

Annex II

Description of cases



State of the Art in Italy - “So Far” project
(Social Services in Multifunctional Farms)
EU FPVI

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A. C.

A social and organic farm for disadvantaged categories and all citizens



The case, in brief

Key-words

- Social cooperation
- Social farm
- Organic farming
- Mental and physical handicap
- Social exclusion
- Labour integration
- Occupational rehabilitation
- Training
- Didactic farm
- “Bio-ethical” food
- Direct selling
- Biologic food retailing
- City farm

“A.C.” is a farm run by a social cooperative for labour integration (so-called “B” kind). It was started more than 25 years ago by some members of a Christian inspired community in the area of “Roman Castles”, nearby the city of Rome.

Since its beginning, farming has been conceived as a means for social and labour inclusion of disabled and socially excluded people. In this sense, “A.C.” includes vulnerable persons as employed members, trainees and/or volunteers in occupational therapeutic activities.

“A.C.” appears today as a very vital and multifunctional farm, open to the territory, to which it offers didactic activities for schools, a farm-restaurant and a food shop, equipped picnic / recreational areas, meetings and initiatives of diverse kind. A parallel society doing relevant business in the retailing of “organic” and “ethical” food has been recently created.

The farm has become a reference place not only for disadvantaged persons or social sector, but also for all citizens of Roman area. Today, the cooperative defines itself as a “social farm” and is actively integrated within an emerging network working for ethical and social farming at regional and national scale.

Beginning of the project

In 1966, in the town of Fermo in central Italy (Marche region) a small group of so-called disadvantaged persons together with a priest and some volunteers start a new communitarian initiative, to react to a threaten of social exclusion. The community – named C. – inspired by social and Christian values, have created progressively new groups through decades, that are today spread all over the country (14 groups in 10 regions, including more than 500 people and getting in touch with at least other 7.000 persons each year).



“A.C.” is a spin-off of C. community, born in in 1978 in Grottaferrata – a small town in a residential, hilly area, named “Roman Castles”, next to the city of Rome. The founding priest and some physical handicapped persons create a first family-group, going to live together in a farm-house with 3 hectares annexed, donated by a religious body. The farm-house starts giving shelter to excluded and disabled youngsters, carrying out diverse activities (agriculture, handicraft, gardening services), with the aid of social workers, volunteers and “conscientious objectors”.

In the 90s, “A.C.” has become a social cooperative for labour integration (“B” kind), that is a “non for profit” enterprise having the aim of integrating disadvantaged categories in labour. The farm have progressively reinforced linkages within the local system, answering to diverse needs and requests expressed by local socio-health services or directly by families. Agriculture was also expanded and qualified (i.e. scale enlargement, diversification, conversion to organic and certification of produce).

Still with the purpose of favouring labour integration of disadvantaged categories, during the 90s a training centre for organic farming is created. Since 1997, educational and labour training is offered through programmes carried out in cooperation with public bodies. More recently, in 2004, an old rural building was restored and transformed into a restaurant (having special facilities for disabled persons). A hall for meetings and an equipped, outdoor area for didactic and recreational activities have been recently created also. These activities are part of a new concept of “social agro-tourism” that the farm is promoting.

“The group guided by Milly and his husband, two disabled persons of great humanity and cultural depth, immediately starts farming with the purpose to create a living and labour place that could be “normal” and not mere relief work” (A.C., brochure)



Activities today

The cooperative has today 24 members, of whom 8 are disadvantaged persons (physical and mental disabilities). At present, other 10 persons are involved as trainees and/or in occupational rehabilitative activities. Training activities are carried out in cooperation with local administrations and are partially funded through ESF. “Socio-therapeutic” integration involves ex-addicts: it is run on the basis of agreements with local socio-health services and do not provide any compensation for the farm.

Farms’ produce is highly diversified. It comprehends: vegetables, poultry and rabbits, daily produce of eggs (1100 per day, in average), honey (200 beehives), olive’s oil (13 ha) and quality branded wine (“frascati d.o.c.”, 5 ha) – all certified as “organic”. The cooperative has two food shops named “C. bio”, one on the farm and in the other one in Rome. They sell their own produce and a wide spectrum of other organic labelled food.

The restaurant is experimenting relevant success and is becoming an increasing important activity. It offers a cuisine based on farm’s food. It has special facilities to welcome disabled persons and it aims at having a “social” nature (e.g. hosting groups). Moreover, the cooperative promotes didactic initiatives for schools, seminars and meetings concerning diverse social topics and issues, music concerts and parties open to all citizens.

