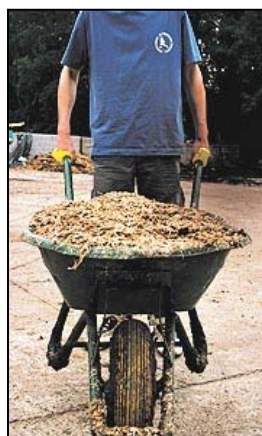


# Social farming in Flanders and Belgium

## *State of the art – version april 2007*



State of the Art - "So Far" project  
(*Social Services in Multifunctional Farms*)  
EU FPVI

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## 1. Number of social farms per province and in Flanders in 2006

According to the most recent count of the Support Centre for Green Care in September 2006, over 200 care farms are more or less active in Flanders. These are all active agricultural or horticultural businesses that provide care for clients as a sideline to their normal farming activities – farming takes priority over the caring aspect. These businesses are mostly run by families. In every region in Flanders, institutional farms or sheltered workshops with agricultural or horticultural activities exist as well. In these initiatives, the care for the clients is more important than the business aspect. These initiatives are mostly run by employees of the institutions.

	Western-Flanders	Eastern-Flanders	Flemish-Brabant	Antwerp	Limburg	<b>Flanders</b>
<b>Care farms</b>	50	60	28	43	31	<b>212</b>
<b>Institutional farms and sheltered workshops</b>	10	8	7	8	5	<b>38</b>
<b>Other social farming projects</b>	1	4	1	4	2	<b>12</b>

*Table 1: Number of social farms per province and in Flanders (2006)*

## 2. The history of social farming. How did it start? When did it start? Who started it? What were the motives? ...

Green Care is not new, in fact it has existed for a very long time. Within psychiatric care we find the oldest examples. In Geel (a village in the province Antwerp), a place of pilgrimage for people with psychiatric problems, patients have been taken in by host families ever since the fifteenth century. Other care facilities, such as the University Psychiatric Centre Sint-Kamillus in Bierbeek, started their own farm in the 1930's in order to be able to grow their own vegetables and fruit and to produce their own meat.

Here and there similar initiatives have cropped up over the last few decennia, mostly for people with a mental handicap and for the young. The last few years there has been a significant increase in the number of initiatives that are based on a cooperation between care facilities and active agricultural and horticultural farms. These new initiatives arose from the individual commitment of some farmers or from a care organisation that were creatively looking for a more appropriate care and guidance for their clients.

The past few years, combining agriculture and care has caught on as an idea in Flanders, in the agricultural and the horticultural sector as well as in the care sector. For the farming sector, it is in line with the spirit of the times to contemplate innovations and to play along with new demands of the market and of society. For the care sector it fits in with an evolving vision on care: total care, care made to measure and a natural setting or domestic environment are brought to the fore as important anchoring principles.

### **3. Estimation of the increase in the number of social farms and a description of how the characteristics of social farms have been changing in time**

Table 2 shows the number of Green Care initiatives that are active in the whole of Flanders. It is clear that the number of care farms has grown considerably over the past years. The number of institutional farms hasn't increased a lot. This clearly shows the positive effect of the incentives set up by the Support Centre for Green Care and the recent new legislation (cf. paragraph 7).

	2003	2004	2005	2006 (sept)
Care farms	46	130	185	212
Institutional farms and sheltered workshops	37	37	38	38
Other social farming projects	10	11	12	12

*Table 2: Evolution of the number of Green Care initiatives in Flanders*

In Flanders quite a few initiatives have sprung up spontaneously. These are mostly independent agricultural or horticultural farms that receive a limited number of people on a small scale. Institutional farms work on a larger scale. In comparison with our neighbouring countries, Flanders scores very well on the diversity of the target groups. Considering the great interest from the care sector as well as from the agricultural and horticultural sector, there are plenty of opportunities for growth as well.

Until December 2005, there was no legal framework, so Green Care in Flanders drew its strength mainly from volunteer work. Over the past year, the change in legislation has made it more attractive for farmers to start with a care farm. The voluntary work has shifted a bit more in the direction of a real financial compensation.

### **4. Short description of main types of social farming projects at this moment**

#### **What is Green Care?**

Green Care in Flanders can be found in varied and combined forms: day spending, relief during the day or 24 hours a day, employment as reintegration or labour care, as well as therapy in the shape of relaxation, development of the personality or learning social skills. It may involve short-term or long-term stay, in a narrow or loose cooperation with the care institution... Most often they are small-scale initiatives that care for a limited number of clients.

