



Project no.: 022682  
Project acronym: So Far  
Project full title: Social Services in Multifunctional  
Farms ('Social Farming')

**SPECIFIC SUPPORT ACTION**  
**PRIORITY [8.1.B.1.1] [Modernisation and sustainability of**  
**agriculture and forestry, including their multifunctional role in**  
**order to ensure the sustainable development and promotion of**  
**rural areas]**

**Deliverables D 15 – “*Economics of social*  
*services on multifunctional farms*” by Katja**  
**Vadnal**

Due Date of deliverable:  
Actual submission date: M24

Start date of contract: 1<sup>st</sup> may, 2006  
Duration: 33 months

Lead contractor for this deliverable: Lubjana University  
(Slovenia)

**Project co-funded by the European Commission within**  
**the Sixth Framework programme (2002-2006)**

Dissemination level: **PP**

# **ECONOMICS OF SOCIAL SERVICES ON MULTIFUNCTIONAL FARMS**

## **1.Summary**

Social farming across Europe, in Belgium-Flanders, Germany, France, Italy, Ireland, the Netherlands, and Slovenia, shows in term of economics some common features. A majority of initiatives are micro projects, oriented to needs of the users. Therefore economic effects are of minor or no importance. On the other hand, there are very many large-scale social organizations (social cooperatives, social firms/workshops), and their economic results depend on initial resources, investments, and capacities of management. Social farming initiatives depend mainly on public funds, and the stakeholders see room for increasing market-based incomes through sales of the high quality products and services (e.g. agro-tourism). Being dependent on public funds is a real threat, as new initiatives have to compete with the monopolistic, well established and rigid structure of the social care system and its actual institutions. Although economics is not a major driving power of social farming, poor economic performance is considered as its' significant weaknesses, as well as one of the major threats to its further development.

From the macroeconomic view social farming is engaged in the dilemma between a government-based solution or market based solutions in the field of social/health care. There is a concern that practicing privatization as a regulatory principle of vertical organization of societal services may destroy the original characteristics of social farming in terms of the underlying values, as well as in terms of performance, and that the market-based paradigm of social farming may lead to developmental excesses (e.g. the risk of creating a kind of "hospitalization" dynamics in the countryside). From the macroeconomic perspective "value of social farming" is to be defined as a positive externality of farming: farmer activity affects well-being in terms of personal/social empowerment and social inclusion. Contractual agreement, that may be used to manage public goods and externalities problems of social farming, has to be based on such a premise.

From the microeconomic view a portfolio of the social farm organization) is an issue that has to be elaborated further. In principle the supply of social farms consists of two sets of outputs: marketable goods and social services that might be marketable, semi-public or pure public goods. In any case, the social farm is a multifunctional farm by a definition. Production of marketable agricultural goods is a precondition for the provision of social services that make the best of agriculture for the well-being of the potential users. Therefore, there is a technical (and/or economic) link between these two sets of outputs: agricultural products and the well-being of people with special needs. This raises the potential for the economy of scope. Furthermore, social farming is perceived as a promising niche activity, affluent in crucial elements of value-added and relationship marketing strategies as the competitive advantage of a social farm. However, the majority of social farmers across Europe are rather optimistic about

future economic performance due to the learning/experience curve effect, the developments in the field of multifunctional agriculture, as well as in the field of community based social care.

## **2. Economic reality of social farming – transversal analysis**

Generally, the economic impact of social activities on the company in **Belgium - Flanders** (Goris at al., 2008) is considered as limited to non-existent. Yet, it was very difficult to discuss economics with care-farmers, as they do not see revenues from and costs of care farming as an essential element of the on-farm care activities. Therefore, quantitative indicators of the economic performance are to be understood as rough approximations.

Costs and revenues are more or less balanced on most care farms. Most care farms have annual revenue from care activities of 1,000-10,000 €. The annual costs vary from 100-5,000 €. Extreme figures like no costs, no revenues or a cost or revenue over 10,000 € per year also occur.