More recently the cooperative has created a distinct commercial society named “bio-solidale distribuzione” (i.e. solidarity-bio retailing) that is developing a relevant business in the retailing of organic food (mainly vegetables). This activity has started by the delivering of farm’s produce in some food shops in the city and province of Rome. Then, it was progressively extended, bringing to the retailing of produce coming from national and international organic food markets. Today the society supplies 15.000 daily meals for school canteens, 15 specialised food shops, and also several organised purchasing groups (supplying “baskets” for a minimum value of 150 €). The next plan is to extend the range of products – including packaged food (e.g. pasta, biscuits, tinned food), various kinds of cold meat (i.e. salami, ham, etc.) and cheese.

*“A. C....
where the
authenticity of
the fruits of the
land is joint
with human
solidarity”
(web site)*



Prospects

With the creation of specialised retailing and agro-tourism (i.e. restaurant, facilities for educational, recreational and social activities) “A.C.” is aiming at strengthening its role as “social farm” (this is a term used by the same players) in the area. Particularly the aim is to: “creating spaces open to youngsters, families, and more in general, to all local inhabitants, where meetings and debates on diverse issues are organised; the creation of these places for meeting and aggregation represent an important milestone for the cooperative; they allow the farm to open more itself to the outside and enhance its social role” (web site)

As stated by Senni (2005), the special location of A.C. – “in a hybrid territory between the rural and the urban, immediately close to the town’s centre of Grottaferrata (municipality with 19.000 people) and next to the capital” – appears as a crucial strength of this case, well comprehended by the same players, since the beginning of their activities.



Recent evolution seems to strengthen this special relation (e.g. complementarity / integration) between the rural and the urban. A.C. may be viewed today as a real “city farm” – a biologic and social reserve for urban people’s needs (- needs of “ordinary and special” kinds). Societal demand for such spaces and services seem to be crescent vis-à-vis a still limited offer. The cooperative seems to be very aware of its role and potential as shown through its recent initiatives – initiatives that are likely to produce relevant economic results in the next future. Definitely, as Senni affirms (2005), A.C. may be viewed as a model of multifunctional farm, in which the social component plays a pivotal role.

The cooperative is also integrated in multiple networks and is in touch with key stakeholders in social and agricultural sectors, at local, regional and national levels; comprehending actors of public institutions and civil society organisations. Particularly the cooperative is connected to an emerging network in Latium (including the University of Viterbo and actors of social and agricultural sectors) and works actively to promote concepts and practices of “social farming”

“...the creation of these places for meeting and aggregation on the farm represents an important milestone for the cooperative; they allow the farm to open more itself to the outside, and enhance its social role” (web site)

“G. d. S.” / C. farm

A pact for health, social integration and local development



The case in brief

The initiative named “G. d. S.” was recently launched (2002-2004) in the area of Valdera (province of Pisa) by an association of professionals in health / social field. The project aims at promoting socio-therapeutic and labour integration of persons with psychiatric problems through gardening and agriculture.

The starters were able to involve progressively third partners in the initiative, particularly public socio-health services, local administrations and some private farms in the area. In this sense, the project aims at showing the potential development of new forms of cooperation at territorial level, for the health and well-being of population (i.e. a “pact for health” as defined by the same promoters).

Further than benefiting to psychiatric services’ users, the initiative have produced relevant effects on the participating private farms. Particularly, C. family farm has progressively transformed its system/style of farming as a consequence of labour integration and for the new support met in the local community (e.g. solidarity groups of purchase), experimenting relevant economic results further than diverse motives of personal satisfaction and enrichment.

Key-words

- Territorial pact for health
- Orthicultural therapy
- Labour integration
- Socio-therapeutic integration
- Training
- Critical / solidarity consumption
- Community supported agriculture
- Enterprise social responsibility

Start of the project

The project named “G. d. S.” was promoted by a local association of professionals working in the fields of health and development in the area of Valdera (O. “Organizzazione Interdisciplinare Sviluppo e Salute” – i.e. “Interdisciplinary organisation for development and health”). It has started with the aim of creating a rehabilitative pilot-experience addressed to persons with psychiatric problems. It was inspired by two main motives: Anglo-Saxon tradition of horticultural therapy; local historical tradition in the use of herbs for medical purposes.

Playing both on social/care rehabilitation, as well as on recovery of heritage, a first therapeutic gardening initiative is created by O. association in the years 2002-2004, with the support of all local administrations of the area (i.e. Valdera). A small piece of land is offered by public bodies for starting first practice with 7 psychiatric services’ users.

