rapidly** over the last 10 years; currently the average is over 15 per county and rising.
- ❖ **These farms, referred to as Social Care Farms ('SCF'), provide a cost effective wellbeing service**, backed by comprehensive research. Visiting participants simply do regular farm jobs under supervision according to age, choice and ability. The beneficial changes to both young people and adults are remarkable.
- ❖ **Area networking of these farms is an accepted key next step** to increasing the effectiveness for all involved through information sharing. The benefits of networking farms are already evident in other European countries, Scandinavia and North America.
- ❖ **Pioneering area networking of farms in this country has been carried out by volunteers.** Success has been achieved without raising grant finance. Annual farmer networking events have been financed by local sponsors and ticketing. Regular travel expenses incurred by volunteers can be avoided until a source of reimbursement is established.
- ❖ **You can play a part more volunteers are now urgently needed as part-time Area Farm Co-ordinators ('AFC') in most parts of England.** This new exciting role can be undertaken with a commitment of just 7hrs/week. It requires no formal training and comes with support from an experienced AFC. All involved in these roles enjoy privileged access to the countryside, socialising and job satisfaction.
- ❖ **Full flexibility - AFCs can decide** on their own weekly time involvement, choose their area size and develop their role independently to match their interests and strengths. No formal commitment exists should circumstances change in the future.

SOCIAL CARE FARMING

THE 5 MINUTE GUIDE to becoming a part-time Area Farm Co-ordinator (volunteer) of Social Care Farms

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The content of this guide, prepared in 2024, is based principally on 15 years' practical experience supporting social care farming enterprises across 6 counties in the South East of England. Further information: info@farmbuddies.org.uk

CAVEAT: The reader should be fully aware that this Guide is not intended to contain professional advice nor is it comprehensive but is intended to be a brief time saving introduction to the subject matter. Changes to the information will occur over time, so appropriate up-to-date advice will be needed before any decision is made. Great care has been taken in preparing this Guide but the author/publisher does not assume and hereby disclaims any liability to any party for any loss howsoever caused whether directly or indirectly.



WHAT IS A SOCIAL CARE FARM?

A Social Care Farm ('SCF') is a farm whose offering includes structured therapeutic services embedded in any agricultural production; some non-agricultural therapeutic activities can also be available to visiting participants.

In England you will mainly encounter four broad types of SCF: Full-time General Agriculture, Full-time Animal Therapy, Full-time Horticultural and Part-time General Agriculture; the latter is usually an enterprise on a commercial family farm or smallholding.

A typical SCF offers participants, usually in the age range 9-90 with mild or moderate additional needs (eg autism, anxiety, depression), a weekly visit to do regular farm jobs often with

animals, according to age, choice and ability. Supervised group sizes are small with one to one support not unusual.

The therapeutic benefit of working on a farm is nothing new and has been known in the UK for over 100 years. However, in 2005, due to increasing recognition of the concept's efficacy, it was decided to follow practice in the Netherlands by introducing formal training for new entrants and calling the farms involved 'Care Farms'. Later, in parts of the UK and other European countries, as the concept developed further, the term 'Social Farm' also became commonly used; hence the use of the combined term 'Social Care Farm' to join up the nomenclature.

Social Care Farming ('SCF') works because of a number of simple features rolled into one activity, namely: a secure site immersed in Nature, ordinary meaningful work caring for animals and the land, being part of a convivial team and farmer integrity.

All work is supervised by the farmer with appropriate safeguarding measures in place. The farmer is paid for her/his time, visits being funded by a variety of commissioners dependant on individual circumstances; the main sources are private families, charities, Personal Budgets, schools, Central Government grant or local Social Services.

With the number of farms increasing to meet demand and

with the NHS under pressure, the next exciting growth stage of the SCF service has arrived.

More Area Farm Co-ordinators as volunteers are now needed throughout England.

The co-ordinator invites farmers to meet up in-person and on-line in small or larger networks to share information on a variety of agricultural, service and administrative queries.

This new communication link between farms has been warmly welcomed by farmers in the first established co-ordinated areas in England see p9. Early key lessons learned on sustainability have been to build networking slowly with an emphasis on minimising formalities and cost.



**HOW DOES
SOCIAL CARE
FARMING &
CO-ORDINATING
FARMS WORK?**



5 STEPS TO BECOMING AN AREA FARM CO-ORDINATOR (VOLUNTEER)

An Area Farm Co-ordinator ('AFC') is someone who enjoys the countryside, communicating with people and has empathy with the farmer as well as those supporting individuals with additional needs.

- How can I become an AFC:**
- Step 1:** Read this 5 Minute Guide
 - Step 2:** Decide how many hours a week on average you can comfortably allocate to the role - around 7hrs is ideal
 - Step 3:** Choose your own area, small or large whatever you think would best suit you. Most work can be done in a home office with travel added for some introductory farm visits, if funds allow
 - Step 4:** Contact South East Regional Network info@farmbuddies.org.uk for start-up support, including a suggested farm to visit for your introduction to the concept, a list of Social Care Farms ('SCF') in your chosen area and for any general queries
 - Step 5:** Contact the SCFs in your chosen area to introduce yourself and suggest a first informal in-person gathering to share experiences. If your chosen area is principally urban, smaller horticultural therapeutic services will also need to be invited

Once you have decided to become an Area Farm Co-ordinator and chosen your area to cover, you can make a further choice relevant to your time availability; three broad options have been identified:

ENTRY

Arrange annual or other periodic in-person gatherings
Curate an on-line group for farms; WhatsApp is recommended
Farm visits useful but optional

INTERMEDIATE

As 'Entry' above, plus offering a 'matchmaking' service to farms for those contacting you on behalf of participants eg parents, carers, teachers

and Social Services in your chosen area

FULL

As 'Intermediate' above, plus making farm visits to pass on key information to farmers interested in starting a Social Care Farming service

A more detailed specification of the above suggested roles can be requested from the South East Regional Network - see p9 for contact details.

