

## Growing Care Farming Annual Survey 2020: Overview

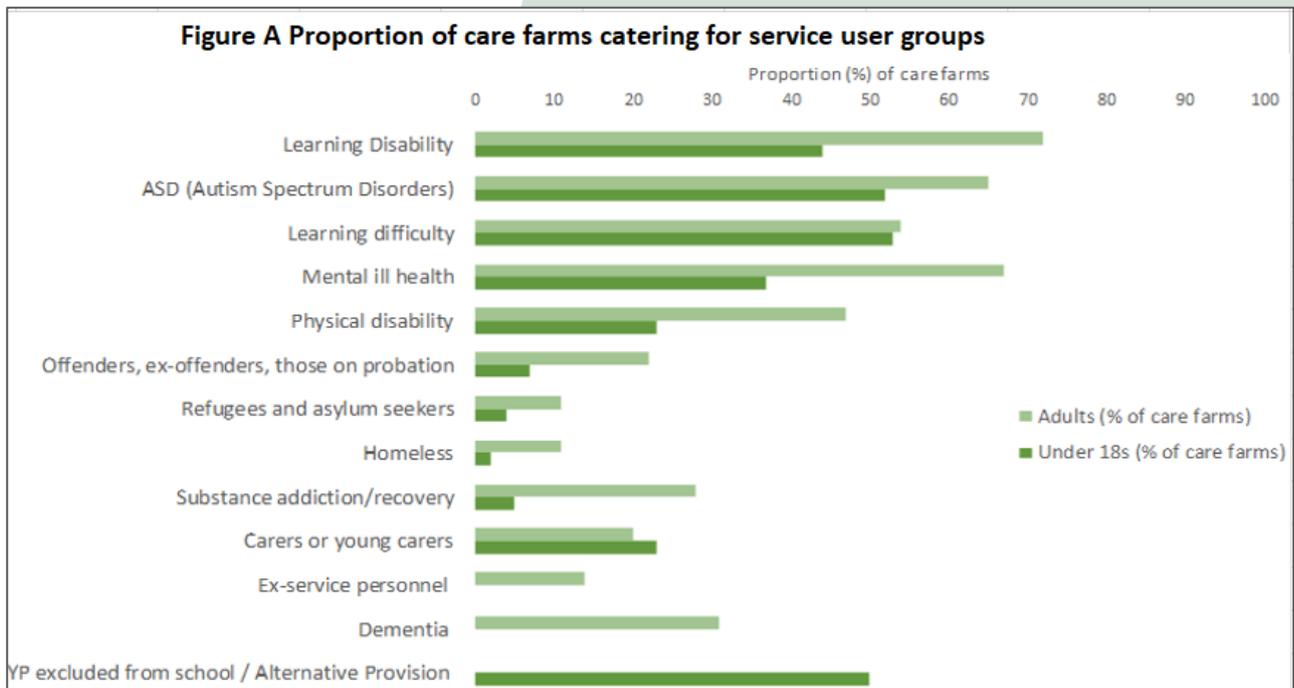


Care farming (sometimes called social farming) is the therapeutic use of farming practices. On care farms, components of either the whole or part of the farm (or site) are used to provide health, social or educational care through a supervised, structured programme of farming-related activities.

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# Key findings

- In 2020, there are an estimated **299 care farms currently operating** in the UK and a further **90 in the Republic of Ireland**. There are also an estimated 150 prospective care farms<sup>1</sup> in various stages of development. Both the numbers of care farms and prospective care farms show an increase since the previous survey in 2017.
- There are **253 care farms in England, 10 in Wales; 12 in Scotland; and 24 in Northern Ireland**.
- Most care farms are either charities (33%), Community Interest Companies (25%) or Limited Companies, Charitable Companies Limited by Guarantee and partnerships. Just under half of care farmers (43%) are owner occupiers, 35% rent their site, and 21% of care farms have been given the land that they use at no charge.
- The number of service users attending a care farm per day varies from farm to farm, but **the average number of clients attending per day is 10** and the majority of sites are open for 5 days per week. 93% of care farms in the survey provide non-residential services. The average operating capacity level of UK care farms is 63%.
- **Care farming places are typically for a day session** but there are morning sessions, afternoon sessions and hourly sessions too. The cost of care farming sessions varies widely depending session length and service user need and ability, but **the average cost is £59 per day** session.
- Care farms in the UK **provide services for a range of client groups**, including adults with a Learning Disability (72%) adults with mental ill-health (67% of care farms), adults with ASD (65%), and with learning difficulties at 54%. For the under 18s, learning difficulty (53%), ASD (52%), young people excluded from school or on Alternative Provision (50%) and Learning Disability (44%) are the most frequently catered for.



