

Summary

- Set up in 2010 by Doeke Dobma, and run with his wife, Iris van Zon
- Mixed farm (143 acres), owned by Norfolk County Council, offering care farming opportunities four days a week
- Doeke has been particularly successful at securing political support and funding, which he has attracted from a range of different sources
- The care farm is well supported in the community, and enjoys the support of several retired volunteers, most of whom previously worked in education or health care.

What is special about this care farm

Doeke has secured funding for Clinks Farm from the Rural Development Programme for England as well as the Waveney Valley Local Action Group, Sustainable Development Fund (the Broads Authority) and EcoMinds (part of the Lottery, which is managed by MIND).

Clinks Care Farm didn't develop overnight, stresses Doeke. One of the seeds for its development was in 2008, when he secured funding to take 12 commissioners/farmers on a five-day to visit around care farms in Holland. Says Doeke: "Health and social care officers got really excited – it provided a practical model of how care farming would work." He then raised interest further by holding seminars, running a road show, and making visits to farmers' markets. Years later, all his work is bearing fruit and he is working in partnership with local NHS, mental health and adult community services.

The care farm also enjoys strong political support, which is exemplified by the fact that in January 2011 its new log cabin was opened by the local MP and Chair of Norfolk County Council.

Target market

The care farm is open four days per week. It takes groups of seven or eight at a time and offers free taster days to those who want. "There is capacity for more, but we want to stay in control at the moment," says Doeke.

Two days cater for a mixed group of people – everyone from disadvantaged young people to those with dementia. The two other days cater specifically for a new 'Farming on Prescription' project, under which people with mental health issues in primary care come one day per week for 12 weeks. This project has one year's funding from the Department of Health's Innovation Fund (East of England), and it funds three part-time staff, two of whom are former service users. It took some time to develop referrals – following publicity to libraries, GPs and the local media – but there is now a waiting list for people to attend.

A final group, called the 'Great Outdoors Project', attends one day per month and is funded by the NHS Norfolk. It provides opportunities for unpaid carers to get some respite/'me time', and to learn new skills, in a healthy environment.

The bottom line

The 'mixed group' are funded through direct payments, and come under referrals from locality teams working in outreach, community mental health, early intervention, elderly people's services etc. Some also come from private care homes.

Funding for the Farming on Prescription project ends in October 2011, but Doeke is negotiating with the local PCT to try and secure its continuation.

A lottery bid is currently under consideration. If successful, it will develop a community kitchen programme, vegetable box scheme for people on low incomes, and basic cooking skills for residents of a local housing organisation, the Saffron Housing Trust.

"Our costs are largely covered," says Doeke. "But we are not making a huge profit – we are doing it to change people's lives."



In their own words

Motivation – Doeke spent a lot of time on a farm when he was young, so he has always appreciated the value of 'green care'. But it was his sister, a health and social care worker in Holland, who introduced him to the idea of care farming.

Approach – The care farm provides opportunities in three areas: around small animal care (poultry up to calves), horticulture (there are some vegetables and a market garden is being developed) and environmental work (it operates DeFRA's Entry Level Stewardship scheme). Doeke says his aim is not necessarily to give people a 'great time' but to enable them, as a result, to participate more in society – leading them to further education and training courses, or helping them find work and volunteering opportunities. Clinks Care Farm is not an end in itself; it is a means to full recovery, participation and social inclusion.

Benefits – Doeke is well aware that the results of care farming are usually only expressed in soft outcomes (see Challenges, below). As a result placements at Clinks are being closely monitored using a questionnaire drawn up with the help of the University of East Anglia. The results are positive so far, says Doeke, and he hopes the project will later become mainstream.

On a care farm that Doeke use to operate - Sotterley, in Suffolk - seven out of the 19 clients (who were in secondary care) secured employment during its 14 months of operation (2008-10).



Messing around with the chickens can be very therapeutic

For more information

Doeke Dobma. Tel: 01502 679134
e-mail: doeke.dobma@clinkscarefarm.org

Key challenges

Care farming is different in the UK compared to Holland, says Doeke. In the UK, commissioners want to see outcomes, rather than just evidence that people have completed a programme.

As another challenge, he points to the major shift currently taking place in the delivery of services, as councils move from block purchasing towards direct payments. In Suffolk, where Doeke is also working, the county council is very keen to outsource many of its services – and it has even set itself a target of setting up 10 care farms by March 2012. But councils are responding to these changes differently; there is not the same commitment in Norfolk.

Doeke also knows the challenges of securing funding, and keeping abreast of its changes. "You have to keep faith and keep believing in the concept of care farming in the face of such changes," he says.

Tips for others

"You have to have a passion to go into care farming," says Doeke. "It requires time, patience, a willingness to make mistakes, and a commitment to helping improve the lives of those who are disadvantaged."

He also suggests those interested should contact their regional care farm network or the NCFI – so that they can hear of others' experiences, and ideally spend some time on an existing care farm, to see how they work.

Finally, Doeke recommends being open with the local community as to anything you are planning. In his case, some people got worried at the thought of ex-offenders coming to their community. Having a dialogue and talking with parish councils, neighbours and others early on, therefore, before misperceptions and opposition develops, is essential.

He also recommends getting political support – if you can.

If you want to learn more about Care Farming UK please visit www.carefarminguk.org or email enquiries@carefarminguk.org