Assisted therapeutic horticulture carried out during one year produces visible positive effects (both physical and psychical) on participants: enhanced self-esteem, autonomy, sense of responsibility; reduced addictions; improved sense of well-being. This is related to the special features of horticultural work that entails physical engagement, open-air activity, personal responsibility, relations with others, as well as with organisms and environment. The acknowledgement of the job done, received by educators and by “important” persons like administrators, creates also important motives of satisfaction.

As a next step, in the perspective of training and labour inclusion, participants are offered the opportunity of integration in some private (for profit) farms in the area. Through the intermediation of O. association, an agreement of “socio-therapeutic integration” is established between 2 farms and local socio-health bodies. This is a voluntary-based agreement: farmers do not receive any compensation nor give any compensation to practitioners. Beyond the personal attitudes, farmers agree on the proposal seeing in it an opportunity to receive possible support in labour, and/or for the wish to cooperate into a local initiative promoted by local institutions.



“Each development process that aims at enhancing health conditions of individuals and collectives cannot be regardless of cultural roots and traditions of their territory” (O. association)



Development of the project

A. C. – a young farmer who has inherited a traditional family farm of 18 hectares in a hilly area – is the main actor involved in this second stage of the initiative. The farm produces vegetables, “organic” certified. Participants join the farm 3 days a week, for a period of one year. At the end of the training period, two people leave, two are regularly employed in the farm, and the other three participants continue to join the farm as paid trainees (small grants paid by the province through the European Social Fund): in all, a very positive balance for participants, both in quantitative and qualitative terms (e.g. appreciation of the experience, personal benefits).

After some initial difficulties (e.g. how to find suitable jobs and tasks for each person), the experience produces a series of positive effects for the farm too. Disadvantaged persons show to be able to do many jobs and to bring actual contribution to production. The employment is facilitated by the law that allow enterprises for entering in subsidized contracts with disadvantaged persons. Beyond it, motives of personal satisfaction/enrichment are experienced by the farmer through this new social activity and engagement at territorial level.

The farming system/style is progressively transformed by the social initiative. Of particular relevance becomes the support of organised buying “solidarity” groups. The produce, previously sold to the gross market, is today completely sold to final consumers. Customers (e.g. families) organized in groups of purchase have increased from 10 to 500. They are mainly active/critical consumers of the town of Pisa, who have chosen to buy from C. farm, for the environmental and social features of its produce. They are now in constant touch with the farmer through e-mail, participating also in farming choices. While before the farm was producing only 3 kind of vegetables, today the produce is made by around 50 diverse kind of vegetables. The income has almost doubled.

“This social engagement has added further value to my work of farmer, I feel...”

“... when I tell my story outside, I see this adds value to the products as well”

(A. C., farmer)

Prospects

“It is clear that we are still at early stages...however, results encourage me to keep going on ...” – A. C. was commenting two years ago. Now he has recently won a national award for “ethical enterprises”. About the state of his farm he is now commenting: “It is running much better than before. In these areas agriculture was going to disappear. ..Today, my farm has become a sort of enlarged family. Consumers have supported the farm also in difficult moments, for example when the produce was limited. This way I could do investments that were unthinkable before..”. It is apparent how the social initiative have triggered a profound transformation of the farm, bringing to the creation of a new model of “community supported agriculture”.

Today other 2 farms of the area (involved in animal and wine production) have become actively engaged with social farming. In cooperation with these farms, a new training course in agriculture was promoted by O. association involving a new group of 9 psychiatric services’ users, and funded through the European Social Fund.

The experience of C. appears as an important model for the other farms as well. Having different features, the 3 farms can usefully play complementary roles and enrich the “social” offer for participants (e.g. integrating into different kind of activities). They are also reinforcing their cooperation in marketing initiatives (i.e. the supplying of families and groups of purchase). At present a project for supplying school canteens is at study, fostered by O. association together with public administrations; as well the organisation of periodic little fairs in the area.

Actually, the initiative created by O. association is prospecting new forms of territorial cooperation that promote health and well-being of citizens (i.e. the “pact for health”) but also agricultural/economic development. We may speak of new forms of integrated territorial welfare and/or social economy characterized by a close cooperation between public bodies, non for profit organisations, private businesses (i.e. farms), and civil society.

In this perspective, the initiative brought also to the juridical creation of a local “society of health” reuniting main actors involved, in order to work steadily in this direction.



***“My farm has become a sort of large family...”
(A. C. , farmer)***

***“Sense of community belonging is very strong in Valdera... stimulating people to devote resources and time to the others”
(G. T., local authority)***