

Care farming & green care annual survey 2021: Overview



Dr Rachel Bragg

Care Farming and Green Care



Social Farms & Gardens have a history of tracking the scale and scope of the care farming sector.

We've taken regular snapshots of the sector since 2007.

Our data helps us advocate for care farming and green care, representing practitioner needs to policy makers and funders.

In 2021, we collected data on the impacts of Covid-19 after most restrictions were lifted. We also invited responses from people looking to develop new care farms or green care sites.

Green care means structured therapy or treatment programmes that take place in natural surroundings.

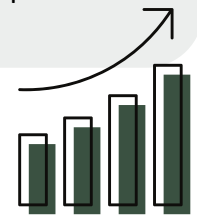
This includes care farming, Social and Therapeutic Horticulture (STH) and animal assisted interventions.

Care farming is the therapeutic use of farming practices.

Key findings in numbers

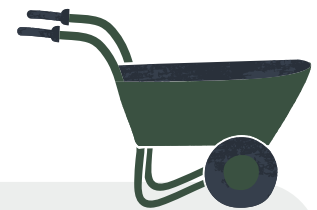
402 care farms and green care providers in the UK - and growing

The number of care farms has grown by **34%** since the 2019/20 survey. There are also an estimated 220 care farms and sites in development.



Care farms are delivering around **675,269** places per year in England alone

This is a 54% increase in places in England and a 57% increase on UK places from the last survey.



Care farms could provide over **1m** places per year

There is significant potential for care farming to expand as an option in health, social and educational care.



Care farming contributes around **£70m** each year to the economy

The average cost of a care farming session is **£68**.

With 23,174 care farming places a week over 47 weeks per year this is equivalent to approximately **£70m** in England annually.



About care farms and green care sites

33% of care farms are charities

Community Interest Companies make up 25%. Others are Limited Companies, Charitable Companies Limited by Guarantee and partnerships.

Land

43% of care farmers are owner occupiers

33% rent their land, 19% have been given the land for a peppercorn rent and 5% provide services on an outreach basis either as their main or additional provision.



People

79% of care farms and green care providers work with adults

59% work with children

44% work with both

Most care farms in the UK work with a variety of client or service user groups. The average care farm or green care provider caters for 11 service users per day. Attendance varies but people usually attend care farms once or twice a week.



Adults

For adults, the most common service user groups attending care farms are:

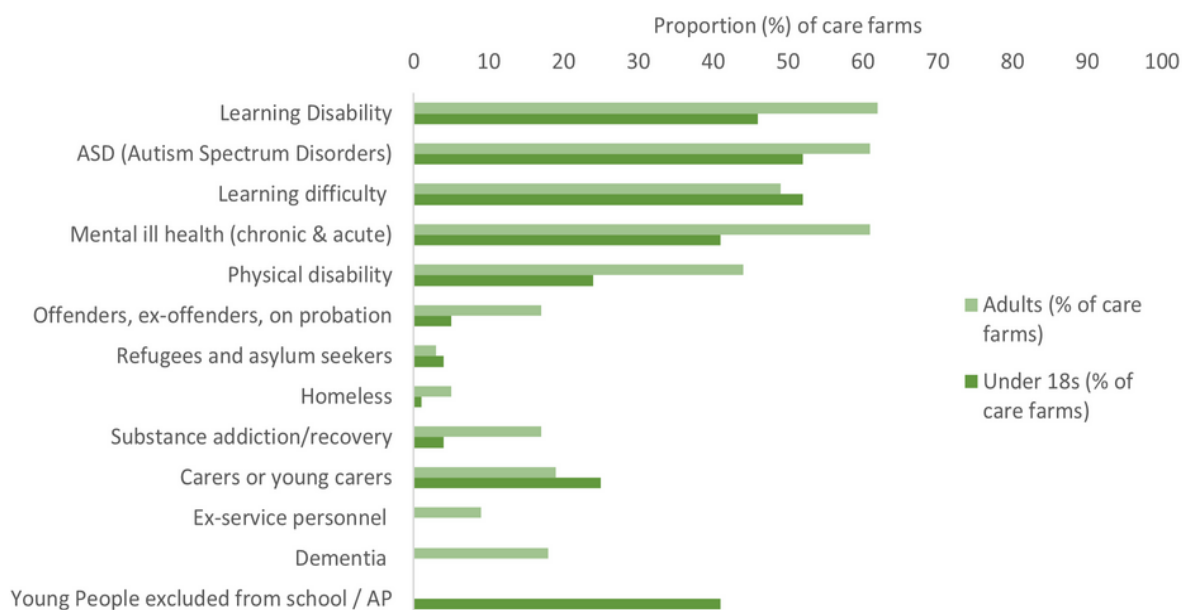
- people with a Learning Disability - 62%
- people with mental ill-health - 61%
- people with ASDs and with learning difficulties - 49%