As of 1 December 2005, care farms can apply for official permission, as well as for a subsidy that is principally conceived of as compensation for the time a farmer (or his/her partner or staff) spends with the users, hindering him to work full-time on the farm. Furthermore, a farmer is required to obtain a minimum of 35 % of his income from agriculture/horticulture and can only have a part-time job off the farm. In case a farmer provides only infrastructure for the activities, the amount of subsidy is 15 €/day, and is 40 €/day, if the farmer (or his/her partner or staff) is responsible for the activities, the supervision and guidance during these activities.

Not every care farm has invested specifically for the social activities. Accommodation for the clients, tools for the clients, and adaptations of the regular farm equipment are some of the investments mentioned. The amount invested can rise up to 10,000 € but is usually below 5,000 €. The investment subsidy is available for up to 40 % of the amount a care farm invests in these particular activities under the conditions that the business is a viable agricultural or horticultural farm, it is run by a capable manager, and the investment is sound.

On-farm care activity is supported through public funds. Also the percentage of revenue from care is very limited; the majority of the care farmers expect the financial situation of the care activity to stay more or less the same in a 5-year period. Some care farmers expect their situation to improve because of higher revenues or lower costs.

Approximately half of the studied cases have been practicing care farming for a decade or more, while the other half started the activity after the year 2000. Due to the conditions for registration, care-farming is really a supplementary on-farm activity, with a share in the total revenue of a farm of up to one third at the most.

The system of social/care farming in **France** is considered by concerned stakeholders to be a highly ethical and solidarity activity more than a (profitable) business. Because social/care activities depend strongly

on public funding (from the very different sources at the very different levels of authority), the providers are searching for a much higher degree of self-funding than it has now, when production and service selling may represent 15 to 25 % of the resources.

As to public funding there is a kind of neo-liberal decentralization going on in the form that the State transfers charges to decentralized authorities that have to assume those charges with limited resources. Such a process leads to a situation of tension in which local public money is not extensible, while its needs are growing. The increased competition between applicants for these funds is an obvious result.

This tension is also observable in the initiatives for disabled residences primarily dependent on the county level. A growing number of projects is submitted to the county for yearly funding instead of multi-year funding as it was until recently. In order to guarantee this money, the projects need to give compensation to:

- more hosting capacity in residences for the same amount of money, which means increasing the productivity of permanent staff;
- proposing to the authorities a better geographical coverage of the county; this supposes that the associations managing the initiatives are encouraged to grow and open new capacities.

In such circumstances it is difficult to assess the economic prospects of social/care activities. Out of twelve studied cases, the majority has been practicing social/care farming for about 10 years. Yet, only a few were ready to evaluate the past economic experiences and/or to assess their prospects: three of them expressed an optimistic view of their situation, while the others did not express themselves in this field.

**German** social farming projects hold a lot of experiences, as the vast majority has been operating for two decades or more. The majority of them is part of different public schemes in the fields of education, employment, social and health care. Eight out of 26 studied cases are constitutional, educational or integration institutions or departments for employment, and they are all financed in this way. Also, some projects (six) have national health service accreditation and are paid by insurance companies or the national government. Projects that are financed this way mainly take care for clients with mental disorders. Some receive government subsidies (three). Some collaborate with a health institution as a subcontractor. One of the studied projects is funded by the users; they pay for the services with their own budget. Three projects receive no outside funding. .

As for the economic prospects of social farming some optimism is detected. However, a more doomed future is assessed at a significant level in the common view, rooted in rising costs. Therefore the future economic situation depends on the dynamics of income.

Intensive economic pressure or poor economic performance is seen by the German stakeholders as a significant weakness of social farming, as well as one of the major threats to its further development. Social farming initiatives depend mainly on public funds, and the stakeholders

see room for increasing market-based incomes through sales of the high quality products. Being dependent on public funds is a real threat, as new initiatives have to compete with the monopolistic, well established and rigid structure of the social care system and its actual institutions.