#### **For whom?**

A broad range of vulnerable groups qualifies for Green Care:

- people with a mental and/or physical handicap
- people with psychiatric problems
- young people from youth welfare work
- children
- (former) addicts, (former) inmates
- (demential) elderly persons

- people with depression or burnout
- underprivileged persons, the long-term unemployed
- homeless people

At this moment the largest number of initiatives is aimed at young people, persons with a mental handicap and persons with psychiatric problems. To a lesser degree the (long-term) unemployed, older people, (former) addicts and children are involved as well.

## **Models**

As far as the approach is concerned, in Flanders three main models are distinguished:

### **• Model 1: active care farm, individual clients**

Via a care institution, care demanders are received on an active agricultural or horticultural farm. Here the care demander is involved in the daily work on the farm as much as possible. The farm provides care "to measure". The care institution is responsible for follow-up. Most often the care institution works with one farm; some institutions are developing a network of care farms that they can call upon. In a number of cases there is cooperation with animal shelters, riding schools, nature reserves, etc

### **• Model 2: active care farm, groups**

Active agricultural or horticultural farms put their infrastructure at the disposal of a care institution, but they themselves have to spend no time or limited time receiving. Supervisors from the care institution are responsible for the care of the care demanders. Here too, there can be cooperation with e.g. animal shelters, riding schools or nature reserves.

### **• Model 3: institutional farm**

The care farm is started within, or is part of, a care institution. This is called an institutional farm. In Flanders they are often sheltered workplaces, labour care centres, day care centres or other partial services within the care institutions.

Combinations of these models may be found as well. They may be, for instance, a care institution that has its own institutional farm but cooperates with an active agricultural farm as well.

## **5. A sketch of the profile of the project holders and the participants in terms of gender**

In 2003 the Flemish Support Centre sent a questionnaire to all active and potential care farmers in Flanders for Green Care. The results of this questionnaire give a good impression of the profile of these farmers. The results show little difference between active care farmers and potential candidates.

In 2006, another survey was held in the Sofar-project. This more elaborate in-depth questionnaire was taken from a smaller but varied group of some 20 active care farmers (i.e. 10% of all care farmers). This gives a good picture of the active care farmers in Flanders, although no statistical analysis is permitted on this sample.

The results of both questionnaires are combined in this profile sketch, which refers to a number of characteristics.

## **Age**

All ages are represented in the population of care farmers, with a majority in the middle group (between 40 and 49 years old). The care function clearly appeals mostly to farmers and horticulturalists that have been active in their business for quite a while. Recently some rather young farm managers (<30 years old) also started a care farm, combined with the starting up of the agricultural enterprise. In this case, usually, one of the partners' motivation is to work mainly with clients (for example the wife has a degree in welfare and decides not to work outside the farm if she can care for clients on the care farm).

## **Farm type**

Businesses that are interested in the combination of agri/horticulture and care, mostly have quite some manual labour – for instance mixed farms, dairy and cattle farms, the more intensive sectors (such as ornamental horticulture or pigs) and organic farms. Most enterprises have mixed farming activities. Furthermore, many care farms are engaged in multifunctional agriculture, with broadening activities (such as agritourism or education) and deepening activities (such as on-farm selling or home processing of farm products).

## **Client profile**

Target groups of young people, people with mental, social or physical disabilities and people with psychiatric problems are mentioned most frequently. The care for elderly people is mentioned less often, but is being considered by some as an opportunity in the future. Care for former addicted or long-time unemployed people also exists, though on a limited scale.

## **Number of clients**

Most of the farmers have a small-scale care farm, with one to three clients. If they take care of a larger number of clients (>10 clients, even up to 70 clients in a week for one care farm), the assistance of pedagogical trainers paid for by a care institution is needed. About half of the care farms have clients on a very frequent basis (>4 days in a week) while a large number of care farms choose to limit their care capacity to 1 or 2 days a week.

## **Background of care farmer**

The care background of the care farmers and horticulturalists is striking. Almost half of the active care farmers and three quarters of the potential candidates have a degree in welfare (such as nursing, pedagogical trainer, social worker, education, ...) and/or a former

experience in this area (for example as a professional nurse, teacher, home carer or volunteer).

### **Gender issues**

Coaching the clients is mainly a male task, taking into account that at most care farms care has essentially focused labour as therapeutic element. If target groups with more care needs (like elderly people) are brought into the picture, the role of farmers' wives is expected to increase.

