

Care Farming in the UK and Ireland: Annual Survey of the sector 2016/17 - Overview

Care farming¹ is the therapeutic use of farming practices. On care farms, components of either the whole or part of the farm are used to provide health, social or educational care through a supervised, structured programme of farming-related activities.

Key findings of the 2016/17 annual survey

- There are approximately 250 care farms currently operating in the UK and a further 35 in the Republic of Ireland. There are also over 100 prospective care farms² in various stages of development, which represents a marked increase in the last 18 months.
- There are more than 200 care farms in England, 8 in Wales; 20 in Scotland; and 15 in Northern Ireland.
- Most care farms are either commercial farm businesses, charities, Community Interest Companies (CICs) (all at 24%), or charitable companies limited by guarantee (22%).
- Approximately half of care farmers (49%) are owner occupiers, 29% rent their site, 21% are part of an existing agricultural enterprise and 14% of care farms have been given the land that they use at no charge.
- Currently there are 23 care farms that have demonstrated that they meet the care farming Code of Practice standards and another 50 or so working towards the Code.
- The average operating capacity level of UK care farms is currently at 65%.
- The number of clients attending a care farm per week varies from farm to farm but the average number of clients attending per week is 35.
- Most Care Farms in the UK provide services for a range of client groups, including people with learning difficulties (93% of care farms), autism spectrum disorders (86%), adults with mental ill-health (70%), people with physical disabilities (53%) and young people excluded from school or with behavioural issues (50%).
- Care farms typically provide services for several different client groups simultaneously (where appropriate) – on average, 5 different client groups.

- Most service users (88%) attend care farms between 1 and 3 times a week; most care farming sessions last for a day (typically between 10am and 3pm). The average cost of a care farming session is £52. Four percent of care farms also provide residential care.
- Care farms receive clients from a variety of referral routes but the most commonly via Local Authority social services (86%), via a client's family or carer (66%), through personalised budgets (56%) and Community Mental Health Teams (56%).

Implications

Numbers of care farms in the UK have continued to grow from 180 in 2012; to 230 in 2014; 240 in 2015 and 250 in 2016/17 – indicating a recent estimated increase of 10 new care farms a year. However, what we have seen in this current survey that has not been present before, is a significant rise in the number of farmers planning to offer care farm services in the future – i.e. 'prospective' care farms – with numbers rising from an estimated 55-60 in 2015 to over 100 in 2016/17.

The development of infrastructure and training for social farming in Ireland (both in the North and the Republic) by Social Farming Ireland has been facilitated by funding and support from the departments of agriculture in both countries. This has resulted in a significant rise in the scale of care farming in Ireland in recent months – particularly in the Republic where the number of care farms has risen by 75%.



In addition, there has been an increasing interest in care farming by a variety of different commissioners and referral agencies. An

important factor in this is the assurance of quality given by the care farming Code of Practice, which has proved very popular with commissioners (particularly from Local Authorities commissioning social care services). The Code of Practice covers everything from safe-guarding, risk assessment and health and safety to staff recruitment, farming activities and evaluation, and is also well-liked by care farmers, with more and more care farmers signing up to go through

¹ also called social farming or green care farming

² Prospective care farms are those farms in early planning stages or being very close to opening for business.

the Code. With 23 care farms meeting the Code standards and another 50 working through the process, these numbers are set to continue to rise – giving further credibility to the sector regarding provision of quality services. Furthermore, several prospective care farmers are using the Code as a template to work through, to ensure that all aspects are covered, before they open their gates to clients.

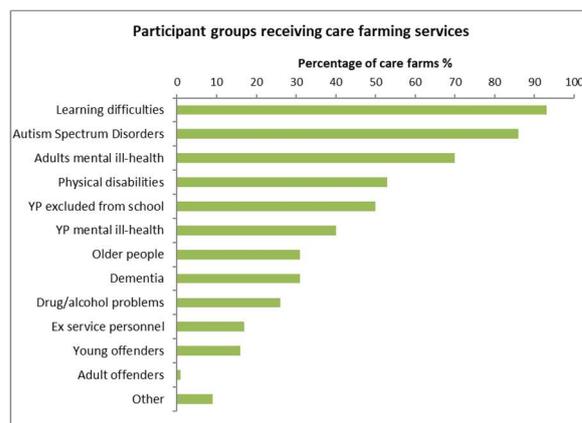
It is significant to note that 30% of all care farms have either achieved the Code of Practice or are working towards it – a 15% increase on last year. The number of prospective care farms has nearly doubled, which shows an encouraging level of interest in the sector and will, ultimately, lead to higher numbers of care farms going forward. Given that the R.o.I. have increased both numbers of care farms and prospectives by 75% as a direct result of the investment into their support infrastructure, it can be anticipated that growth in the UK would be equal or greater with a similar injection of funding into a support organisation (such as Care Farming UK).

Care farms continue to offer health, social and special educational care to a wide range of different service user groups including those with learning disabilities, people with Autism Spectrum Disorders, those with a drug history, people on probation, young people at risk and older people, as well as those with mental health issues. This year more care farms are providing services for ex-service personnel. Benefits for those attending care farms come from the combination of three key components: i) the natural outdoor environment; ii) the meaningful farm-based activities; and iii) the social context of working as part of a team. Care farms typically cater for an average of five different client groups at any one time which also has positive implications for increased social inclusion and for breaking down barriers and prejudices between social groups.

To give an estimate of the extent of care farming services for the whole of the UK, the results of this annual survey can be scaled up. Currently, there are approximately 250 care farms known to be operating in the UK. Given that the care farms in this study provide services for a mean number of 35 clients each a week, 250 care farms provide services for an estimated total of 8,750 vulnerable people per week across the UK.

Furthermore, most care farmers in this research stated that their care farm was not currently running at full capacity, with the mean operating capacity standing at 65% (a rise from 57% in 2015). Theoretically therefore, if all the places at existing care farms were filled, care farms could provide around 13,500 clients per week with farming services

in the UK. There is therefore a significant amount of latent potential for care farming to expand as an option in health, social and educational care.



Health and social care providers are seeking i) access to non-clinical interventions for their patients - delivered within the local community; and ii) different options for cost effective services - particularly with the challenge of caring for people with dementia and tackling mental ill-health. Care farming already integrates health and social care and provides exactly the style of community-based, non-clinical care sought by the NHS in the Stevens' report.

Care farming also makes a considerable contribution to the rural economy. The average cost of a care farming session is £52. Given that at the current 65% capacity level an estimated 8,750 people attend care farms in a week, over 40 weeks per year this is equivalent to a sector spend of approximately £18m. If these existing care farms were operating at 100% capacity in future (over 40 weeks), this would equate to approximately £28m per year.

In addition to providing valuable health and wellbeing benefits to service users and engaging more people in agriculture, care farming therefore provides new opportunities for small family farms who may be seeking alternative ways to use their farms and farming experiences post-Brexit; where income is independent of farm prices and the weather, whilst retaining and developing rural skills, employment and associated services.

The full report of this annual survey is available at: <https://www.carefarminguk.org/resource/care-farming-uk-and-ireland-annual-survey-201617>

Care Farming UK is a professional charitable company led by care farmers and care farming supporters. Care Farming UK has two main roles: i) Promoting care farming; and ii) Supporting care farmers. For more information see: www.carefarminguk.org or email: coordinator@carefarminguk.org