As there was no research on social farming in **Ireland** prior to the European SoFar project, it is difficult to discuss the economic situation. Almost all of the social farming type initiatives are attached to or embedded within care or community services. They perform their activities on a non-profit basis. In terms of its resources, public funds are predominant, but they are supplemented by private funds. For example, Camphill Communities of Ireland is a non-profit registered charity. The revenue expenses of the individual communities are largely met by the regional health boards and the Irish Department of Health. Funds for capital development derive partly from the same sources, as well as from the Department of the Environment, but a large proportion are dependent on private donations and the fundraising activities of friends and supporters.

In most cases the social farming element of activities is not readily distinguishable from the other care service elements and is treated as part of the overall operational budget. In those cases where some goods may be sold, e.g. garden centres as part of a social service, the social farming element is not expected to make a profit but rather balance income and costs. In almost all cases, staff is paid out of the overall operating budget and not from social farming activities as these would be insufficient to meet staffing costs.

There are many different arrangements in place across projects, for example, co-workers in Camphill communities receive no payment for their work as care workers and are therefore effectively volunteers. Costs of services vary greatly depending on the nature of the service in terms of usage, residential or otherwise, vocational or a more specialized therapeutic provision. This varied and sometimes apparently random pricing structure may have implications and present problems for the potential development of social farming in Ireland.

There is practically no institutional integration of private farms into the provision of social/health care services, which makes analysis of the contribution of care activities to farm income impossible. It is likely that informal practices of care farming on private farms are common, but not due to economic reasons. Nevertheless, the emancipation of private farms as regular providers of social services may be met with resistance by the existing providers, institutions in particular, out of increased competition for funds.

Among 15 studied social farming projects in **Italy**, 9 were social cooperatives. Additionally the social cooperatives, though having the obligation of being non-profit, do operate with an entrepreneurial structure/organization in fixed way, producing relevant results in terms of economy and employment in the territories in which they are active. In terms of employment and economic results, social cooperatives that

provide social/care services (type A) are usually stronger than social cooperatives for labour integration (type B). "A" cooperatives usually receive daily attendance fees per user, whereas the entries for "B" cooperatives are represented only by goods and services sold. In Tuscany, the former (type A) produce 80 % of the overall annual turnover of social cooperation (Istat, 2006).

**Table 1: Economic results of the 2 different kind of social cooperatives in Italy and Tuscany, EURO (general values, non specific of agricultural initiatives), 2003 (Istat, 2006)**

	Italy	Tuscany	Italy	Tuscany
	Social/care services (type A)	Social/care services (type A)	Labour integration (type B)	Labour integration (type B)
Average annual turnover per enterprise	770,000	800,000	473,000	335,000
Average annual turnover per worker	...	16,000	...	13,500
Average social capital per enterprise	...	53,000	...	20,000

A similar trend is common in all regions. The average values reported above do not give an appropriate representation of the actual situation. There are a restricted number of very large cooperatives (with relevant economic turnover and number of employers) and numerous small or very small ones with evident "diseconomies". Therefore, particularly in the sector of social/care services, a process of concentration is essential. However, economic growth can produce two different patterns of development that reflect two different kinds of "philosophies" and cultural backgrounds: a) dimensional growth of the organization (this is more frequent for a-confessional cooperatives that see scale enlargement as a positive factor in order to reinforce organization and professional quality of services); b) the creation of spin-offs, i.e. new organizations (more frequent among Christian inspired initiatives that usually see small scale as more appropriate for purposes of care and social inclusion; however, these smaller cooperatives are usually supported by federations or consortia in organizational and administrative aspects).

The main costs for social cooperatives are generally represented by the payment of salaries. However, in the cases of agricultural initiatives, costs for farming are also relevant. In cooperatives providing care services (type A) the agricultural component is usually secondary in economic terms. As such it can be difficult for these farms to access the subsidies provided by agricultural policies. For these reasons (and for other ones as well) often there can be a juridical separation between the farm and the care services' social cooperative.

