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Social Farming



## SoFar 2nd Country/regional Platforms



# *SoFar project* Introductory paper on Social/Care Farming

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### Introduction

**S**ocial farming is an emerging topic for farms and farmers as well as for different stakeholders in Europe. An innovative use of agriculture is quite often introduced directly from the bottom by new and existent farmers, as well as welfare institutions. Social farming includes all activities that use agricultural resources, both from plants and animals, in order to promote social welfare (i.e. social inclusion, rehabilitation, employment, education, therapy, etc.) in rural areas. Yet, models of interlacing social/health care and agriculture are diverse, often adjusted to local tradition and culture, as well as systems of social/health care.

The general definition about social farming is not yet agreed around Europe. Still today there are different ways to indicate the phenomena (farming for health, green care, social farming, gardening therapy and green programs of social/health care) and to use agriculture or gardening for social/health purposes. For the progress of social farming towards an unambiguous, consistent and robust sector on a European level a joint European view on social farming has to be further developed. This has to come to a political European action agenda based on the interests and insights of the stakeholders from the cooperating countries involved in the SoFar-project. Therefore, in 2008 two meetings will be organized: a national platform in each participating country and a joint platform in Brussels with representatives from each country. This paper is an introduction to frame the discussions of the platform meetings. It summarizes the state of the art of social farming, the similarities and differences between countries and the points to be addressed during the platform meetings.

### Social Farming - what is it all about?

**S**ocial farming is a new as well as a traditional concept. It originates from the traditional rural self-help nets quite well present in rural areas before modernisation of agriculture and the rise of the public welfare system. Nowadays the concept has been deeply reformed in an innovative and still changing way.

In order to build a *sustainable web* it is important to preserve the formal and more professional social nets. Moreover, some informal networks should be involved to improve the capacity of local initiatives in their capability to adapt to the local context and to include and increase the opportunities of marginalized or socially excluded people.

From an economical point of view social farming is related to a specific aspect of multifunctional agriculture. In that respect, social farming can be indicated as a positive externality of agriculture on social capital.

From a technical point of view social farming has the possibility to use low-input technologies, so diminishing negative externalities of farming in a natural environment.



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For agricultural practice social farming gives a wider view due to the opportunity to enter in other sectors (social/health care, environmental education). So:

- Farmers have the opportunity to strengthen their economic performance due to a market oriented scope and diversification of markets
- Farmers may benefit from building new nets and circuits that can be helpful to qualify their offer, especially with respect of ethic consumers.
- Farmers may change their own entrepreneurial attitude towards the idea of corporate social responsibility.
- Both the young generation and the wider society have the opportunity to change the perception about farming

From a social point of view social farming:

- Provide an opportunity to strengthen or to develop community based social/health care system
- Contributes to social cohesion by supporting and promoting the inclusion philosophy
- and may offer new linkages and bridges among sectors due to its multidisciplinary approach.

It has a strong political impact too. People involved in social farming are often strongly motivated and active. They have to struggle to participate in a bottom up political process in order to build policy networks and to present and discuss the topic in front of a wider public.

## Today's' significance of Social Farming

**S**ocial farming may have a wide impact on many aspects of agriculture and on its links with the society, due to:

- The benefits for 'users' in terms of empowerment, social inclusion, education, employment, therapy.
- Innovation: in agriculture, social/health care and education
- The definition of new sustainable links between agriculture, social/health care sector, education and society
- Strengthening urban-rural relationships; sustainable cities
- Economics of farms and rural areas toward diversification
- Reputation and responsibility of enterprises
- Improving social capital in rural areas
- Strengthening social services in rural areas; healthy and alive rural communities and preserving landscapes



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### Effects on users

The personal approach, being outside, having contact with animals and plants, living with the seasons and nature, being involved in physical work, being able to follow the growth of plants and animals and harvesting their products are important elements and crucial values. "Products" of social approach and farming is health. Both users and farmer report on the benefits as: "I get power, strength, fun, relaxation, satisfaction and motivation from the work with nature and people." The reported effects can be classified in

- Physical effects: Skills, physical health, employment, day/night rhythm
- Mental effects: Self esteem, self value, responsibility, awareness, enthusiasm
- Social effects: Social skills, social interaction, community integration

An important topic for discussion is the effect of social farming and the methods to proof its effects. The existing studies are done on the basis of personal experience. There are results and measuring methods in questionnaires and literature concerning the effects of work and new social life on psychiatric patients. There are also studies on the effect of animals on human (people with drug addiction, old people). Until now, there are no measurements backed up with science or statistically data.

