



PRODUCTION
DISTRIBUTION
VOLUNTEERING
FOOD HUB
QUIN BEO



**CLOUGHJORDAN
COMMUNITY FARM**

WINTER UPDATE 2021

Hello! and welcome to our Winter update.

The world may be complicated, truncated, fractured, contested, in many crises and all kinds of everything, but here - on the ground - we have our farm. 2021 has been a year of continuity and change, of consolidation and, well, of a fair few cabbages, for this cosy community in the midlands.

Our board saw two new members join - Megan O Hanlon (Kildare) and Fergal Anderson (Galway). Our producers at the start of the year were Torben Marl and Rebecca Gould. Rebecca finished in the Autumn, to return to her previous position, while Torban has stayed on to complete the year. Next year, Pat Malone returns from February, with an exciting plan you'll hear about here and at our two meetings, with Torben also coming back for the busy Summer period (April to September) to complete the team. Already, we've seen an uptick of green manures go into the land for longterm fertility and productivity, we've seeds ordered, we hope to have a new polytunnel completed by end of year, to elongate the growing season and provide our own early season tunnel crops - so we're planning to have plenty of fab fodder to feed ourselves in 2022.

We want to invest in the farm itself - fertility, productivity, infrastructure and more - and with our coming plans for 2022 - we really feel this will be possible. More details at our next meeting early in the new year.

Mel White and Aaron Bailey have taken over coordinating the ESC programme, which sees young people (aged 18-30) come here for up to a year to live, learn and work in our community, on our farm's land. We thank Conor Mongey and Susan Cabezas for their work up to Mel and Aaron's time.

2021 also saw Patrick McGee, our bookkeeper join, and an exciting venture initiated with our Open Food Hub, a local digital farmers market and accompanying national training programme. The North Tipperary Online Farmers Market is giving local producers a viable route to market in small towns, while adding to our own food security and food sovereignty. While our educational outputs were inevitably more limited due to covid, Kevin Dudley is currently delivering really interesting seed saving courses for farm members and the wider community.

2022 looks exciting, with lots more synergies between the on-the-ground entities on site in the Ecovillage; with a new ambitious, ramped up production plan; with the hope of doing face to face educational events and gatherings in the buildings on the land, and more.

Despite it all then, despite all the madneses of the world, the stresses and the pressures, our farm has shown an enormous and very real resilience. We adapted to circumstance and kept our focus on good food and good farming. Not for us the long, fraught and fragile supply chains of the global food system - at least when it comes to growing, sharing and eating good food. For this, we can be thankful to all of the people listed above - and many more behind the scenes like Tamara, Davie and Eileen - thankful to nature and the land, and to each other for our mutual aid and support. This is, in its own small but assured way, the other world you hear people sometimes say is possible.

Best, Ollie Moore. Chair of CCF Board



Production Update from Torben and Pat

It was a good year for our beetroot crop. The potatoes experienced a lot of slug damage which we reckon could be from the compost that we use to fertilise them. The carrot crop was a lot smaller than expected due to seed germination and weed pressure. We hope to improve on this next year. The squash production was more successful than last year and we aim to build on this. Our Brassica production has been successful with no major setbacks and the incorporation of a green manure before planting. We lost a few trays due to the extreme mid summer heat which is why there are no swedes available unfortunately.

Production will be shifted to fields 5, 6 and 7. A green manure has been planted on fields 5 and 6 to ensure fertility into the coming year. We managed to get all the potatoes out of the ground in time to plant a green manure to protect the bare soil in the winter. Many thanks to all the members who helped with this and also with the harvesting of some 40000 onions this year.

A big infrastructural addition to the farm was the purchase of a breathable compost cover which is being put to good use on the farm. It prevents the compost from being saturated from the rain and allows it to break down far better than when covered with plastic. Another big job was fixing the irrigation pump to ensure it's reliability. This year we experienced a drought and more are to be expected with the changing climate. With the right investments the farm will be in a good position to deal with this changing climate. I would like to thank Stephen Peel and Pat Malone who helped with fixing the pump. We also invested into some new crop protection to allow for better growing in the tunnels.

A big focus at the moment is to ensure that enough greens are growing in the tunnels. We had a setback in tunnel 2 with aphids and as a result are a bit behind on salad production but will hopefully fill this gap when younger plants come through. I will be leaving the farm at the end of this year for a break and will be back in April to continue growing with Pat Malone. I would like to thank all members for their support this year. It was a fantastic experience.