Cooperatives for labour integration (type B) can be either very small and operate under difficult economic conditions or, rather, be consolidated and economically successful. Economic results depend on initial resources, investments, and capacities of management. In this sense, successful cases show: consolidated knowledge in agriculture by part of the staff; diversification and integration of various activities (e.g. agricultural

production, green services, agro-tourism, school visits, further than the social ones); direct selling and strong integration of the farm within the local system. Particularly, the current scenario (e.g. increased interest for countryside, new sensitivity for environmental and social values orienting consumption) is offering new opportunities to social farms. In this sense the emergence of new forms of marketing in which the “social” factor adds value to food produce appears to be of particular importance.

The majority of studied cases are well established businesses operating for two decades and more. In terms of economic prospects they often argued that income is too low, yet they do see economic prospects in social farming.

The survey carried out in **the Netherlands** in 2005 (Hassink et al., 2007) showed that for approximately 50 % of the care farms, the annual revenues directly related to care activities already exceed the revenues of the agricultural part of the farm. The average number of clients on a care farm paid by the general insurance for medical costs, AWBZ (Exceptional medical Expenses Act), is generally higher than by the farms’ other financing structures. The average income per day is higher for personal budget, PGB (€ 77 per day), than for AWBZ or contracts with care institutions (approximately € 50 per day). At this moment it is not possible to give a good estimation of the costs related to the care activities. The height of the costs depends to a great extent on the number of clients and the need to hire personnel. Generally the farmer or his wife guides the client when the number of clients is limited (less than 6 per day). For this type of care farm, the additional costs due to care activities are low. Assuming that 5 clients are present on the farm for 4 days a week and the average income per client is € 50 per day, the additional income is € 48,000 annually. In this situation the costs are low and the contribution to family income will probably be more than € 40,000.

**Table 2: Percentage of care farms receiving income from different financing structures, average number of clients on a farm financed by the different financing structures, and average daily income from the different financing structures (Hassink et al., 2007).**

Financing structure	Percentage of care farms using this financing structure	Average number of clients paid by this structure (in 2005)	Average revenue per client per day, €
AWBZ	20.8	16.7	55
PGB	59.5	5.3	77
Contract with institution per client	45.8	5.9	47
Fixed contract with institution	16.7	8.6	50
Reintegration budget	6.5	4.0	57
Budget client	7.1	9.5	56
No financing	23.2	4.4	0
Other form of financing	14.3	5.6	80

The survey of 2005 showed that annual revenues of the care activities ranged from € 0 to € 435,000; the average was € 73,028 leading to annual revenue for all non-institutional care farms of € 37.1 million, of which € 32.0 million was attributed to the supply of daytime occupation and work training and € 5.1 million to offering 24 hour services. The annual revenue of all institutional care farms for day time occupation was calculated to be at least € 17.4 million euro (€ 221,300 per care farm annually).

**Table 3: Estimation of revenues of care services for an average care farm and the total care farm sector, distinguishing non-institutional and institutional care farms (Hassink et al., 2007).**

	Average revenue per care farm (thousands € per year)	Revenue total sector (million € per year)
Non-institutional care farms	73.0	37.1
Institutional care farms	>221.3	> 17.4

Studied social farming projects are relatively new business. Yet, they show some features that may be significant for future developments in social farming. Out of 15 studied cases, four – all family farms – reported a considerable impact by care on economic vitality of the farm. Three of them reported that the share of care activities in total income of the farm is more than 60 % up to 90 % respectively. It means that agriculture acts more as a supplementary activity or second business to care and not vice versa. On the other hand, farms with care as a supplementary farm activity reported moderate or low impacts or have no idea about the economic impacts of care on their respective farms. Therefore, there is an issue whether interlacing social care and agriculture is a genuine driving force with high innovative potential.

As to economic prospects of social farming the Dutch are optimistic, expecting the incomes to rise.