So, there is a need for research by socio-economic scientists and social/health sector experts to gain scientific evidence. A multidimensional impact hypothesis matrix is to be studied by qualitative, as well as quantitative research methods.

Formulation of the impact hypotheses

<b>Impacts hypotheses</b>	<b>Stakeholders</b>	<b>Indicators</b>
In terms of users	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The sick</li> <li>• The disabled</li> <li>• The socially excluded</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Getting better</li> <li>• Living with illness or disability</li> <li>• Coping with life</li> </ul>
In terms of providers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Institution (public, private)</li> <li>• Enterprise (business oriented, social enterprise; small, medium, large)</li> <li>• Family farm</li> <li>• Cooperative</li> <li>• Association</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Effectiveness</li> <li>• Efficiency</li> <li>• Quality</li> <li>• Timeliness</li> <li>• Safety</li> <li>• Responsiveness</li> </ul>
In terms of authorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local authorities</li> <li>• Regional authorities</li> <li>• National authorities</li> <li>• EU authorities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transparency,</li> <li>• Safety</li> <li>• Cost-effectiveness</li> </ul>



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# Strengths and challenges

According with the point of views of practitioners a SWOT on social farming can roughly be summed up in common grid as follows:

<p><b>Strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Practices &amp; Relations:</b> high potential; tailored-made practices; comparatively cheap; small groups, social dimension, familiar character, large offer</li> <li>• <b>Territorial Dimension:</b> Integration at territorial level among society and economy; Increased sensitiveness and awareness, new ties, attention from consumers, effects on landscape;</li> <li>• <b>Entrepreneurial Dimension:</b> innovation &amp; diversification"; involving youths in agriculture.</li> <li>• <b>Care users:</b> strong benefits, support from families</li> </ul>
<p><b>Weaknesses</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Rules and laws:</b> juridical framework; still limited diffusion and consolidation; gap between demand and offer, dependence from public support, lack of recognition and evidences, strong heterogeneity</li> <li>• <b>Start-up:</b> Difficulties to start-up; distances (figurative and physical); not easy inter-cultural/professional integration; confusion of roles and competences</li> <li>• <b>Local system</b> : Prejudices for disabilities; Lack of transports</li> </ul>
<p><b>Threats</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Policies &amp; Institutions:</b> bureaucracy; standardization, loss of original value-systems; no institutional change, lack of interest</li> <li>• <b>Actors:</b> Competition among actors; development of opportunistic behaviours; market oriented welfare systems; hospitals in the countryside</li> <li>• <b>Practices:</b> incidents</li> </ul>
<p><b>Opportunities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Local System</b> increasing sensitivity and demand from society, positive reputation, newcomers in agriculture</li> <li>• <b>Policies &amp; Institutions:</b> new juridical framework; wider recognition and support, multifunctional agriculture</li> <li>• <b>Practices:</b> shift from medical to social model (citizenships instead of patient), community integration (care by the community)</li> <li>• <b>Networks:</b> broadening relations and networks.</li> <li>• <b>Marketing:</b> enhanced reputation/image</li> </ul>

Different limitations slow down the development of social farming, like:

- The different sectors (farming, social/health care) are not interconnected,
- Systems of community-based social care are rather new,
- the medical model of health often prevails (disease still dominates socio-psychological one),
- the support strategy is often unsuitable: via reward and compensation we foster "hospitalisation dynamics in the countryside".



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- Via bureaucracy and institutionalisation we risk to lose specific qualities and values.
- Innovations in care systems may reduce quality.

## Dynamics of social farming

A dynamic process is accompanying the organisation of social farming across Europe. It has changed the organisation of practices as well as the relationships at local, regional, national and even international level. A key word to better understand organisation and diffusion of social farming projects and practices could be the word awareness. Awareness about social farming practices and results affects public institutions (both from agriculture and the sectors- education, health, social, labor, ec- that can make use of social farming), but also farmers and their associations, and again local society.