Torben

Hi all ,
I'm returning to the farm after a 2 year break. Within that time I returned with Lucas for 3 months in 2020 and have acted as a mentor to Rebecca and Torben from February this year so never left really.
From February 1st I will return as farm coordinator/manager taking on the cropping and facilitating volunteers / members on the ground. As well as working with Co-ordination and the Board , I will also have a steering group supporting me and Torben will be working with me from April to September.

My main goals are to increase fertility, reduce our weed pressure consolidate diversity and continuity of supply, some of the main areas of focus will be to;

- 1 mechanise the field production area
- 2 expand the no dig area
- 3 reduce hand weeding
- 4 increase fertility by diverting land over to green manures
- 5 we will also build a small propagation tunnel allowing tunnel 4 to be used for crop production

We have plans to cover the farm containers bringing equipment under cover and freeing up one of the containers for storage for which it was originally intended.

All in all I am hoping for a new beginning for our community farm , consolidating our cropping , seed saving and sustainability. Particularly I hope members will feel comfortable to visit any time either to help or just to visit for chats , meals or to enjoy the space.

Slan tamall, Pat



Distribution

The Coach House continues to be full of food. Our variety might be reduced due to the cold growing season yet we have plenty. Day 2 and day 3 after the harvest delivery continues to give a good selection of our winter vegetables. A big thank you to Torben and our team of ESC Volunteers for their efforts during this cold season.

The Harvest Report has recently been benefiting from shared recipes by farm members. It would be wonderful to have more input from members re recipes that they enjoy, or even feedback re the recipes shared in the HR that you like.

We had a difficult time with carrots and parsnips during the growing season this year due to a severe shortage of labor during the summer. We are now purchasing some locally grown organic carrots and parsnips from a farm in Birr as these are important core vegetables for members.

The new Top Up system continues to work well. It's a big improvement over our 'After 6' box that had previously aimed at supplying those who couldn't collect vegetables earlier in the day. Thanks goes out to Marika for being the person who consistently tops up the vegetables by 4:30. Any offers to help with this would be very welcome.

Our new program of weighing all of our vegetables coming from the farm. Now all the compostable veg from the CH is being weighed as well. A big thanks to the farm team for managing all the weighing every harvest day. And again a very big thanks to the small team of volunteers who keep the CH clean and tidy every week.

Reminders - The farm is now using AIB as our bank. Some farm members continue to deposit into Ulster Bank. Also we've had some payments for the year with no name attached. Please be sure to identify your payments so you can be credited correctly.

Tamara





Volunteering

In October Conor and Susan stepped down as coordinators of the ESC volunteer programme - thanks to them for all their work over the years, we really appreciate how much time and dedication they've put into building the programme to where it is today, and we wish them all the best in their own ventures with The Night Orchard. The coordinators roles were advertised and have been filled by Aaron and Mel, who officially took over from Conor and Su at the beginning of November.

We currently have four volunteers who will be with us on the farm until the end of March: Noelia, Ana, Jorge (pronounced Hor-hey) and Suzan. They spend five days of the week on the farm, planting, weeding and harvesting all the lovely vegetables that we collect from the coach house each week. They've all settled in well over the year, and have formed a strong team of close friends who work well together, and have a great relationship with Torben (who has been invaluable in working with the volunteers on a day to day basis, managing and delegating tasks). As well as their vegetable-growing tasks, the volunteers have each taken on self-directed personal projects that benefit the farm:

- Jorge and Suzan run the farm's Instagram account, which now has 900 followers, and their posts regularly get around 40 'likes'.
- Suzan has been drawing up maps of the farm showing the different fields and polytunnels, and the rotation of crops, which can be used by the production team in the years to come to keep track of what has been grown in the various plots, and when crops are due to be moved to new locations.
- Jorge and Noelia have been weighing the veg each week before it goes to the coach house, and weighing any leftover veg before the next collection day. This will help us to keep track of how much veg our members actually use, and will provide the production team with valuable information about how much to plant to meet members' needs.
- Noelia is interested in the various ways we can preserve the farm's crops and is starting to make chutneys using surplus veg. The intention is to sell these to make extra income for the farm, and the recipes can be passed onto the next batch of volunteers to continue the practice next year.
- Noelia has also been managing the farm's sales on the online farmers market: uploading the farm's surplus products to the open food network site, designing labels (along with Suzan), and dropping off anything that's been sold on collection days.