Young people

For young people under 18, the most common service user groups attending care farms are:

- young people with a learning difficulty - 52%
- young people with ASD - 52%
- young people with Learning Disability - 41%
- young people excluded from school or on Alternative Provision - 25%

Figure A. Proportion of care farms catering for different service user groups



Care farm charges

Most care farms charge for a full day session which costs £68 on average

Charges for care farming sessions depend on time and service user need and ability.

Most care farms charge for full day individual or group sessions. The average cost for a group of 8-10 people is £210.

Some care farms charge for individual sessions by hour at an average cost of £32 per hour.

Referrals

Referrals and funding for care farming and green care places vary and can be quite complex.

The average care farm and green care provider will work with at least four different referral agencies or commissioning bodies.

Referrals to a care farm may come with or without funding.

Most care farm referrals come from:

- Families and carers - 55%
- Local Authority Social Services - 53%
- Personal Social care budgets - 46%
- Education services - 42%



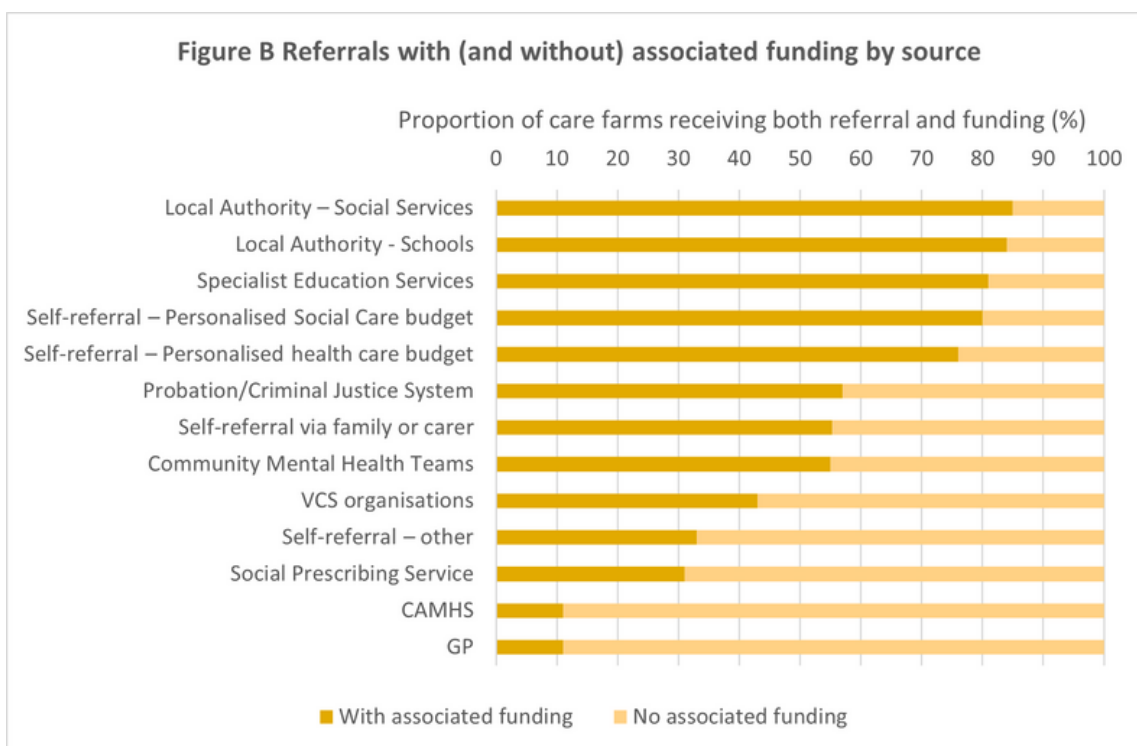
Referral funding

Over 80% of referral routes from Local Authority social services, self-referrals via personal social care budgets and Local Authority schools come with funding for service provision.



This compares to 30% or less from social prescribing and other healthcare referrals.

However, associated funding for referrals from probation services, Children's Mental Health Teams (CMHT) and Voluntary and Charitable Sector (VCS) organisations has increased since the last survey.



Impact on resources

If a referral doesn't come with adequate funding, the funding needs to be found elsewhere to cover the cost of the service. This can put considerable strain on care farm resources, planning and longer-term financial sustainability.

Covid-19 impact

37% of care farms saw an increase in enquiries and 29% an increase in referrals due to Covid-19

On average, care farms and green care sites lost almost six months of delivery due to pandemic restrictions.

Covid changes

- A low number of referrals during lockdowns
 - Surges and backlogs as lockdowns lifted
 - Some service users being hesitant to return due to Covid anxiety
 - Changes in type of referral and service user
- Care farmers and green care providers developed new ways of working during the pandemic.
- To stay in touch with service users care farmers used social media, online newsletters, online support sessions and changed operating procedures.
