

## South West Mayo Development Company: Inishturk Organic Community Garden

*Lot 29:1 Mayo: Mayo Islands*



*1: Sailing towards Inishturk*

### SICAP Theme

This project is primarily a Goal 1 project, through with a Goal 2 training element. It also has strong elements of collaboration and demonstrates a solid engagement strategy with the local community

### In a nutshell ...

Inishturk is perched in the Atlantic Ocean, nine miles off the coast of County Mayo. The island is accessible via an hour-long boat journey, often across bumpy seas. There is an active Community Council on Inishturk with a full-time development officer and a part-time administrator. The Community Council owns and operates a beautiful Community Club which comprises of a traditional bar as well as a full restaurant which is open six months of the year.

Life for island communities can be extremely challenging. Islanders live at the mercy of tides and weather and are reliant on the mainland for most goods and services. Following a community needs analysis, Inishturk set itself a challenge to become a self-sustaining island community.

In early 2018, members of the Inishturk community donated Inishturk Community Council a piece of land to develop a community garden. An Organic Community Gardening group was set up to develop the garden. This group approached South West Mayo Development Company (SWMDC) for support to develop the garden under SICAP 2018.

The group's vision was that produce grown in the garden would be used in the Community Club restaurant and surplus would be available for the community, either through the community shop, or simply by helping themselves in the garden.



*2: Looking up at Inishturk Community Club*

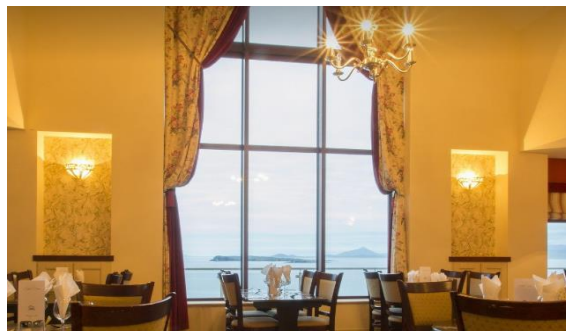
## What is the problem that the Organic Community Garden is trying to solve?

Put simply, the organic community garden is a way of ensuring that fresh, nutritious vegetables are available to all in the community, reducing the ‘food miles’ incurred in transporting vegetables to Inishturk and the reliance of islanders on produce from the mainland.

Food served on Inishturk generally has travelled a long distance. Produce is, in the main, transported from Westport via ferry to the island. This boat journey is the sole means of transporting goods and produce into the island; produce which is used in the Community Club restaurant to nourish visitors and locals alike. Roonagh Pier, near Louisburgh, is the scheduled departure point for the Inishturk ferry. However, the swell at Roonagh is notorious, making travel unsafe at times. In bad weather, the ferry instead travels from and to a safer pier in Claggan, near Clifden.

Produce travels from Westport, a 45-minute road journey, before being unloaded onto Roonagh pier. If sea conditions are not favourable, an hour and a half road journey is made to Claggan pier. Produce is then loaded onto the ferry to Inishturk.

This is a labour-intensive process that is costly for islanders, in terms of time and effort. An organic community garden has the potential to reduce costs, promote health and provide a project to unite the community.



*3: Caher View Restaurant, Inishturk Community Club*

## Who looks after the Garden?

A Community Garden group was established by the Community Council. There are approximately 10 regular members on the Community Garden group, one-sixth of the population of Inishturk. There are two scheme workers tasked with maintaining the garden, one from the Rural Social Scheme and one from a Community Employment scheme. Seaweed is used as a natural fertiliser.

Inishturk is heavily reliant on seasonal summer tourism and scheme staff are in great demand between May and August. Two volunteers came to the island as “WWOOFERS” (World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farm/Willing Workers on Organic Farms). Part of their placement was to maintain the organic garden. This was a great resource to the Community Garden group during a very busy season.

A trainer from The Organic Centre facilitated two training sessions with the group. One was held in March and was used to support the group in deciding what to set. A further session was held in August, looking at what vegetables to plant in late summer and showing the group how to treat blight.

To date potatoes, carrots, parsnips, beetroot, lettuce and kale has been set in the garden.



*4: Inishturk Organic Community Garden*

## How did SICAP support this project?

SWMDC’s SICAP Islands Development Officer, Caroline Healy, provided support, time and guidance to the group in 2018. In financial terms, SICAP supported the training element of this project in 2018.

Caroline sourced a skilled and experienced trainer to support the group, ensuring value for money and in line with good financial practice.

As this is a long-term project, SWMDC hopes to support it further in 2019. At present, there is no suitable space for storing materials and equipment. In Autumn 2018, Inishturk Community Garden Community applied for a SICAP small grant for a potting shed to store equipment centrally.



*5: PJ O'Toole and Corena Ward - taking advantage of the good weather ...*

## Learning

The Inishturk Organic Community Garden is a valuable community-led initiative that has the potential to enhance the food served in the Community Club, the food available to islands and to bring the community together. The project is in very early stages and there is a lot of scope to develop and maintain this garden.

However, many of the permanent households on Inishturk already set their own produce and so have limited time to devote to another garden, especially during the busy April – September period. Although the population has increased in recent years, bringing the population up to about 60 full-time residents, this is a very small number of people.

As Corena Ward, Inishturk Development Officer said wryly, “On Inishturk, we have less than two handfuls of adults of working age that are relied on to provide all community services”. A low population and a lack of people to provide labour is the reality of life on Inishturk. This is a challenge that island communities grapple with every day and will also be a challenge in maintaining and expanding the garden.

Nonetheless, there is a tremendous amount of goodwill towards the garden. In all senses, it is a community-led and community driven initiative. The need for the garden was identified by the community, land was donated by the community and the community comes together to maintain it. Most importantly, the community benefits from the garden as a social activity and economically, through the Community Club. SWMDC looks forward to working with this group under SICAP in 2019.



*6: Reaping the harvest*