The clients are also predominantly male. This makes social farming in Flanders a particularly masculine activity.

### **Start of project**

The majority of care farms have started their care activities very recently, over the last 5-6 years. However, some have been active for even more than 25 years.

The motivation to start this social project on the farm is a particularly altruistic one: helping clients, getting them to reintegrate in society and improving their quality of life are most mentioned. Other motivations to start are widening of the family income and social networking.

Many farm managers did not experience any difficulties in starting up their social activities. Problems that are mentioned are lack of own knowledge and experience, lack of financial or professional support and lack of cooperation from different governments. Supporting actors while starting up are mainly the Support Centre for Green Care and care institutions. Government and other care farmers are also mentioned.

### **Economic aspects**

Generally, the economic impact of social activities on the company is considered as limited to non-existing. Costs and revenues are more or less balanced on most care farms.

Most care farms have a yearly revenue from care activities of 1.000-10.000 € per year. The yearly costs vary from 100-5.000 € per year. Extreme number like no costs, no revenues or a cost or revenue over 10.000 € per year also occur. (These numbers cannot be interpreted strictly, since a reasonably large number of care farms have no idea of costs and revenues for these activities.)

Percentage of revenue from care is very limited. Most care farmers expect that the financial situation of the company will 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.

Not every care farm 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 invested amount can rise up to 10.000 € but is usually below 5.000 €.

## Effects on different stakeholders

Physical and mental benefits are esteemed to be the most important effects on clients. Developing skills and improving their physical health are the most important physical effects on clients. Mentally, the effect is mainly shown as an increase in self-esteem, increased sense of responsibility, a stronger feeling of pride and enthusiasm. Increasing social contacts and social skills as a good working attitude, being able to handle discipline and learning to collaborate are also very important effects on clients.

Society can benefit highly from social farming because the possibilities of less-abled people are brought to the front. Possibly the existing institutions could focus on caring for people with less possibilities, as clients with some possibilities can go to a care farm. Reduced costs for society, improving the imago of agriculture and reducing the number of young people who fall into evil ways are also mentioned.

Social farmers mention the satisfaction and enriching new contacts as the most important effects on themselves. Some other effects are the breaking of routine and learning to put things in perspective. Even effects like getting new insights in their own company and finding calm because of the lower work pace are mentioned by one care farmer, just as getting some help in the work and the financial benefit. Negative effects on the farmers themselves are the loss of time, the energy it takes to organise the work, the limitation of privacy and patience it requires. Overall, the balance is found to be positive.

Getting to know an unknown group of people, usually with their own specific characteristics, is the most positive effect on family members like the farmer's children. These family members often regard it as time-consuming and limiting their privacy. Sometimes their attitude is rather negative towards these activities but that tends to change over time, as they get to know the client involved. Fear for the target group, fear for theft and fear that children might imitate negative behaviour are also mentioned by the farmers relatives. Overall, the balance is found to be positive and enriching for the education of the children. Clients sometimes even become like relatives or friends to them.

## Landscape/nature

Increasing biodiversity on arable land (for example through green manuring) and putting hedges are the most popular environmental measures amongst the questioned care farmers. The construction of specific biotopes, nests or shelters and the maintenance of grasslands or dykes occur often. Most care farmers consider their contribution to nature protection as intermediate, but some care farmers assign their company (very) high nature values.

The majority of care farmers regard care farming as moderately suitable to rather unsuitable for implementing landscape/nature measures. Obstructing factors for applying landscape/nature measures on their own farm are lack of financial support and lack of time. Some have had negative experiences regarding nature protection. A rather large number of care farmers don't see any obstructing factor for the implementation of landscape/nature measures.

## Organization

Just a minority of care farmers is not involved in any networking activity. Most of them join meetings and organized activities in some way. Active participation in some organization or active involvement through lobbying exists but to a lesser extent.

### **Vision on support of Care Farming in Flanders**

A large majority of the questioned care farmers considers care farming in Flanders as clearly supported and/or acknowledged by the government. However it does not get enough attention at this moment.

Government policies can effect the further growth of Green Care by information and a financial compensation in the first place. Guidelines for starting care farmers, a legal regulative framework and support for networking activities and professional training could also help to expand the sector.

### **6. Stakeholders involved in social farming. Their roles and the developments in the networks of social farming and the support structures at regional and/or national level**

Recently a few umbrella organisations that are concerned with Green Care have sprung up in Flanders.

