

**Between agriculture and social
work, non for profit and
entrepreneurship**
*State of the art of “social farming”
in Italy*



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

Francesco Di Iacovo, Paolo Pieroni
5th april, 2006
University of Pisa
Viale delle Piagge, Pisa

francovo@vet.unipi.it
ppieroni@ agr.unipi.it

Table of contents

Abstract	p. 3
Players and the process of start (Brief historical excursus) (Starters' motivations) (Conditions for start) (Gender)	p. 3
Different kind of organisations and practices of social farming	p. 6
Features of diverse actors, dynamics of interaction and networking (Social cooperation) (Private farms)	p. 9
Economic dimension (Social cooperation) (Private farms)	p. 11
Policies and evolution of social farming (Evolution of social cooperation and social sector policies) (Evolution of "social farms" and agricultural sector policies) (Relations with agro-environmental and landscape dimensions) (benefits for society)	p. 13
Conclusions: prospects	p. 16

Between agriculture and social work, non for profit and entrepreneurship

State of the art of “social farming” in Italy

Francesco Di Iacovo, Paolo Pieroni

Abstract

The term “agricoltura sociale” (i.e. social farming) has recently entered the scene of rural development in Italy, embracing a wide constellation of different practices that are emerging in our territories; experiences that, in many cases, were born as bottom-up actions and have “grown in the shade” for long time. In synthesis, practices of social farming may be divided in the following main categories: (1) care and socio-rehabilitative integration (“occupational therapy”); (2) training and labour integration (i.e. employment) of disadvantaged categories; (3) socio-recreation and/or education of people with special needs.

Initiatives are mainly carried out by two kind of actors: (1) “non for profit” enterprises (i.e. social cooperatives) that operate in social/care sector or promote business with a specific purpose of integrating disadvantaged categories in labour; (2) private farms, that are “for profit” enterprises in the agricultural sector. Public institutions play then important roles, according to a logic of decentralised, community-based model of “welfare-mix” (i.e. public-private integration). Finally, voluntary-based associations of diverse nature play relevant complementary roles as triggers and/or for intermediation and support, working in liaison with enterprises, public bodies, persons with special needs, and the wider community.

Players and the process of start

(Brief historical excursus)

In order to comprehend motivations of social farming players, it seems important to provide a brief historical excursus of social farming practices in Italy.

The first experiences of social farming, and/or more in general of “social cooperation”, can be situated at the beginning of the 70s. In those years a crescent gap between people needs and the capacity of the State to provide services became apparent. This has brought to the spontaneous creation of new forms of civil society’s organisation and bottom-up social/care practices. In many cases, countryside and agriculture became also spaces of social and labour inclusion for people with different kind of disabilities and/or risking marginalization. Many initiatives are rooted in traditions of voluntarism and solidarity, inspired mainly by Christianity and/or Socialism; many of them have communitarian features and/or are based on concepts of mutuality. However, starting from the 70s and 80s, non confessional experiences, started by professional social/care operators and/or inspired by an entrepreneurial logic have become increasingly important. In 1978 the centralised national health system was reformed through the creation of (public) locally-based services. Particularly, the field of psychiatry and mental health/care was reorganised, bringing to the closedown of traditional institutes (so-called “mad-houses”) and to the creation of new spread services for prevention, care and rehabilitation at local level (e.g. daily centres). Within this framework, diverse initiatives of agriculture and gardening were started in almost all regions.

Starting from the 90s juridical reforms have been progressively introduced, transforming the traditional welfare state into a “welfare-mix” system. This one is inspired by a principle of cooperation between public and private actors – particularly so-called “social-private” ones (“non for profit” enterprises, part of so-called “third sector” i.e. “social cooperatives”) – further than by a principle of decentralisation (i.e. community-territory based system). Thus, juridical reforms of welfare have regulated private-based solidarity initiatives that were already pre-existing; however the new juridical framework (e.g. the law on social cooperation of

1991) has also contributed to reinforce, promote and regulate these new forms of “social entrepreneurship” operating in the field of care and/or promoting labour integration of disadvantaged categories - a number of which dealing with agriculture. During the last years, an increasing attention on potential development of social farming has emerged in the agricultural sector, viewed as a possible means to broaden the scope of rural development and to promote new possibilities for multifunctional agriculture. New recent attention on agriculture as a tool for therapy and social integration has come up also within professionals’ and/or research communities in the fields of health and education (e.g. alternative medical and care practices, as horticultural therapy and pet therapy).

