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Social Farming



SoFar 2nd Country/Regional Platforms



SoFar project discussion paper on Social/Care Farming

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Introduction

Social 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.

View and questions of the actors involved

During the 1st EU platform meeting in October 2007 in Brussels the stakeholders convened had fruitful discussions. It was stated that social farming is diverse. The different administrative models and cultures in Europe arise the need for convergence, a common ground. The diversity in social farming and definitions decides about political strategies. There was a discussion on whether to exclude or include initiatives by definition. Whereas the inclusion, the broad approach, is seen as a strength and a need for a project to serve all kinds of farms, it was also stated that the "melting pot situation" or the "big basket with many different things" does not enable the addressing of policies effective and strategically.

Some stakeholders had the opinion that a clear definition or "common slogan" is needed ("to map Social Farming") to address and gain people and to "persuade European public". Others mentioned that there should be asked for "original values". Therefore, the defining of a characterization, a description, should be achieved. The questions of professionalization or solidarity, the share of farming and social activity remained unsolved.



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Following concrete points came up as share values regarding social farming:

- Till today a big effort has been performed with good results. It is time to be recognized, socially and politically.
- In that regards social innovation should be stimulated and supported.
- There is a need of knowledge/research and clear definitions.
- A debate has to start on the difference in impact of a commercial approach and an approach based on commitment.
- Coherent actions should be built at national and EU level.
- Networks should be improved and a debate/communication pathways for exchange of ideas should be built.
- It starts to become necessary to move from diversity to a more shared vision for Social Farming in the EU.
- Adequate policies should be promoted as well as a political agenda for Social Farming at EU level should be formulated

For further consolidation of social farming in Europe and working up to a EU-broad political action agenda, following concrete questions were addressed during the EU platform and still should be kept in mind during next debates. They regard the following points:

- **How** do we ensure that the rights/needs of service users are incorporated into social farming practices and policies? What methods should be used to achieve this?
- **How** much agriculture should be involved in social farming?
- **How** much social farming should be interwoven with agriculture – i.e. should it be seen a “niche activity” within farming and if so, what does this mean for policy?
- **Are** there any logical and necessary steps in the development of social farming? And if there are - which ones?
- **How** do we persuade institutions, policy makers to exploit the benefits of social farming?
- **How** should policies and structures across the relevant sectors be “joined-up” to provide the necessary supports to different types of social farming?
- **How** can policy support the development of appropriate quality control and standards without losing values/identities?

Starting from the questions above the following aspects were agreed during the first EU platform.

Strategies to support Social farming

Strategies for consolidation of social farming has to aim at building diverse partnerships, adaptation of structures and support through European actions. Different suggestions for EU strategies resulting from the 1st EU platform meeting may be considered. Some of them can be considered as general remarks that should inspire any strategy or action related to social farming:



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• Core points of strategies and whether or not to include EU

- Focus on farmers for support and education. Users already receive help from other institutions.
- Focus the strategy on the farming. Motivation should be an ethical choice.
- Social farming should not be a paid service but a compensation of additional costs on the basis of number people hosted.
 - There is no shared vision on mechanism to be used in order to recognize social farming. Especially the issue of adaptation of rules and financial support is subject to debate: is the personal budget and accreditation (Dutch model) a motor of growth, or does a personal budget reduce public expenditures? (The Dutch model might not be effective for all countries. However, the lessons to be learnt might be the capacity to coordinate initiatives and actors to overcome fragmentation of policy. The Netherlands were fortunate because various ministries were willing to cooperate, it fitted, it was the right time, a small country, etc.)
 - Integrated compensation for Social farming (i.e. a social scheme) could be introduced, in the same way that the environmental schemes were introduced in the Rural Development Plan, although that activity may not attract all farmers.
- Discuss whether an agreement on a common policy/strategy is possible and whether the goal should be: 'the increase of social farms?'
- Regulation at national and EU level can be controversial. Strict regulations and frameworks may destroy creativity, fantasy and movement. On the other hand the EU may have a role for the accessibility of social farming for farmers and clients.