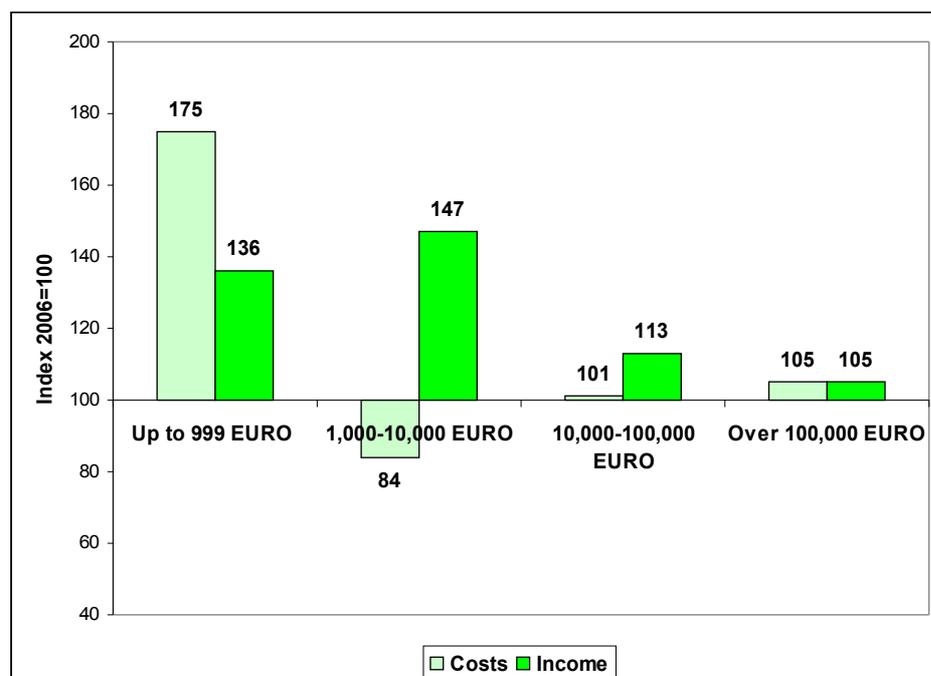
The late nineties were the period when a majority of green care initiatives in **Slovenia** made their start, being stimulated by strong personal beliefs and creative urges to open farming as well as social care to new challenges. Strengthening the process of normalization of users and a better quality of life were dominant motives to start a green program, while financial gains have been relevant for social firms and one of the family farms. In spite of this, all the green programs that are run by social care institutions are required to have balanced costs and incomes. This may be a reason why farmers who are engaged in green care programs as subcontractors feel really underpaid. On the other hand, low income from agriculture is the main concern of the actors in this field.

**Table 4: Distribution of studied cases to annual costs and incomes, Slovenia, 2007 (Vadnal, 2008)**

	Annual costs, €	Annual income, €

	number	average	number	average
Up to 999 €	3	400	2	660
1,000-10,000€	4	5,050	7	4,775
10,000-100,000€	5	39,250	1	42,000
Over 100,000€	2	502,500	2	502,500
Unknown	1	-	2	-

As a majority of these projects are micro projects, oriented to needs of the users, economic effects are of minor or no importance. Two social firms and one centre for protection and care reported that the impact of care activity on the economic situation is moderate. Although green programs are not motivated by economics, their holders are very optimistic in regard to their economic prospects. Ten of them expect the economic situation to improve in the immediate future, while five of them expect that the economic situation remain the same as today. Larger projects are intended to be consolidated in terms of economics, while smaller projects will still be in the phase of introduction with costs rising faster than incomes.



**Picture 1: Development of costs and incomes to economic size of the projects, Slovenia (Vandal, 2008)**

**Table 5: Distribution of studied cases to investments into green programs, Slovenia, 2007 (Vadnal, 2008)**

	Up to 9,999 €	10,000-29,999 €	30,000-49,999 €	50,000-99,999 €	Over 100,000 €
Equipment for clients	5	3	-	-	-
Facilities for clients	-	1	1	1	1
Adaptation of agricultural production	2	2	1	-	-
Adaptation of tools for clients	1	-	-	-	2
Adaptation of animal	2	-	1	-	-

husbandry					
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The ambitions in the field of investment show that the providers see the green programs as an opportunity as they are rather high with regard to their actual economic performance.