(Starters’ motivations)

It is apparent how players’ motivations and the process of start are closely dependent on the historical context in which the initiatives were started. Actually, today we find initiatives which were born in different times - more than 30 years ago or very recently. The geographical context (and so the specific regional/local socio-cultural, economic, institutional background) might be also considered as a relevant factor affecting actors’ perspectives/motivations and the process of start. However, in overall general terms, we can sum-up starters’ motivations in the following items:

- The need or wish to respond to needs of special disadvantaged groups (e.g. initiatives started by familiars of disadvantaged persons);
- The wish to pursue goals of social justice and solidarity (putting personal values and beliefs into practice) as part of personal/family/community life-style choice (e.g. initiatives strongly based on ideal / ideological values);
- The wish to carry out (alternative) professional practice in this field (e.g. initiatives started by professional operators of social/care/educational sectors);
- The opportunity to have new possible incomes/advantages and/or the wish to opening-up to local community (e.g. initiatives started by agricultural businesses)

These diverse motivations may be also coexisting.

It seems important to remark that almost all initiatives, with different nuances, express a kind of social solidarity choice (e.g. the wish to help people). The driving forces at the base of the phenomenon of private solidarity-based initiatives and of the evolution of third sector in Italy were discussed in several studies (Iommi, 2005; Zamaro, 2002). While initial researches have mainly explained the phenomenon ascribing it to economic/financial dimensions (e.g. the need of reduction of public expense and to introduce a private-oriented welfare system), new sociological approaches have emphasized the importance of players’ motivations and values. In this perspective, private solidarity-based initiatives may be viewed as the expression of new forms of social identities and participation, beyond the traditional ones (e.g. political parties, syndicates, religious communities). This interpretation gives more room to pro-active, self-aware character of social players. For sure, the observed cases of social farming in Tuscany and Italy do confirm the relevant role of starters’ motivations, attitudes and values - “knowledge systems”. Motives of personal satisfaction in terms of quality of life are also expressed by operators (e.g. personal enrichment, human relations, social/community life, “human” dimension in organisation and work, relation with nature); these aspects are also likely to be part of motivations.

Agriculture, or “rurality” in wider sense, are sometimes pre-existing the start (e.g. already existing farms or farming traditions); sometimes they are fruit of a deliberated choice (e.g. moving from urban to rural setting and/or life-style); in other cases circumstances seem to play also a relevant role (e.g. the availability of a piece of land or other resources, the characteristics of the environment/context, or other aspects related to personal biographies).

In most of the cases, we may say that agriculture and “rurality” are seen by starters as especially vocated for social purposes: features of work, (physical) environment, social organisation are viewed as especially suited in order to favour rehabilitation and labour integration of persons with special needs. However, some

interviewees (e.g. educators or social operators) express diverse opinions about it, seeing other productive and/or creative activities suited as well for rehabilitative purposes - as agriculture or even more in some cases.

(Conditions for start)

It is apparent how conditions for the starting-up of initiatives have profoundly changed through the last decades. The initiatives that have started in the 70s and in the 80s were strongly pioneering. These ones were based on complete self-organization and bottom-up action, not being present any institutional framework for social/care private initiatives at that time. Moreover, the spontaneous, innovative and/or radical features of these initiatives (e.g. the involvement of marginalized groups) were often perceived as negative by institutions and/or by local communities, producing even hostility in some cases. The described evolution (e.g. juridical reform of welfare state during the 90s) has produced a profoundly different scenario. Thus, the starting up of initiatives in the social sector (e.g. social cooperatives running agriculture) can be based today on a clear regulatory framework as well as on a structured and consolidated system; in this sense we may speak of usual procedures. Social policies have provided also specific measures for the promotion of new initiatives (e.g. support to social cooperatives for initial investments), though the sector is still facing the need of reduction of public expense. Social cooperatives that operate in agricultural sector (i.e. registered also as “agricultural enterprises”) can also access to subsidies that are commonly provided for farms through agricultural policies. The general societal perception on issues of disabilities and social integration has profoundly changed also, in favour of a widespread enhanced sensitivity. In some cases private sponsors (e.g. banks’ foundations) can support the start-up of new initiatives too (however these are not common practices).