• Partnerships

- A large demand for networking was registered as a way to convene, advocate, amplify, build communities, facilitate, stimulate, communicates values, around social farming. In this respect different groups and actors could be addressed like:
 - The support of client groups associations should be met. Representative advocacy bodies and networks on European level such as autistic societies, down syndrome associations etc. should be persuaded to strengthen Social Farming. It is necessary to include other networks and client organisations in the movement and discuss values and their opinions on Social farming.
 - Link social farming to other movements that share these values, like slow food, nature conservation ("landscape as a legacy of European farming heritage") and preservation of genetic resources. This will result in a partnership in a strong movement that influences policy makers.
- Some practical action should also considered as a way to increase the attention of a wider public regarding social farming, like:



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- Invite new governments and politicians to visit care farms in order to increase the understanding of such initiatives (as a strategy used to foster the Dutch development).
- Support through citizens, the solidarity of consumers i.e. in basket delivery system may be used as a strategy. This might make local population "proud of Social farming" and might be chanceful, because the importance of farming and rural activity is currently growing.
- Create National and European organisations of people using Social farming, to break down boundaries between different target groups. Create in this way an excellent example of innovation in social care.
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• **Structural adaptation and support**

Farmers that would start with a social farm should overcome material and immaterial barriers. From the first point of view social farms are generally requested to readapt structures and activities in order to better fit the users needs. But also from the point of view of knowledge, training, organisation many aspect have to be faced. From this point of view in order to facilitate projects in social farming some supports can be adapted, like:

- Use of financial instruments in order to improve the organisation of adequate structures.
- Build an information desk and introduce Social farming in rural development plans. (This was done in Italy. Here social farming developed from agro-tourism because the human and social dimension of the local population were missing. Rural developers promoted the new network, the new concept of Social farming and new training courses for technicians).
- Develop a support agency doing the intermediate between supply of social farming places or activities and the demand from the medical or social sector (as done inter alia in Belgium where this model was built with the support of the Ministry of Agriculture).
- Specific support should be also defined in order to facilitate the establishment of policy networks.

• **Actions on European level**

- Social farming is increasing its evidence at EU level. From this point of view specific actions should be built in order to better support and address the dynamic. The European dimension of the process should be lead by project holders A European platform should develop the urgently needed common grounds and it should address following points:
 - the definition of a minimal grid able to offer a common understanding about social farming across Europe.
 - To clarify minimum -core- requirements for farmers and farms.
 - an unambiguous European action plan able to support social farming across Europe (informations, recommendations, supports, et).
 - Research projects that integrate the side of medicine ("with sensitive health operators") should be promoted. This is urgent to achieve



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recognition by the health system and the political side and to research on strategies for attracting politicians to become effective in different countries.

- A stronger communication and integration should be promoted among different policies with the aim of better integrating agriculture in the social and health dimension.
- Some activities able to facilitate linkages, benchmarking and exchanges among country/regional experiences in a better integrated view could be facilitated by organising study visits of practitioners and politicians in different social farms in other countries.

Defining the arena for the discussion

According with the results of the first European platform the next steps of the project should better define what can be the added value of an European initiative related to social farming, both in the perspective of the Country/regional evolution of social farming as well as in a common European view. The perspective of the construction of an unambiguous EU view on social farming some points should be addressed in a proper discussion.

These questions as emerged from the first EU platform still regard a better definition about:

- **what** is SF (definitions, target, etc.).
- **how** to improve social farming across Europe.

Both points have been already touched in the first round platforms, but should be still more finalised in the future in a process of converging clarification.

About **what** is SF (*definitions and main characteristics of SF*), the main topics selected in the 1st EU platform are the following:

- a mapping and catalogue of the different forms of social care, institutions and policies and different kinds of handicap to be continuously updated with the evolution of the phenomenon
- deepening the reflection on the relation between farming and handicap.
- the ethical principles which should channel those initiatives.

Related to **how** develop social farming (*action plan*), the main emerging points to address in the discussion are the following:

1. How to organise policy networks at regional, national and EU level
 - To convene stakeholders (who and how)
 - To define a format that is useful to build regional and national/EU networks
 - To define communication strategies in order to amplify the subject and to involve society in a wider way
2. How to characterise the minimum common features of local projects and practices
 - To define the structure to be involved and in which way (minimum standards for farms; minimum requirements for social support, etc.)



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- To define monitoring and evaluation practices (at farm and territorial level)
3. How to define suitable support for social farming
- To define support at farm level (what and in which way)
 - To define support at territorial level (networks, education, professional training)

In the next future of the Sofar projects two more steps were planned:

- First one is related to the organisation of one more partner country/regional platform. Starting from the findings of the first EU platform, aim of this platform is to better analyse the relevance of the EU view and actions according with the specific situation of any Country.
- Second one regards the organisation of a new EU platform able to incorporate in a common EU view the contributions arising from any Country regional platform.