Not all the actors may have same awareness about social farming. In Belgium awareness of public agricultural institutions is quite high and rules are mainly based on agricultural policies. The case is different from the Netherlands where the health, social sector is mainly intervening on social farming. In other countries the awareness is very low and practices are really pioneering and isolated one from each other. There are also different situations, like Italy, where the awareness is increasing in all the actors but still it is difficult to define specific rules. Here is the local society that is struggling in order to recognise and to define its own way of regulation based upon the reconnection of local ethic food markets circuits. In some way the cross country section give also the opportunity to recognise some different steps in the process of social innovation that accompany the diffusion of social farming. According to this one of the main question arising debating on social farming is who and how the local environment is built in order to facilitate the organisation of social farming practices. This also explain why debating on social farming and about the opportunity to improve it visibility and recognition in front on a wider public one of the main question regards the possibility to clearly name and verify the results of different practices, as well as to increase number, evidences and communication about good practices. All this activity would increase the awareness of a wider number of public, private, individual and collective actors about social farming. According with this view, about four different stages can be distinguished, each different in development as well as the awareness of different public sectors (agriculture and care/health sector) and as a consequence the regulatory systems adopted at local/regional/country level:

**Pioneering situation:** few experiences, voluntary action based on very strong motivation, public/care recognises public institutes (for their work, not necessary for SF), private farms act on their own projects, farmers enter in the system from their own commitment, no awareness from the local society.

**Multifunctional agriculture:** increasing experiences, the interest comes from agriculture, there are local practices (private and public), no awareness from the care sector that funds public structure, strong commitment from farmers aided.



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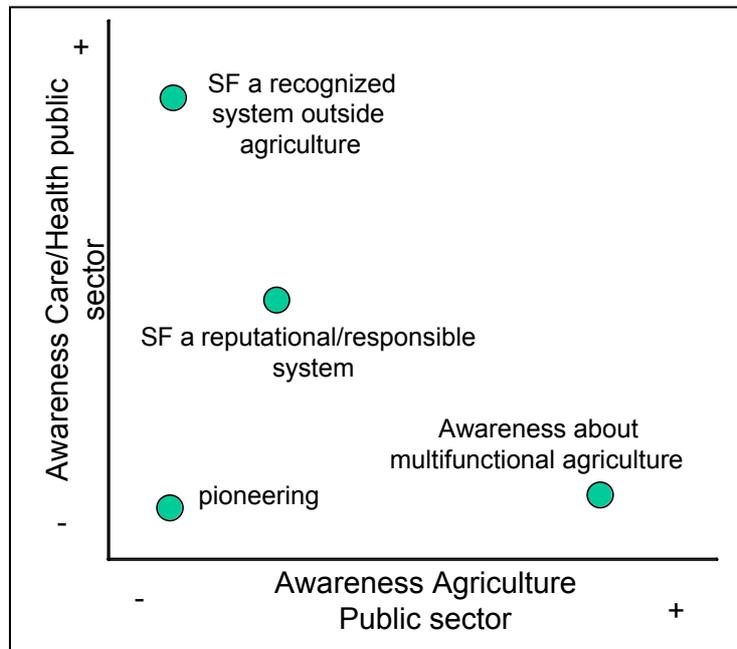


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**SF as a recognized system:** large interest, social or health public institutes recognise SF as relevant both from private and public structures.

**SF as a reputational model:**

there is a large number of practices, strongly rooted in the local society. They can be read also in a temporal perspective or in a cross-country view. The different stages differ in awareness by both the care and health sector and the agricultural and public sector. The schedule represents a positioning of the stages in the field of tension between both sectors.



Schematical presentation of the stages

## Similarities and differences in Europe

Social farming increased its relevance everywhere in EU in the last part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and has been grown to a recognizable representation of the agricultural practice in the different countries. The process of development was mainly stimulated from the communities and individuals nor policy driven, although reasons were diverse (see below). Nowadays there is an increasing number of experiences and projects in Europe and a very quick growth can be registered. The common elements of social farming in the European countries are:

- Animal production, horticulture, diverse fields of action
- Organic, labour intensive, different products,
- Landscape management, biodiversity
- Open farms, direct selling
- Local networks
- Commitment and motivation
- Highly engaged persons

Social farming is in all countries embedded in the local system. In general, the target groups are in all countries comparable and consist of a wide range disabled people (mental, physical, psychiatric), addicts (drugs, alcohol), children, youngsters, resocializing prisoners (ex), long run non occupied, terminal patients, burn outs and elderly.