Despite the challenges of Covid, the volunteers have also managed to integrate reasonably well with the community, and have been involved, amongst other things, in the local soccer club, cooking classes with Tamara, Kung fu with Aaron and Patrick, tin whistle lessons with Shay, NVC with Patrick and Deirdre, and caring for horses with Susan Huschke. They've enjoyed the few social events that have taken place over the past months, and they're really hoping that Covid restrictions will allow for more parties over the Christmas period so they can get to know more people in the community and celebrate with us all (they're all staying with us for Christmas, so remember to extend an invitation to any festivities that they might like to be a part of).

Often the volunteers who stay with us don't want to leave when the year ends, and Pilar, who was part of a previous volunteer programme, decided to stay on, and is still living here in CloughJordan. Others have to leave us, and most recently Jake decided to go back to Australia when Covid restrictions there lessened to the point where he was able to go back to his family. While we'll miss him here, and are sorry that he didn't get to complete his year with us, we understand his reasons for wanting to go home and wish him all the best.

While we still have a few months left with the current volunteers, we're already thinking ahead to next year, and have successfully applied for funding for six new volunteers, who will join us on the farm from April. We will be looking for accommodation for them nearer the time, so please keep us in mind if you have space available, or are aware of any options that might be suitable.

Open Food Hub

With funding secured in December 2020 from Rethink Ireland the Farm established the Open Food Hub at the WeCreate Enterprise Centre. Our aim was to provide sustainable routes to market for the Farm and local small producers through an online farmers market and with the 'Open Training Network provide training and mentoring to farmers, producers and other food hubs, CSAs and farmers across Ireland. The Hub acts as a model for regional Food Hubs that enable communities to strengthen food security and local economic resilience through the production and distribution of local food.

The Training Network was coordinated by Davie and Eileen and over the year hosted 14 virtual and 2 physical sessions with national and international trainers for producers, framers and hubs across Ireland. There are now 14 other regional Food Hubs in a Community of Practice that we maintain. Funding has been secured from the Wheel for 2022 to extend and maintain the Open Training Network to serve an emerging cooperative and community-led food sector.

Through the Food Hub we also researched and published a major report for Trasna Productions on the potential of **CSA for Camphill Communities**, produced a film on the Farm for the St Patrick's Festival, coordinated the **CSA Ireland Network** where we carried out a survey on CSAs in Ireland and hosted a large online gathering for CSAs and Regenerative Farmers.

In July two events of **Feeding Ourselves** were hosted by the Food Hub, which this year was a virtual series of events held over a week in partnership with ARC2020, NOTS, Cultivate and Talamh Beo. In September the Hub coordinated Feile na N'Ull, the annual **Apple Festival** here in Cloughjordan, which this year was an evening of music in the Hub and a day of apple pressing, stalls, workshops and activities around WeCreate.



The **North Tipperary Online Farmers Market**, launched in July, and has been running every two weeks since then on www.openfoodnetwork.ie. Mel White, as the market coordinator, is responsible for the various operational tasks, including administration, communications, tech support, accounts, and managing the drop off and distribution of products.

We've now built up a small but regular customer base who shop at each market, and we also attract a small number of new customers at each order cycle. As twenty percent of all sales go to the farm, the market has brought in €700 euros for the farm since it launched (not including the sales of our own farm veg).

The online market gives us access to local products outside of the scope of what we can produce on the farm, while providing a new outlet for a number of local businesses. We now have 23 producers onboard who are all based either in Cloughjordan or the surrounding area, helping us to fulfil the farm's remit of supplying local food to the local community. It's ideal for food producers as it enables them to connect directly with customers without having to stand all day on a market, and as they only need to prepare or harvest what they know has been sold, they don't have lots of leftover unsold produce going to waste at the end of the day. It's also a great support for new businesses or small initiatives who don't produce enough stock to fill a market stall or to supply a shop.

As well as the farm's surplus vegetables, the market is now selling organic chicken and pork, organic milk, locally made cheese, free range eggs, home-baked bread and cakes, quiches, chutneys, jams, foraged wildflower syrups and cordials, hand-made eco-friendly laundry detergent, natural health and beauty products, locally produced crafts, and lots of other goods. A new Christmas range includes extra products like turkey and goose (available to pre-order for collection on the 23rd), Christmas hams, Christmas cakes and Christmas puddings, gingerbread men, chocolate brownies, Christmas cookies, Christmas wreaths, a gift box containing various brands of tea, and a range of locally made crafts that would make ideal Christmas presents. We even have wrapping paper available!