#### **Support Centre for Green Care**

In 2003 a study was conducted that examined the viability of a support centre for Green Care initiatives. In the care sector as well as in the agricultural sector, enquiries were made about the surplus value and the bottlenecks of Green Care. The possible tasks for a support centre were put to the question as well.

The Flemish Support Centre for Green Care ('Steunpunt Groene Zorg') has officially existed since January 2004. Its primary goal is promoting Green Care in Flanders. It does not have a structural financing, leading to an uncertain future development.

Care organisations, active care farms and interested farmers/horticulturalists can contact the centre for:

- all information on Green Care: visits, website, newsletter, training & extension;
- contacts with interested care organisations and interested agricultural or horticultural farms;
- support of a start up of cooperation between care organisations and farms;
- meeting active Green Care initiatives: information and demonstration days, study visits, consultation platform, study groups, working groups;
- screening of new care farms;
- first matching of clients, organisations and farms.

Behind the scenes, they also work/cooperate at:

- promotion of the Green Care concept,
- appropriate conditions for Green Care,
- preparation of policy, consulting public authorities,
- extending of national and international contacts,

- research projects,
- some form of quality system for Green Care initiatives.

## **Regional partners**

The province of Eastern Flanders has a pilot project called 'Green Care Eastern Flanders' ('Groene Zorg Oost-Vlaanderen'). It is a Flemish organisation that supports Green Care on a regional level. In the province it actively looks for interested agricultural or horticultural farms and care institutions, and brings the most suitable partners into contact with each other. It offers support in making arrangements and creates moments for encounters to enhance the exchange of experiences.

In the other provinces of Flanders, the Support Centre for Green Care takes care of these tasks.

## **7. Regional and national policies and special regulations supporting or hindering the development of social farming**

- **Subsidy for care farms:**

Since 1 December 2005, care farms can apply for official permission. New legislation, with a corresponding subsidy, was developed. This subsidy is principally conceived of as a compensation for the time a farmer (or his/her partner or staff) spends with the guests, hindering him to work full-time on the farm.

A distinction is made between:

- providing infrastructure on the farm: if a group of clients is taken care of by a pedagogical trainer (paid for by a care organisation) at the care farm, the farm only puts its infrastructure at their disposal. The subsidy for this type of care farm is 15 euros per day.
- caring for maximum three clients themselves: The farmer (or his/her partner or staff) is responsible for the activities, the supervision and guidance during these activities. The subsidy for this type of care farm is 40 euros per day, irrespective of the number of clients.

The following requirements apply for an agricultural or horticultural business to be regarded as an official care farm:

- cooperation with a care organisation, officially recognized by the Welfare Department, or with a counselling centre for high school students,
- farming or horticultural activities as the main or additional profession (the farmer must obtain a minimum of 35% of his income from agri/horticulture and can only have a part-time job outside),
- using the official Care Farm contract: a standard contract between care farm, care organisation and client, elaborated and provided by the administration.

The care organisation is ultimately responsible for:

- coordinating the cooperation,
- taking care of the administration involved with care-farming of clients.

The budget for this subsidy comes from the Department of Agriculture, as part of the Rural Development Programme Flanders. The Departments of Welfare and of Education helped to elaborate this new legislation, but they don't contribute to its costs so far.

The main asset of this subsidy regulation is the recognition of care farmers by the Flemish government and the society. This legislation provides moral as well as financial support to farmers who wish to add social value to their business. This gives new incentives to the sector, stimulating care farming to become a fully-fledged welfare concept.

However, the legislation is not perfect yet and it still needs some adaptation. At this moment the agricultural or horticultural business must have a minimal viable size. This implies that projects with a limited agricultural aspect cannot be supported. The legislation is also rather strict: the standard contracts that are provided, can't be adapted to the situation and the subsidy is fixed in the sense that it doesn't take into account the intensity of care and the number of clients. At this moment, only the Department of Agriculture contributes to this measure, Welfare and Education have no financial input until now. This may hamper the further development of Green Care in the future.

- **Investment subsidies for care farms and social workshops**

Care farmers who want to make investments on their care farm to provide appropriate facilities for their clients, can get a subsidy of 40% of the amount they invest. The aim of the investment could be for example fitting out a place for them to sleep or a canteen where they can eat their lunches. The business has to be a viable agricultural or horticultural farm, run by a capable manager and the investment has to be sound as well. The subsidy is paid by the VLIF (Vlaams Landbouwinvesteringsfonds = Flemish Agricultural Investment Fund), which is a part of the Flemish Rural Development Programme.