The scenario looks different for social farming initiatives on private (“for profit”) farms. A specific regulatory framework for this kind of practices hasn’t being created yet. Thus, the start-up of new initiatives cannot follow usual procedures, and this, of course, represents a difficulty: relevant efforts and time are needed to create linkages and schemes of cooperation among diverse actors (e.g. farmers, public bodies, third sector’s organisations). However, the absence of such a standardized framework is viewed by some actors as a positive aspect too (e.g. vis a vis negative effects of routines). Therefore, in these cases initiatives start-up in diverse, original ways, according to context and actors: diverse forms of agreement/cooperation are created among private and public actors. In these kind of partnership farms usually do not receive any direct monetary compensation. So, personal attitudes and value-systems have main importance as initial driving forces. However, in general terms, we may say that attitudes and perspectives of farmers have changed profoundly in the last decades, having become open to the wider community and active players in the local system, as well as used to new concepts of multifunctional agricultural and sustainable development (e.g. successful experiences of agro-tourism, didactic farms, integrated work for local development, promotion of organic, quality, typical food, etc.). The topic of social farming is today entering the agenda of agricultural policies. Some regions have recently introduced some specific measures in rural development plans addressed to social farming; these ones should support future investments.

As a general feature, all interviewees have remarked the lack of specific knowledge as a relevant difficulty experimented in the starting process, either in agriculture (e.g. initiatives started within the social sector) or in socio-therapeutic aspects (e.g. initiatives started within the agricultural sector).

(Gender)

“If we should draw a profile of who is working today in social cooperation no doubt that the main features are: woman, young and qualified” (Tuscany regional administrator – social sector). A peculiar trait of social cooperatives in Italy is their capacity to absorb female labour, being women traditionally more present in the fields of social/care and education. The percentage of women among the total number of

operators in Italian social cooperation is about 70 % (Istat, 2006)¹, especially concentrated in the cooperatives of social/care and educational services (“A” kind). “Part-time” is the typology of contract in which the percentage of women is higher; however high percentages can be found also in the case of full-time personnel. So, we can affirm that social cooperation have created important opportunities of employment for groups of population traditionally weaker in the labour market, as women – particularly the young ones. This general statement on social cooperation may be considered valid also for those specific cases that deal with agriculture.

As mentioned, many initiatives of social farming (carried out both by social cooperatives or private farms) are based on family or community organisation. These forms of social organisation appear to be particularly suited to create inclusion of disadvantaged persons. It is also apparent how gender aspects play important roles in these cases (e.g. specific and/or complementary roles and interplay of women and men within the family or community) affecting practices of labour, welcoming and social integration.

For what concerns the involved disadvantaged persons, according to some interviewees, agriculture would be preferred by (and/or be more suited for) men rather than women. However, there are not sufficient evidences to make some generalizations.

Different kind of organisations and practices of social farming

Social farming practices in Italy are mainly implemented by 2 kind of actors:

- “non for profit” enterprises (i.e. social cooperatives), that are part of so called “third sector” (that cannot be ascribed either to public nor to private sector: in intermediate position between the two)
- private farms, that are “for profit” enterprises

Public institutions (i.e. local socio-health companies – “ASL²” - and local administrations) are then involved as owners of public social/health services. Public bodies usually cooperate with the above mentioned actors to provide services (i.e. afore mentioned logic of “welfare mix”); however, in some cases they can run initiatives directly too, through public structures and personnel (e.g. initiatives started within hospitals, schools, prisons or else). A complementary special role is often played by associations (e.g. intermediation between disadvantaged persons, enterprises and public sector, and/or direct support); associations are based on voluntarism and can reunite family members, diverse kind of professionals, supporters or other stakeholders.

Practices of social farming may be divided into the following categories: (1) care; (2) socio-therapeutic integration; (3) training; (4) labour integration; (5) socio-recreation and (6) education.

- (1) “Care” is usually an assisted activity that can be offered by public structures (e.g. health institutes) or by a special kind of social cooperatives (“A” kind)³. The latter (usually formed by social operators and educators) enter in contracts with public services receiving daily (or day + night) fees for assisted person. Fees vary for category⁴. Participants are therefore public services’ users, but can also be members of the cooperative as well. The cooperative is a (care) services’ provider, that in some cases can run a farm as well or can cooperate with third farms. Farming is usually practiced with a therapeutic meaning.
- (2) “Socio-therapeutic integration” is inspired by a similar concept (e.g. “occupational therapy”). It is established through an agreement between local social/health public services and diverse kind of enterprises (for profit or non). Particularly a second kind of social cooperative (“B” kind)², that has a

¹ Istat is the National Institute of Statistics. These data are referred to 31/12/2003

² ASL: Azienda Sanitaria Locale (i.e. Local Health Company)

³ See more detailed description about it in the next chapter, i.e. “features of diverse actors...”