Next year we hope to start selling more products made using surplus farm veg at times of year when we have a glut, preserving the farm's produce and providing more income for the farm. While building up relationships with the food producers in the area, we discovered that there are currently no suppliers for certain types of food products within the immediate locality - a disturbing issue for our regional food security, and something that we hope to address in the future. The gaps in the market include some very obvious products that could be made from farm veg, like pesto, sauerkraut, and other preserves, and even soups and healthy ready-made meals to be reheated at home. We'd also like to encourage anyone in the area who has an interest in food or would like to make a bit of extra income to consider making products to sell on the market.



CUAN BEO

Earlier this year the Cuan Beo educational facility, which includes the Educational Polytunnel, Green Cabin and Compost Loo, had some work done to it, thanks to funds raised by Toni Ryan.

Mick Bradley drew up a fantastic and imaginative overall design for the area, which we hope will evolve in reality over the next couple of years. With the sensory garden close by and the composting area and Bruce's black plot opposite, this wider area has potential to evolve into a multi-layered educational space around sustainable growing and biodiversity.

Thanks to Mick and other community volunteers, a great start has been made on revitalising this space and creating renewed enthusiasm for this project, which got badly stalled in 2020 by Covid. Additional community members got involved in planting and landscaping and creating some new infrastructure: an outdoor seating and screening area have been created, with Mick and Julia donating a screen and sail style weather covers; Shay, AJ and Vasudha, Pat Bowe, Jo Monaghan, Gabrielle Kieran and Hasret all worked hard on initiating some landscaping. As mentioned above, all this work was instigated, co-ordinated and funded by Toni...so thanks are due to her and this diligent team.

We have been discussing next steps and a relaunch of the Cabin as an asset for the Ecovillage as well as the Farm for courses, classes and meetings.

Again at Toni's behest, Kevin Dudley has since run the first of several courses in the space and this has kickstarted what we hope will be a series of Cuan Beo courses and classes by various tutors over 2022.

Eileen B, the Cuan Beo Coordinator along with Davie for the Community Farm have also had a meeting with VERT, to explore the opportunity for VERT to help drive Cuan Beo's development re Community education courses via collaborative projects and to encourage VERT's use of the area, especially re biodiversity courses. Toni, who is involved with helping develop Cuan Beo, has been approved as VERT's lead on Biodiversity Education at the behest of Land Use, so that is a positive step which creates further connections and, hopefully, some great biodiversity courses can be run next year from/involving Cuan Beo.

With increased usage in mind, we have been exploring the potential for upgrading the Green Cabin and getting electricity to it, in order to improve the facilities. Eileen B will look for potential funding for that but this could involve a wider discussion with WeCreate and others.

The Compost Loo will need finished also, as the site is not complete without it. It may be possible to look to the next crop of ESC Vols to help out with that but further discussions need to be had with Aaron and Mel, the new ESC Vol Coordinators to see what is possible.

Regardless of this issue, there is a good opportunity next year for the Farm and Cuan Beo to develop educational courses in collaboration with Aaron and Mel with regard to the new ESC programme. Toni Ryan is also keen to develop the possibility of Social Farming type courses there too. Stephen Peel is also interested in helping to further develop and maintain this area as part of its remit is to be front of house for the Farm and the Green Cabin is one of the first buildings people see when they drive into the Ecovillage.

Our plan therefore is to start to create a solid calendar of events to offer throughout next year and also to encourage the use of the Cabin and the Polytunnel, at a reasonable charge, by local community groups. It will be necessary to start charging set rates for the above in order to establish a small fund for ongoing maintenance and repairs and hopefully to also provide some income for the Farm.

It is high time to really get this area animated and to make the best use of the Green Cabin and the Polytunnel as educational assets and with the emphasis now at last truly on learning about climate change and sustainability, the demand is increasing for this type of education and we hope to really make the most of this new public focus and awareness over the coming year.





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For more information visit our website: www.cloughjordancommunityfarm.ie

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Visit our North Tipperary Online Farmers Market

www.openfoodnetwork.ie

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