<sup>1</sup> Prospective care farms are those farms in early planning stages or being very close to opening for business.

- Care farms **typically provide services for individuals from 5 different client groups** simultaneously (where appropriate).
- The **referral routes and funding for care farming places varies enormously** and so it is a very complex picture. Most commonly, referrals come from personalised social care budgets (53% of care farms), Local Authority Social care referrals (52%), referrals from families or carers (47%) with Specialist Education services at (38%). Typically, **the average care farm will work with 7 different referring agencies and commissioning bodies.**
- Grant or charity funding is accessed by most care farms (63%) with donations and fundraising activities both at 17%, but **mainly care farmers told us that they regularly access funding from at least five different sources.**
- The **biggest challenges** facing care farms include: **funding** (identified as the biggest challenge at 63%), **securing contracts and accessing referrals** (both 16%) followed by growing capacity to reach demand (11%), transport and land tenure issues.

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## Numbers of care farming places

Numbers of care farms in the UK have continued to grow from 180 in 2012; to 230 in 2014; 240 in 2015, 250 in 2016/17 and 299 in 2020 – indicating an estimated increase of **over 10 new care farms a year**. In the 2020 survey the rise in the number of farmers planning to offer care farm services in the future – i.e. ‘prospective’ care farms – continues, from an estimated 55-60 in 2015, over 100 in 2016/17, to around 150 in 2020.

To give an estimate of the extent of care farming places for England, the results of this annual survey can be scaled up. Currently, there are approximately 299 care farms known to be operating in the UK and 253 in England. Given that the total number of weekly care farming places reported by care farms in the survey is 2,861 (from 30% of care farms), if we included numbers from 100% of care farms in England, the total increases to approximately 9,536 places per week. Care farms are delivering services for an average of 46 weeks per year, so **it is reasonable to conservatively estimate that care farms are currently delivering 438,656 places per year in England alone and 469,660 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 63%.** Theoretically therefore, if all the places at existing care farms were filled, care farms could provide around 15,136 places per week in England (or 16,206 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.**

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## Benefits of care farming

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Benefits for those attending care farms come from the combination of three key components:

- 1 the natural outdoor environment
- 2 the meaningful farm-based activities
- 3 the social context of working as part of a team.

Care farms continue to offer health and social care and special educational services to a wide range of different service user groups including those with a Learning Disability, people with Autism Spectrum Disorders, those with a drug history, people on probation, young people at risk and those on Alternative Provision, ex-service personnel and older people (Figure A).



**This year we have seen an increase in care farms delivering services to adults with mental ill-health. Care farming also increases social inclusion and breaks down barriers and prejudices between social groups.**

Health and social care providers are seeking;

- access to non-clinical interventions for their patients - delivered within the local community via Social Prescribing; and
- different options for cost effective services - particularly in regard to caring for people with dementia and tackling mental ill-health.

**With the Covid-19 pandemic and the reported increases in anxiety and depression associated with it, the challenge facing mental healthcare is likely to increase still further. Care farming already integrates health and social care and provides exactly the style of community-based, non-clinical care sought in social prescribing. Furthermore, nature-based therapeutic options such as care farming are particularly relevant at the moment and can play a major part in the nation's mental health recovery post Covid-19.**

Care farming also makes a considerable contribution to the rural economy. The average cost of a care farming session is £59. Given that an estimated 9,536 care farming places farms a week are currently provided, over 46 weeks per year this is equivalent to a sector spend of approximately £26.8m in England.