### **3.Economics of social farming – a macro view**

Although systems of social/health care differ among countries, they share the same approach to the nature of services provided by social farming. They are understood as pure public goods provided by the government. Therefore, in this context social farming is facing a traditional dualistic approach: the complex reality is defined by two exclusionary aims (Radej, 2004; Barthelemy and Nieddu, 2004). With regard to social farming this means a traditional choice between public and private expenditures for goods and services along with opportunity costs associated with each choice. If there is an aim to reduce public spending, there are only two possibilities: to increase the effectiveness of the government or to reduce the area of governmental intervention (Samuelson, 1968; Kovač, 2000).

In practice, the stakeholders of social farming across the EU are facing both possibilities. The stakeholders from France are questioning decentralization as a working principle of vertical organization of societal services that leads to a more effective system. The stakeholders from Germany, Slovenia and Ireland detected the adversity of the actual social care providers, i.e. institutions that operate within the (rigid and monopolistic) public sector, toward social farms as potential new providers. Therefore, there are two important questions. The first question is: Is the government really more effective or is just the area of governmental intervention shrinking?

Towards the end of the 20th century the relations between political systems and societal services started to change rapidly. Intensive institutionalization (public schools, hospitals, etc.) has been replaced or is in the process of being replaced by deinstitutionalization. Deinstitutionalization becomes a regulatory principle of the relation between the two. Yet, its nature is twofold. On one hand, its results are less uniform, more qualitative and a more effective treatment for the users, while, on the other hand, it leads to less equal, less universal and less impartial treatment of the users (Rus, 1990; Kebbon, 1997; Van Slyke, 2003).

This phenomenon has been clearly detected by the stakeholders of social farming in the EU. The Netherlands is the only country where a "personal budget" has been introduced. Through this mechanism control has been reallocated from providers to users; that is a very positive development. Yet funds are still public. Therefore, the arguments about the personal budget as a way to reduce the public expenditure for social services are relevant; so are the doubts about the solidarity issues.

This leads to the second question: Is the reduction in the area of governmental intervention substituted by a transfer of societal services from public or state institutions to non-state, private profit or non-profit structures? The dilemma between a government-based solution or market based solutions is not foreign to the stakeholders in social farming. There is a concern that practicing privatization as a regulatory principle of vertical organization of societal services may destroy the original characteristics of social farming in terms of the underlying values, as well as in terms of performance. On the other hand, the market-based paradigm of social farming may lead to developmental excesses (Rus, 1990; Pestoff, 1992; Olooney, 1993). Another concern is the argument that generalization of market rules (provision or supply of care services) bring along the risk of creating a kind of "hospitalization" dynamics in the countryside, e.g. farms are transformed into a new form of care/health centres. Is the occurrence of the domination of social care activities over agriculture in some social farms in the Netherlands, where a quasi-market situation has been developed by "personal budget", just an accident or a new development pattern?

A (quasi) market-based solution (Anderson, 2000; Merlo and Briales, 2000) must be questioned from the viewpoint of human rights of the users. The users of social farming are people who are already marginalized by the market rules. Furthermore, their contractual power is low or none (Zaviršek, 2000). Therefore, along with market-based solutions regulatory, control, and redistributive governmental functions are needed in order to maintain all citizens' universal access to societal services and assure a level of equality that is precondition for social justice.

