



SOCIAL FARMS AND GARDENS WITH THRIVE SELECTED TO EXPAND AND TRANSFORM CARE FARMING IN ENGLAND

JOINT PRESS RELEASE FROM SOCIAL FARMS & GARDENS AND THRIVE

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Social Farms & Gardens, working with Thrive, have today been selected to expand and transform care farming services across England and ultimately help improve the mental health of disadvantaged children and adults with defined needs, by bringing them closer to nature.

The Growing Care Farming project is part of the Children and Nature Programme being supported by Defra, funded by the Department of Education and managed by Natural England, which aims to encourage children from disadvantaged backgrounds to play and learn outside, in and out of school, and is a key commitment in the Government's 25-year Environment Plan published last year.

The £1.4m Growing Care Farming project will run across all nine English regions and will create more opportunities for both children and adults to attend care farms, where they will access health, social and specialist educational care services while experiencing the natural environment in new ways. Therapeutic activities vary between care farms but typically include looking after livestock and growing crops and plants.

Social Farms & Gardens has a long history of working with its member care farmers, city farmers and community gardeners across the UK (see <http://www.farmgarden.org.uk>). The charity will work with care farmers and will support those interested in starting up in care farming in order to achieve these plans - which seek to increase the number of care farming places in England to 1.3 million per year by 2023. Social Farms & Gardens will work together with Thrive to provide new training opportunities and supporting resources for care farmers.

A key factor in the success of this project will be the engagement of professionals and commissioners in the health, social care and education sectors as well as the care farming community. The project will establish regionally-based networks and care farmer expert teams which can be responsive to local requirements.

Chris Blythe, Director of Social Farms & Gardens, said: 'Research shows a clear relationship between the benefits of spending time on a care farm and improved mood and self-esteem. Today's announcement represents a milestone in helping more people in need to access nature to improve their health and wellbeing.

'It will enable a rapid expansion of care farming places to deliver high quality services to people with health, social and educational needs.

'Importantly it will provide a stronger platform to increase understanding about the lifelong therapeutic benefits of access to nature among healthcare, social care and education professionals.'

Gardening-for-health charity Thrive, which specialises in using Social and Therapeutic Horticulture (STH) to help people with disabilities, poor mental health and long-term physical conditions, will provide its training expertise to equip the care farming sector to deliver the Growing Care Farming project. Thrive will provide four new courses for care farmers, two classroom-based ones that will run across the country and two others that will be available online via www.thrive.org.uk

Thrive has a track record of working with teenage students with Special Educational Needs via its Grow and Learn programme, which recent analysis showed had improved the cognitive skills of 60 per cent of participants from 2016-18.

Kathryn Rossiter, Thrive's Chief Executive, said: 'We are delighted to have this opportunity to work closely with the care farming sector promoting greater use of nature-based activities that will help many more people.

'The care farming and therapeutic gardening sectors have many similarities and share similar aims, so this represents an exciting project to bring our training expertise to a wider audience of practitioners and professionals.'

The success of the Growing Care Farming project will be evaluated through an independent process commissioned by Defra.

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Notes to Editors

- Social Farms & Gardens formed from a merger between the Federation of City Farms & Community Gardens (FCFCG) and Care Farming UK. Both organisations have a long track record of working with care farms, schools, special schools, community gardens and APIs. Many of SF&G's members work with schools in one form or another, whether as a local school visit to a farm or garden, or formally tied into studying a curriculum subject.
- SF&G supports over 1,000 members to deliver health and wellbeing outcomes through care farming and gardening activities, rather than directly delivering activities itself. The Trustees of Social Farms & Gardens are largely made up of either care farmers or community gardeners with direct delivery experience of health and wellbeing outcomes, ensuring the organisation always has a focus on benefits to the care farm end user.
- SF&G has an established history of developing and being part of partnership bids to develop the capacity of both member groups and those in the wider sector. The care farming sector across the UK is expanding, with the number of care farms growing from approximately 70 in 2008, to a current level of over 250. There are also 60 prospective care farms in various stages of development in England, representing a marked increase in the last 18 months. More than 50 per cent of care farms work with young people excluded from school or with behavioural issues.
- Thrive is the leading charity in the UK for the therapeutic use of gardening and horticulture. It promotes the use of gardening to bring about positive changes in the lives of people who are living with disabilities or ill health, or are isolated, disadvantaged or vulnerable, in a process known as Social and Therapeutic Horticulture (STH). Thrive provides information and specialist services, training and structured therapeutic horticultural programmes which help thousands of disabled people.
- Thrive's training and education programme has increased the professionalism of STH practitioners through a series of courses. These courses can also be beneficial to individuals working within the wider Green Care sector.
- SF&G and Thrive have extensive experience in joint working in the wider nature, health and wellbeing networks.

For more information, interview requests or photographs, please contact Dr Rachel Bragg, Care Farming Development Manager at Social Farms & Gardens: carefarming@farmgarden.org.uk / 07851 931957; or Mark Lang, PR & Communications Manager at Thrive; mark.lang@thrive.org.uk / 0118 988 0677.