- Many of these changed ways of working are continuing.

“Referral ceased altogether during the height of the pandemic - now though, we have a surge of referrals.”

Challenges and successes



Funding and operational costs were identified as the biggest challenges facing care farmers and green care providers now.

This was followed by securing contracts, accessing referrals and finding staff. Covid-related issues also featured.

Innovation in using digital communication worked well for many care farms.

“Too many referrals not enough funding for additional staffing to offer more places.”

“We provided activity packs with resources and ideas for children with SEND and we have now developed this into an extended offer.”

Sector support needs

Care farmers and green care providers identified that the following additional support would help them or the wider green care sector:

Stable funding streams

1



Funding to cover core costs

2

Networking and collaboration between care farmers

3



More training opportunities

4



Support and resources

5

More advocacy and promotion of the sector at a national level

6

Help to match land available to where land is needed for care farms

7



Growing the sector

The prospective view

This year, people developing new care farming or green care sites also told us about their experiences. Just over a third told us they are at the planning and research stage. About half of the prospectives said that their plans and progress had been delayed in some way but that things were now moving forward.

Land for new sites

63% of prospectives own the land

The majority of prospectives (86%) have a site lined up, and 14% do not. Of those who have a site lined up, 63% own the land, 20% have been given the land for no charge or a peppercorn rent and 17% plan to rent the land.

Challenges



Start-up funding (23%)

Accessing referrals and delivery planning (16%)

Funding for referrals, planning permission / legal issues (12%)

The challenges facing prospective care farmers and green care providers vary widely but there were some common themes identified.



More information



Social Farms & Gardens is a UK wide charity supporting communities to farm, garden and grow together.

Social Farms & Gardens, in partnership with Thrive, are delivering the Growing Care Farming (GCF), project as part of the Government's Children & Nature programme.

Our vision is to create more opportunities for children and adults with a defined need to benefit from the health, care and educational services provided on care farms and green care sites.



Find out more and read our full annual survey report at www.farmgarden.org.uk