Under such conditions, the idea that a social economy might be a good solution for social farming attracts stakeholders of social farming. Italian experiences in a social economy stimulate an additional reflection (di Iacovo and Ciofani, 2005; Senni, 2005, di Iacovo et al., 2006). The basic elements of social economy are based on a clearly defined ethical concept; its primary objective encompasses an improvement of the life situation and the opportunities of disadvantaged people, as well as social cohesion and support. Furthermore, it verifiably reinvests the profits and resources for the benefit of disadvantaged people, serving as an intermediary function between public and private, the bridge between social and commercial purpose (Martin and Osberg, 2007; Certo and Miller, 2008). These criteria are met by the majority of the studied social farming projects.

The question is, does the concept of social economy address the problem of positive externalities of agriculture/farming in the case of social farming. It is beyond doubt that there are externalities (negative and positive) in farming just as in every other economic activity. While discussing multifunctional agriculture, many different positive externalities were identified and studied (OECD, 2001), but not the positive

externalities in the field of empowerment and inclusion of people with special needs, which are basic effects of social farming (Vadnal, 2003).

Stakeholders of social farming feel this problem at the theoretical and practical level. They stress the significance of social farming in the context of a win-win situation in the field of managing environmental and landscape problems, i.e. in the field where the problem of externalities is intensively studied and directed. Lack of research on how to measure the positive externalities of farming in terms of empowerment and inclusion hinder the instrumentalisation of detected win-win situations in societal and social context, as well as objectification of "value of social farming". From the economic perspective "value of social farming" is to be defined as a positive externality of farming: farmer activity affects well-being in terms of personal/social empowerment and social inclusion. Contractual agreement, that may be used to manage public goods and externalities problems of social farming, has to be based on such a premise (Pretty et al., 2000; Yrjola in Kola, 2001; Weersink, 2002, Vadnal, 2003). Yet, the subsidy for care farms in Belgium-Flanders (based on contractual agreement) is defined in terms of opportunity costs but not in terms of positive externality.

#### **4. Economics of social farming – a micro view**

The question: "Are the disabled clients a kind of new crop today?" was raised by the stakeholders. Therefore, a portfolio centered on the social farm is an issue that has to be elaborated further. In principle the supply of social farms consists of two sets of outputs: marketable goods and social services that might be marketable, semi-public or pure public goods. In any case, the social farm is a multifunctional farm by a definition. Production of marketable agricultural goods is a precondition for the provision of social services that make the best of agriculture for the well-being of the potential users. Therefore, there is a technical (and/or economic) link between these two sets of outputs: agricultural products and the well-being of people with special needs. This raises the potential for the economy of scope.

As to the economy of scope (Wossink and Swinton, 2007), there is no evidence that it is something more than a potential. As economics of social farming is not a main concern of farmers they do not keep records about costs and revenues on the provision of social services. The review of economic reality of social farming across Europe shows that very many providers have no idea about costs, while others complain about low income and high costs or are satisfied with a break-even outcome. Yet, the majority of them are rather optimistic about future economic performance. Although the reasons for this optimism have not been studied, there are two hypotheses that might support it. The first is the learning/experience curve effect (Marra et al., 2003). The second might be based upon the developments in the field of multifunctional agriculture (van Huylenbroeck and Durand, 2003) and community based social care

(Walsh and O'Shea, 2008) that both provide room for the economy of scope.

According to some stakeholders, social farming is perceived as a promising niche activity, while others are pointing out the threat of all other actual providers of social services, strong and well established institutions in particular. Therefore, the competitive advantage of a social farm has to be studied to make a provision of such a niche activity a genuine opportunity for a farm. Furthermore, there is a concern, if the target segment of the users is large and/or stable enough to make all the needed inputs of value.

While discussing the "demand" side of social farming, the marketing issues appeared. Several crucial elements of value-added marketing strategies have been presented: innovative farming business, innovative marketing channels, etc. Yet, the risk of creating charity-based marketing for the products from a social farm has been stressed too. To avoid this threat, the paradigm of relationship marketing (Ravald and Grönroos, 1996; Sheth and Paravatiyar, 2000) seems to be a good solution. The business philosophy of social farming corresponds to the basic characteristics of this type of marketing: building constructive relationships with selected target audiences.

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