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Apart from similarities, there is a diversity between countries in terminology, users and their position (users, employees) and financing structures. Remarkable differences are:

- Origin of social farms:
  - Italy: 70's: closing down of institutes: start of social cooperatives
  - Germany: historically established homes begin 20<sup>th</sup> century, diverse pioneers; often driven by religious or ethical motivations. Agriculture as self supply. Since 70's sheltered workshops with accreditation; furthermore Antroposophic and religious communities such as Camphill and other communities; Pedagogic approaches and school farms since 90s.
  - Ireland: 70's: Camphill, religious communities
  - Netherlands: 70's: Antroposophic and religious communities
  - Slovenia: 90's: social firms, social/health care institutions
  - Belgium: community of Geel
  - France: ....
- Features:
  - Netherlands, Belgium: Mainly private family farms; diversity of client groups
  - Italy: Mainly social cooperatives, which means that the 'users' of social sector are employed
  - Germany, Ireland, Slovenia: Institutional farms; people with intellectual disabilities
  - France: mixture of typologies with many community gardens
- Structures and orientations:
  - Prevalence public/Health: Germany, Slovenia, Ireland
  - Prevalence private (Health/agriculture): Netherlands, Belgium
  - Third sector and associations/Social and employment: Italy, France
- Networks:
  - National/regional centres: Netherlands, Belgium-Flanders
  - Separate networks: Germany, Italy, France
  - Isolated projects: Ireland, Slovenia

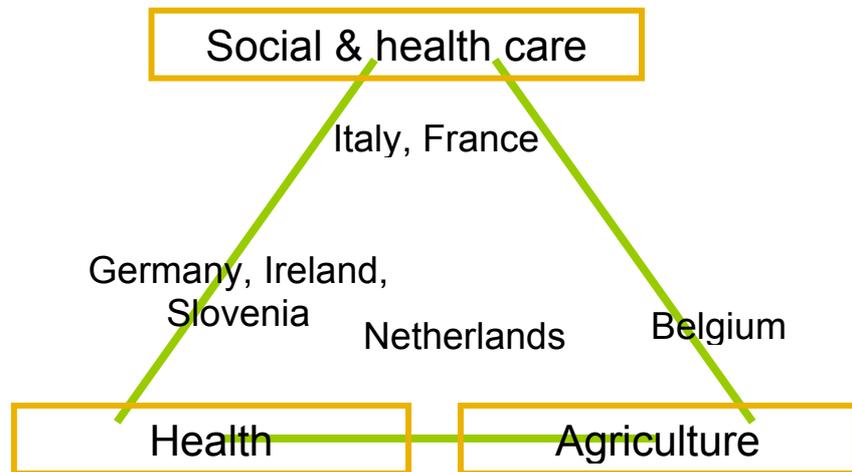
- Number of social farms:  
(see table)

<b>Country</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>% of total</b>
Netherlands	700	0.7
Italy	450	0.01
Germany	150 (workshops)	0.03
	ca. 50 (school farms)	
	48 (drugs addicted)	
	ca. 50 (others)	
Flanders	260	0.4
Ireland	90	0.08
Slovenia	20	<0.01
France	>1200	>0.02

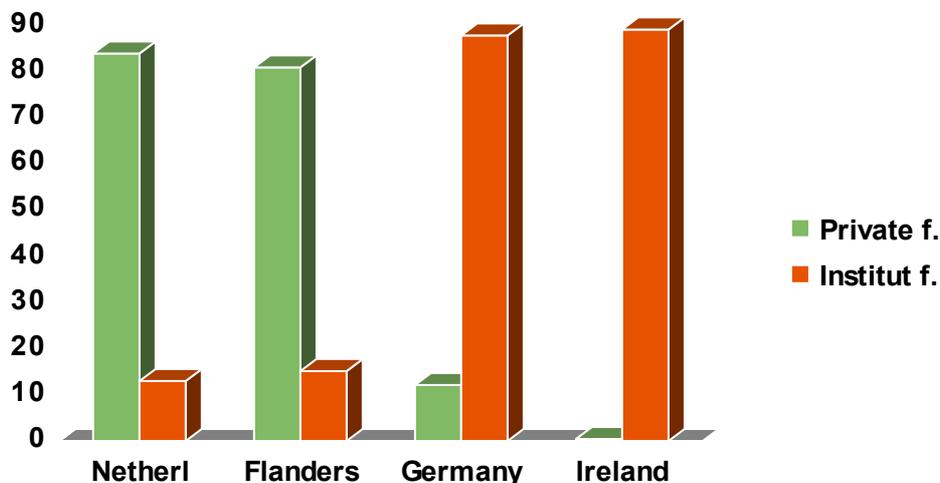
Source: Jan Hassink 2007

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- Goals:
  - Care/Rehabilitation of 'client groups': all countries: 70-80 Percent of users are male
  - Therapy/treatment is limited on social farms; the focus is on useful time spending, rehabilitation of labour integration
  - Labour integration: users employed as paid workers (Italy, France, Slovenia)
  - Education: Networks in France (1200 farms), Belgium, Netherlands
  - In most countries all types of farms exist
- Orientation: see schedule



- Percentage of private and institutional care farms: see figure



- Some country-specific characteristics:
  - In Germany there are changes in the client groups in workshops for handicapped. The share of people with less severe handicaps is increasing.