Since 2006, social workshops that have agriculture or horticulture as their activities, can also apply for these subsidies. They can get an intervention from VLIF for their investments in the agricultural infrastructure. The subsidies vary from 10 to 40% of the total amount invested.

## **8. Introduction and use of quality systems by social farms (what kind of system is used)**

The Flemish care farms do not use any standardized quality system, as is for instance the case in the Netherlands. The care organizations have the final responsibility concerning their clients and the cooperation with care farms. The agreements between the care farm, care organization and client are put into a kind of contract, which is evaluated on a regular basis.

The Support Centre for Green Care is these days developing a quality guide. The aim of this guide is to visualize the quality on care farms. It describes the ideal situation on a care farm and the ideal cooperation between farm, care organization and client. The guide will contain a general description of a qualitative care farm, testimonies by people involved and many practical tips.

## **9. (Hot) issues**

At this moment the subsidy for care farms is financed completely by the Department of Agriculture and Fishery. The Departments of Welfare and Education haven't contributed until now. This is not very logical. For example, a farmer who wants to support nature on his farm, can sign in on agro-environmental measures. Part of these measures are paid for by the Department of Environment, Nature and Energy.

Not all Green Care initiatives have a strong agricultural basis. In some initiatives the emphasis is on the clients, while an income from agricultural or horticultural products is restricted to a secondary level. Small-scale initiatives with an emphasis on the clients, find it very difficult to get sufficient financial support at this moment.

## **10. Research in the field of social farming; results of research projects and names of organizations performing research**

Not many research programs concerning Green Care or care farms, have been carried out in Flanders until now.

In the province of Antwerp, some research is going on at this moment. This research wants to find out how familiar care organizations are with the concept of care farms and to what extent they are already cooperating with care farms. What mechanisms make some care organizations anticipate this trend while others don't? Is there any relation to the model of assistance or the sector? Is there any relation with the location of the organization (city versus countryside)? Is there any relation to the perception of what Green Care is all about? Is this caused by lack of knowledge about Green Care? The aim of this research is to improve the actions of the Support Center in the province of Antwerp.

Organization: University of Antwerp, Faculty of Political and Social Sciences, in cooperation with the Support Center for Green Care.

## **11. Initiatives in education related to social farming to train/educate farmers, participants (clients) etc. and other SF-related initiatives of different kinds**

These last few years, several organizations have conducted training sessions that deal with Green Care:

- Information days or evenings:

Over the past years, different actors have organised a large number of information sessions. The main aim of these day and evening sessions was to promote the concept of Green Care, to show what it means in practice, what the conditions are and how new initiatives can be started. These sessions were organised for the agricultural sector as well as the welfare sector.

Organisation: Innovation Support Centre/Support Centre for Green Care, Flemish Agricultural Centre, Green Care Eastern Flanders

- Exchanging of experiences

Active care farmers are often confronted with new situations and new problems they are not used of dealing with. For that reason, the Support Centre for Green Care

organises evenings where they can exchange these experiences on a regular basis. The purpose of these evening sessions is that care farmers can learn from each other, gather new ideas and reinforce the group feeling amongst them. It anticipates the need of care farms to unite and professionalise together.

Organisation: Support Centre for Green Care

- Training course agriculture and social care:

This is a one-year occupational training course that focuses on the different steps that must be taken if you want to start a care farm. The training was first organised in 2004 and is aimed at farmers as well as social workers. The different possibilities and the steps to be taken are discussed. Attention is also paid to legislation, possible forms of organisation, possibilities for financing, insurance, quality care.

Organisation: Landwijzer vzw

- Training course hippo therapy:

This training course is meant for care givers who want to use horses therapeutically. It explores the holistic vision, knowledge of the horse and possible target groups and objectives. The course was first organised in 2003.

Organisation: Artevelde Hogeschool

- Training course therapeutic work with assistance animals:

This course is aimed at care givers who want to include animals in their counselling of children and young people. Care farmers (or care farmers' wives) are welcome as well. The course has started for the first time in the autumn of 2004.

Organisation: vzw 't Keerhof

## **12. Other aspects relevant to understanding the situation in our country**

All the information mentioned until now concerns the Flemish, Dutch-speaking part of Belgium. However Belgium is a federal state with three major regions: Flanders, Wallonia and the Brussels capital region. Legislation concerning agriculture and welfare is quite different in these regions. Only Flanders has support for care farms at this moment. The Support Centre for Green Care only operates in this region as well. As a consequence, not many initiatives exist in Wallonia and Brussels. Furthermore, these initiatives are scattered.