For most interested parties the 'Entry' level is expected to be the best starting point with travel according to what funds allow, leaving open the option to increase service levels later.



**THIS VOLUNTEER
ROLE IS FULLY
FLEXIBLE TO
SUIT YOUR TIME
AVAILABILITY**

FAQs

Am I too young or old?

Anyone is eligible for such a flexible Area Farm Co-ordinator ('AFC') role. However, typically volunteers' ages range from 50-75.

Do I require any qualification or special skill to start?

No, just empathy when supporting farmers to expand their Social Care Farming ('SCF') enterprise.

Do I need farm or social services experience?

Not essential but some basic knowledge of one or the other would be helpful.

How much travelling is involved?

It is not essential to do any regular travel but you may find it useful to visit some farms.

Will I get involved in fund raising?

Experience has shown that regular SCF support can be delivered initially without grant applications and the associated accountability. Annual events have been ticketed with venues and associated expenses covered by one-off sponsorship.

During the year are there peaks and troughs in time commitment?

More time may be necessary leading up to an annual event. Otherwise the time requirement is relatively consistent, with November to February being quieter months.

What if my time availability decreases?

The role is flexible to accommodate holidays or can be scaled down at any time. The ideal expectancy in-post would be 3+ years.

Who can I refer to for more information?

Currently the principal source available is the South East AFC (see p9 for contact details). It is expected that more support will become available as the value of the co-ordinator role becomes more widely acknowledged.

APPENDICES

An Area Farm Co-ordinator's story volunteering in South East England

I stumbled across Social Care Farming for the first time whilst browsing an agricultural journal back in 2007. The simplicity of the concept and its benefits for young and older people alike immediately resonated with me.

Initially, with few practical farming skills and no real knowledge of social, health or education services, I provided a basic 'matchmaker' service in our local area; parents and others enquired and I would suggest an appropriate farm.

The rapid beneficial changes in the visiting participants' social skills, education and wellbeing amazed everyone. Fast forward to today and with valuable support from my wife, we have introduced hundreds of young people and adults with a wide variety of extra needs to weekly farm visits.

In 2022, it dawned on me, as I got to know the farms involved better, that most of them had accumulated huge expertise from their individual experiences but rarely contacted each other, let

alone shared that valuable information.

So, I invited those I was aware of to an informal 'Exhibition Day'. Eight farmers attended in-person, openly and enthusiastically sharing information. At the same time, I agreed to curate a new WhatsApp group to help them stay in touch. Overnight, I had become an Area Farm Co-ordinator ('AFC')! Two years later and following a sell out larger networking event, there are now over 40 farmers regularly sharing information across six counties.

It's been a blast! There is still a lot to do and God willing I plan to ensure that new AFCs, wherever they are located in the country, can if they wish draw on our experience. I believe it is an exciting time to be in touch directly with farmers and the countryside as Public recognition of good food, Nature recovery and now community wellbeing increases.



Stephen Sellers

EXAMPLE AREAS WHERE SOCIAL CARE FARMS ARE CO-ORDINATED IN SOUTHERN ENGLAND

Examples of different sized areas chosen by co-ordinators:

- Town: **Reading** (incl. urban horticultural sites)
Network name: Reading Green Wellbeing Network
Co-ordinator contact: rgwn.org.uk
- Geographic area: **Surrey Hills** (AONB)
Network name: East Surrey Care Farm Project
Co-ordinator contact: surreyhills.org/east-surrey-care-farm-project
- County: **Norfolk & borders** (incl. urban horticultural sites.)
Network name: Norfolk Green Care Network
Co-ordinator contact: ngcn.uk
- Region: **South East:** Kent, East Sussex, West Sussex, Surrey, Hampshire & Berkshire
Network name: South East Social Care Farming Network
Co-ordinator contact: farmbuddies.org.uk

If you decide to volunteer as an Area Farm Co-ordinator ('AFC') in your own chosen area, you are encouraged to request start-up support from the South East Co-ordinator as above; other support may be available.

Opportunities may also exist to assist the AFC in one or more of the above networks.

#SocialFarmingworks for all

'The time I have spent here has shown me that I can do anything I put my mind to. I have gained so much confidence. I will always remember my time here'

————— PARTICIPANT

'J loves the farm! It has been brilliant for his self-esteem, concentration levels and general enjoyment of the great outdoors'

————— PARENT

'I am 100% committed to the farming project and think it is a wonderful and worthwhile piece of work'

————— SOCIAL SERVICES MANAGER

'The whole experience has been fantastic - it has allowed a young man who struggles significantly in the formal learning environment of a school classroom to demonstrate and build confidence in his practical skills'

————— SCHOOL TEACHER

'We have seen the impact and it is very gratifying. One of the lads we had last year went off to agricultural college, having previously not been able to go to school'

————— FARMER

'Without doubt the most satisfying period of my working life to date'

————— AREA FARM CO-ORDINATOR (VOLUNTEER)