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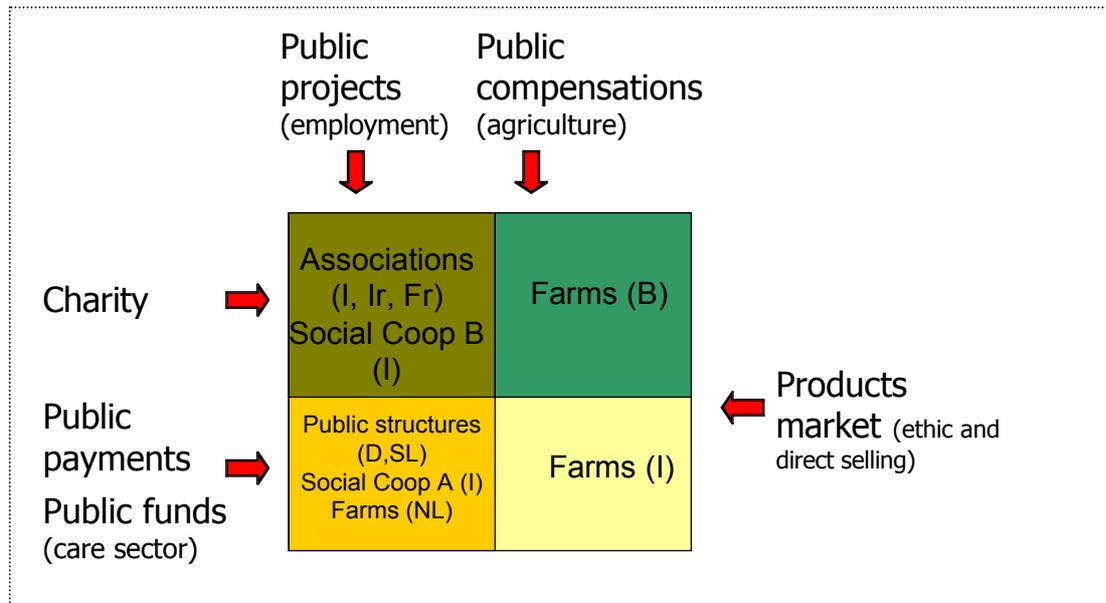


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- The Netherlands are the only country where Social farming “has an economic value”. This makes the role of institutions, quality control, professionalization and special education important. Dutch farms face the development of growing care and decreasing agriculture. So, specific qualities might become lost.
- In France Social farming is decentralised. It is a complex institutional system. The therapeutic farms already started as therapeutic farms, while in other countries farms often developed to care farms. Although there are different approaches of individual/private farms and institutions, in France only institutions get public support. Therefore, there is a need for European support to help France to include private farms.
- In Slovenia public social care institutions are opening to the local environment, using local resources (family farms in particular), to diversify and to decentralise the activities for the users of their services.
- Regulatory system:
  - Italy: Regulation for social cooperatives A (care, education) and B (labour integration); not for private farms
  - Germany: Regulation for sheltered workshops: > 120 users
  - Flanders: Agricultural regulation for private commercial farms (35% of income should be agricultural):40 euro/day
  - Netherlands: General regulation: care farms have access to budgets of care sector:60 euro/pd
  - Slovenia: regulation on social firms and social care institutions - centres for care and protection, group homes etc.

Any regulatory system has a strong impact on the organisation of social farms and the phenomena at country level: The regulatory model has a distinct impact on the balance between agriculture and services and the accompanying competences (specialisation/multifunctionality). Besides that, each system has a peculiar effect on the evolution of practices, the introduction of an accreditation, the quality system, farmers attitude (philanthropy, voluntary based with compensation, direct payment, etc), the Corporate Social Responsibility, etc. (see figure below).

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## Standards and quality control

A discussion about standards is similar to that on definition. On the one hand standards may “destroy qualities” because the main attribute of social farming is the human contact with immeasurable qualities. Human characteristics and values should therefore be the basis for social farming, policy and the quality system. On the other hand rules and standards are important, as quality control should prevent abuse and neglect of users. A subsidy system may cause the need for quality certification. So, other political instruments might be preferred. A third possibility may be a description of the requirements for a successful social farming performance (positive) instead of a quality control and certification approach telling people what they should NOT do (negative).