



# Farming Connect Management Exchange

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Italy

Care farming

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## Background

I currently contract rear dairy heifers and do relief milking work on a neighbouring farm. A farm diversification venture in 2010 involved recycling quarried slate spoil to produce decorative slate products. My most recent venture has developed from another part time role supporting the development of individuals with autism and learning difficulties by using a wide range of activities incorporating nature-based activities. Supported through my membership of a Farming Connect Agrisgôp group in 2018, I began the process of registering as a Care Farm. I hope Gwaun Care Farm will be fully operational this summer. I am currently contracted to host one young person on-farm one day a week.

I plan to grow the Care Farm and its activities, offering a greater range of learning opportunities for individuals and have already invested in some dairy sheep. I am also planning to develop woodland activities and green woodworking workshops, incorporating these into other nature-based activities to offer a holistic learning environment. There is significant demand for care farms in Wales according to both many local health boards and county councils. I believe this could offer some farm businesses the opportunity to respond and meet those needs.

During my exchange, I will visit San Patrignano care farm in Italy, sector leaders who offer specialist rehabilitation methods tailored to suit individual needs, enabling residents' rehabilitation and the chance to regain their confidence within society.

## My Exchange

San Patrignano is more than just a farm; it is a community dedicated to rehabilitation: from those who suffer from a wide variety of addictions to those with disabilities. I had chosen to visit this farm in Rimini, Italy, after being awarded a place on Farming Connect's Farm Management Exchange. This meant I could visit anywhere in Europe to enhance and learn valuable things in order to promote our new or existing businesses.



During my visit, San Patrignano was celebrating 40 years of existence; this equates to 40 years of helping people with addictions and disabilities. A lot of the individuals in the care of the farm had issues with drug addictions. This particular matter was dealt with by being placed on a four-year programme. For the duration of their rehabilitation, they were not permitted to have any physical contact with their families or to mobile phones, or relationships on the farm. After reaching a specific milestone in their programme, they were then allowed a weekly phone call. The severity of this rehabilitation programme was highlighted to me when I was informed that they were not allowed coffee, tea, biscuits; they were not even allowed to go to the gym more than four times a week as they were addicts. The community was not solely for those who had drug addictions; it also had supporting programmes for those with addictions ranging from gambling to sex, to alcohol abuse and eating disorders.

However, the current success rate is a phenomenal 73%, and for many participants, it is their last chance to really turn things around, as they will automatically return to jail if they fail the programme. Although they were very stern, the atmosphere was quite relaxed and incredibly family-orientated.

San Patrignano is incredibly self-functioning; they produce their own award-winning milk and cheese, and they would keep the wool from their sheep and goats to produce both high quality and award-winning garments such as jumpers, socks and general clothing. They kept the hides from their beef cattle in order to create top quality leather products like shoes, coats, watchstraps for Rolex and leather goods for Gucci. They even had ex-models on the programme that had been highly addicted to narcotics in order to keep themselves thin. These participants had made garments for London Fashion Week by using by-products from the farm. As an example, they had rabbits that they wanted to use for their fur, in order for them to be able to produce these toys, weighing in at £1200, so that designers such as Gucci could add them as accessories to their handbags.

During their time, they had made handbags, shoes and even bedspreads - whatever they were able to make out of wool, they would. It is a fantastic way to train these individuals and prepare them for the transition from their programmes back into the world outside the confinement of the farm. The thought process behind this is they will be replacing their addiction with something positive and constructive to focus their minds on. By the time they leave, they will have invaluable skills in areas that range anywhere from basic woodwork, metalwork, IT skills and even wallpaper design skills.

There were many participants who were unable to read or write, and with the help of the school that was within the community, they were able to return to their education to learn these invaluable skills. It was fantastic to see middle-aged adults returning to school in order to learn and better themselves.

There was also a 24-hour hospital as well as a dentist, where they also taught basic dentistry, because the participants who had drug addictions would have sold anything to fund their habits.

During my time at San Patrignano, I met someone who had everything they could want or need in life, but he lost it all due to the fact that he had become addicted to drugs – it was a real eye opener. As I mentioned at the beginning of this report, San Patrignano is much more than a farm; they have vineyards, a large equine centre and they even have their own football team who, under supervision, compete locally. Health and fitness are very valued and important things at San Patrignano; it is very much the ethos of healthy body, healthy mind.

To highlight the astonishing things that the staff at San Patrignano has achieved: twenty years ago, 75% of the community were infected with HIV and hepatitis and when we were there in 2018, there were but twenty individuals with the illness. They had been working with local authorities and other sources in order to find a cure for hepatitis, which worked out at a cost of £25,000 per person. Due to their hard work liaising with authorities and outside sources from Italy, they were able to reduce this cost by £20,000.

I felt a great sense of honour to be having lunch with them; there were 1,312 within the community, who were enrolled onto various programmes, plus an additional 28 of us visitors that day. In San Patrignano, they will only eat what they produce on the farm, there is absolutely nothing artificial in their food, and I must say, it was the best risotto I have ever had! The kitchens were absolutely amazing and they ran like clockwork; they all knew what their roles were to ensure the smooth running of the kitchen. This was another example of how San Patrignano encourages participants to focus their mind on something skilful in order to recover from their addictions, whilst providing them with the skills they need to thrive. I was incredibly impressed with the amount of respect that they had for one another; they all knew that they were there for a reason and there were no second chances in San Patrignano, and if the rules were broken, the alternative would be to return to prison. The participants would also be drug tested at random in order to ensure that they were following the rules correctly.

The reason behind me wanting to visit this farm was due to the fact that I knew they had rehabilitated 26,000 people in 40 years, which was absolutely astonishing. A friend who runs a San Patrignano society in London had also recommended this particular farm to me. They have a colossal amount of financial support from giants such as Pirelli Tyres, Rolex and BMW to name but a few.

This once small farm started off with 200 chickens, nine participants, two members of staff and a zinc shed. Every single one of the nine individuals had escaped during that first night, however, they did successfully get them back to the farm and gave them a second chance. One of the first people they had ever helped was an alcoholic, and that same person is still there 40 years later, helping other people overcome their addictions. Not only did that speak volumes, but also it really inspired me to give my

students who have autism and Asperger syndrome the opportunity to learn new skills, overcome problems and better themselves. I feel passionate about being able to give them a chance, like San Patrignano has to so many. San Patrignano's website also hosts an array of important and insightful information: from detailed explanations of their treatment methods to blog posts that give you an insight into life in the community. They also have a number of projects running on the side, such as 'Where the Future Takes Root', which they describe as being an 'ethical project of rebirth and sustainability' and 'We Free', which is their prevention project.

If there is one thing I took away from my visit to San Patrignano, it's that it is possible to do anything. If you can turn someone living with a heroin addiction around, you can do anything. Their current success rate is 73%, and this strong figure would not have been accomplished without a dedicated team to support and encourage these participants; it is impossible to do it all on your own.