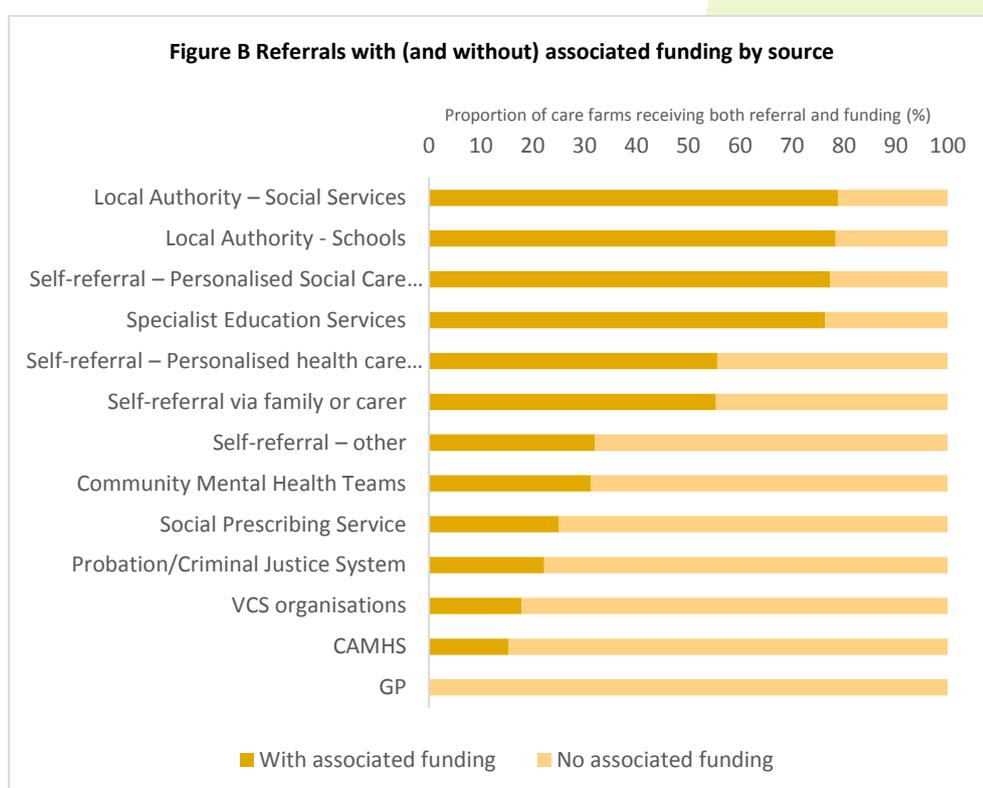
This is at the 63% operating capacity, **if these existing care farms were operating at 100% capacity in future, this would increase to approximately £41m per year.**

## Referrals and funding

Referrals to a care farm currently may come with or without funding. **Some referral routes seem to be better at providing funding for their individual referrals than others.**

Currently, referrals from social care and education seem to be better funded than those from health (Figure B). Nearly 80% of referrals from i) Local Authority social services; ii) self-referrals via personal social care budgets; iii) Local Authority schools; and iv) SEN services, come with associated funding to pay for the service provision.

A referral with associated funding means that the care farm can provide the service, as costs are covered. If a referral does not come with funding, the funding needs to be sought from elsewhere. **As a result, care farmers typically have to access other funding sources to adequately cover the costs of providing services.**



**If we are wanting care farms and other green care sites to help tackle to rise in mental ill-health post Covid, creating more sustainable funding and consistent referral pathways is key.**

The full report of this annual survey is available at: <https://www.farmgarden.org.uk/gcf/scale-of-sector>

*Growing Care Farming is part of the Government's Children & Nature programme and is delivered by Social Farms & Gardens, in partnership with Thrive. GCF will transform the scale of the care farming sector across England through the provision of advocacy, training and resources, quality assurance (via the care farming Code of Practice) and regional networking to create more opportunities for children and adults with a defined need to benefit from the bespoke health, care and educational services provided on care farms.*