Points to be addressed

From a methodological point of view, next Country regional platforms should address same points able to focus the discussion regarding actions that can be established at EU level in order to promote social farming. Results should be organised in a common integrated report that will represent the entering frame for coming discussion at EU level.

In order to better frame the discussion at Country/regional level the following points will be focused:

1. As emerged in the first EU debate an aspect that should be better analysed regards the way to organise a **policy network at EU level** able to link Country/regional initiatives in a larger view. Role of such a network should be finalised to the on going construction of specific strategies and actions able to support social farming. With this purpose actions should be better defined in order to achieve the organisation of such a network able to link together project stakeholders with policy makers and institutional members.

Questions regarding this specific point can be organised as follows.

- **Policy network at EU level**
 - a. What is the importance of a EU network for green care? What could be the added value and impact for networks at local level, at policy level?
 - b. To what degree this network can be already established and connected with networks in your country? Does this networks involve different kinds of (institutional) stakeholders?
 - c. What are the advantages related to this EU network, and in which way it could improve the organisation at regional/country level and at policy level?



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- d. What measures can be taken to further improve this EU network? And what measures EU policies should include in order to facilitate the organisation of local networks?
 - e. What kind of policy support measures can redress the lack of awareness of social farming among various stakeholders and help to raise the profile of social farming?
 - f. How can policy measures assist the development of appropriate support agencies and networking mechanisms at national/regional and EU level?
2. Moving from sectors to an **integrated view of policies**: one of the main question that should be debated regards the way to better integrate the multidimensional perspective of social farming in front of different institutional stakeholders (agriculture, health, care, educational, employment) in order to be fully recognise and to better integrate and address policies and measures, both at EU and Country/regional level. Also in this case specific strategies and actions should be indicated.

Questions regarding this specific point can be organised as follows.

- **Integration of green care sector into policy at regional level and at EU level.**

Also in this case specific strategies and actions should be indicated.

- a. To what extent is the multidimensional aspect of social farming recognised by the different institutional stakeholders?
- b. Is there already an integration of the multidimensional perspective of social farming in front of different institutional stakeholders?
 - i. If yes: what strategies and actions have been taken in the past to establish this integration?
 - ii. If no: what strategies and actions can be taken in the future to enhance integration?
- c. Is the integration based on bilateral relations, or is there an multidimensional interaction between different stakeholders?
- d. Is the integration driven by a bottom-up approach, or is it established by governmental institutions?
- e. How can policy support measures ensure that the rights/needs of service users are incorporated into social farming practices and different policy domains?
- f. What sort of institutional arrangements should be in place to ensure that policies and structures across the relevant sectors are "joined-up" to support the development of social farming?

The first two general questions are preliminary to the definition of specific needs and ways of intervention both at farm and territorial level.

The **second two aspects** regards the action that should be focused in order to improve social farming projects (farm level) but also to better integrate social farming in a territorial dimension.



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Here should be better defined the elements that should be faced (both for an immaterial –common features, standard, requirements-, as well as a material and more tangible aspects -training activities, supports, compensations, etc.-) and the actions that should be organised in order to fit the previous elements. Still for each of them the relevance of agricultural and integrated policies could be indicated.

3. Action that should be focused at EU level in order to improve social farming projects (farm level)

- a. What are the elements that should be faced
 - i. for immaterial and common features, what are the standards, requirements?
 - ii. for material and more tangible aspects (training activities, supports, compensations, etc.) and the actions that should be organised in order to fit the previous elements.
 - iii. For each of them the relevance of agricultural and integrated policies could be indicated.
 - iv. How can this action reinforce the country and regional dynamics?

4. Action that should be focused at EU level in order to integrate social farming in a territorial dimension.

- a. What are the elements that should be faced
 - i. for immaterial and common features, what are the standards, requirements?
 - ii. for material and more tangible aspects (training activities, supports, compensations, etc.) and the actions that should be organised in order to fit the previous elements.
 - iii. For each of them the relevance of agricultural and integrated policies could be indicated.
 - iv. How can this action reinforce the country and regional dynamics?

	elements to be faced	expected actions	Role of Agricultural policies	Role of Health, care, educational, employment policies
Farm level				
Territorial dimension				



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All the relevant aspect should be referred to the EU dimension. The perspective should take into consideration the definition of actions and strategies that should planned.at EU level in order to reinforce country/regional dynamics.