⁴ Being welfare system decentralised, fees vary from area to area (regional and local levels). As a reference we may indicate a range of 30-70 € per person/day

specific mission of labour integration of disadvantaged categories, is active in this area; private farms can also practice it. In this case disadvantaged persons are integrated in work as volunteers; as well, integration is offered for free - it is not a paid service. Disadvantaged persons can receive pocket-money (e.g. 200 € per month) by public services.

- (3) “Training” is oriented towards the employment of disadvantaged categories in the labour market. Training programmes are usually funded on project basis by local administrations, through the European Social Fund (ESF). Projects can be run by accredited bodies (e.g. can be the same social cooperatives in many cases) and/or can involve different kind of farms (for profit or non for profit businesses). Funds can support teaching activities (that can include also on-farm practical activities) and traineeships. The latter are formally agreed by local administrations and enterprises. Traineeship have a limited duration (max. 2 years for disadvantaged persons) and cannot be renewed; in some cases trainees may benefit of grants (e.g. around 400 € per month); enterprises do not receive any direct compensation.
- (4) “Labour integration” is the employment of disadvantaged categories. (For or non for) profit enterprises can enter into a special (subsidized) contract with disadvantaged persons. Particularly “B” kind social cooperatives (having a specific goal of labour integration) have the obligation to include at least 30% of disadvantaged persons among employers. Vice versa, “B” social cooperatives can benefit from tax relief and find favour with public institutions in competitive tenders (e.g. placing of contracts for the maintenance of public parks and gardens and for other services); the law provides also for the creation of systems of agreements to be offered jobs by private enterprises. In this case, therefore, disadvantaged persons are regularly employed; in the case of social cooperatives they can be also members of the organisation as well.
- (5) “Socio-recreation” comprehend activities aimed at favouring quality of life, and/or at producing personal / social enhancement, with a focus on persons with special needs (disabled persons, children, families, elderly people). In this category we can include different cases:
 - a. Special forms of “social” agro-tourism or on-farm pedagogical activities that are more or less targeted to special groups and/or integrated with similar activities addressed to all citizens (e.g. agro-tourism, school-visits); usually these activities are paid directly by users;
 - b. Special initiatives promoted by local administrations, like “social (periurban) gardens” for elderly people; these ones are generally run on voluntary-basis and based on self-organisation;
- (6) “Education” comprehend activities similar to agricultural training that however are addressed to minors with special difficulties (in families, at schools, or with justice). These activities can be integrated with practices of foster care. They are usually regulated through agreements with public bodies (e.g. tribunals, schools), and can be both paid services (e.g. activities run by “A” social coop and paid through fees by the Institutes) or voluntary based (e.g. in similar way to “socio-therapeutic integration”).

Social farming practices may interest persons with diverse kind of disabilities. In practice all kind of disadvantaged categories are represented in the cases observed (Annex I and II). It is apparent how care services are mostly addressed to persons with more intense disabilities, whereas labour integration usually occur for persons with a relative high level of autonomy (e.g. ex-offenders/convicts and ex-addicts that have completed rehabilitation programmes, persons with lighter physical or psychical handicaps).

In synthesis, main kind of “social farming” experiences (i.e. combination of actors and practices described above) can be sum up as in table 1.

Table 1: Main kind of social farming experiences in Italy

Kind of organisation / farm	Kind of activities	Position of organisation/farm	Position of disadvantaged persons
“A” social cooperatives (non for profit enterprises)	care farming, education	providing care services’ or education; care is paid by social/health public bodies (daily fees); education can be paid by diverse institutes; obligation: no profit	public services’ users; can be also members of the cooperatives
“B” social cooperatives (non for profit enterprises)	labour integration; socio-therapeutic integration; training; socio-recreation	doing business in agriculture (and other sectors) as a means of social inclusion; opportunities: subsidized contracts, tax relief, systems of agreements for adjudication of jobs; obligations: no profit, minimum 30% of employed disadvantaged persons	can be regularly employed, trainees or volunteers; can be also members of the cooperatives. In case of socio-recreation can be paying users/participants
Private farms (for profit enterprises)	training; socio-therapeutic integration; labour integration; socio-recreation	doing business in agriculture for profit; opportunities: human resource for labour, subsidized contracts, (other indirect advantages).	can be trainees, volunteers or regularly employed. In case of socio-recreation can be paying participants/users
Public Institutes	care farming; socio-therapeutic integration; training	providing care, education, rehabilitation; being involved in research or other activities in the fields of agriculture and/or social/care	can be users, be engaged in rehabilitative, research or educational programmes, volunteers, trainees or else.

(Benefits for participants/users and operators)

All interviewees remark numerous positive effects on participants/users. Particularly:

- Physical effects:
 - Recovery/development of skills;
 - Improvement / physical health;
 - Employment;
- Mental health effects:
 - Self-awareness
 - Enhancement of personal responsibility;
 - Enhancement of well being;
- Social effects:
 - Capacity of social interaction;
 - In-group work;
 - Working habit, discipline;

- Community effects: enhancement of social relations within the local community.

In many cases, these positive effects are witnessed by the end of hospitalization of users (i.e. psychiatric patients) and/or by the recovery of other personal activities.

Operators also witness many positive effects at personal and at family/community levels (in those initiatives run on this basis). Particularly:

- Sense of personal satisfaction for being socially engaged and/or for promoting social change through the own work;
- Positive atmosphere in labour environment, enhanced human relations and quality of life/well-being
- Enhanced social relations and reputation within the wider local community

Features of diverse actors, dynamics of interaction and networking

Below we offer more detailed description of the main actors who are promoting social farming in Italy - their distinctive features, sectorial backgrounds, perspectives and interplay. Particularly we refer to: (a) “social cooperation” and social/care sector on one hand; (b) private farms and agricultural sector on the other one. These actors belong to 2 different worlds (i.e. different backgrounds, institutions, policies) that however are merged to a certain extent and/or are likely to enhance their interaction progressively, in the perspective of development of social farming.

(Social Cooperation)

Italy has long term history in cooperation (i.e. workers’ cooperatives inspired by socialist or Christian traditions) – particularly some regions of central-northern Italy. However, so-called “social cooperation” is a relative new phenomenon created with a national law in 1991 (L. 381/91). As already mentioned the law has intervened to regulate spontaneous self-organisation processes started by civil society aimed at providing new forms of social inclusion and care. The law has created 2 diverse kind of “social cooperatives”: “A” kind, that can provide care and educational services (e.g. home care, management of daily centres, residential shelters, or kindergartens); “B” kind, that can operate in all sectors of business (agriculture, industry, commerce and services) with the purpose to integrate disadvantaged persons in labour. Both have the obligation of no profit, though being inspired by a logic of entrepreneurship (e.g. they can do relevant economic activity), which distinguish them from other organizations of the third sector (e.g. associations). In this sense, they are often named also as “social-private” sector or may be seen as “hybrid bodies”, in which private needs (e.g. personal employment and income of promoters) and collective goals are joint together. Therefore, we may say that social cooperation extend the principle of solidarity, typical of all cooperatives, to the outside, including also groups with special needs as members – “from internal to external mutuality” (Iommi, 2005). Social cooperation represents today a mature phenomenon in terms of quantitative and qualitative growth, and in terms of consolidated/institutionalised practices – a basic pillar of Italian welfare (-mix) system (Iommi, 2005). Some basic figures are shown in table 2.

Table 2 - Basic figures of Social Cooperation in Italy and Tuscany⁵

	Total number	Social/Care and educational services (A kind)	Labour integration in all kind of business (B kind)	Mixed (A + B)	Consortia	Territorial density (A + B coops each 10.000 inhabitants)
Social cooperatives active in Italy	6.159	3.707 (60,2 %)	1.979 (32,1 %)	249 (4 %)	224 (3,6 %)	
Social cooperatives in Tuscany	402	221 (~ 60 %)	160		21	10,7

⁵ National data are taken by Istat (2006), and referred to 31/12/2003, whereas the Tuscan ones are taken by Iommi, 2005.

It seems important to remark that social cooperatives are not specific of agricultural sector or rural areas, but operate in all contexts and fields. They are regulated through social/welfare policies, and usually cooperate closely with local social/health services and/or administrations at local level (e.g. stipulating contracts/agreements). However social cooperatives provided with land and farming it, can be also acknowledged as farms (i.e. double registration), thus being also regulated by agricultural policies. No specific distinction has been made for this kind of “social cooperative farms” by agricultural policies so far. According to the archives of social cooperatives’ federations, in Tuscany there were 8 social coops for labour integration (“B” kind) working in agriculture in 2004, corresponding to the 6,5% of all “B” coops in the region. However an other 20% has a transversal activity, often working in agriculture and in other sectors at the same time (e.g. handicrafts) (Iommi, 2005). Besides, many “B” social cooperatives work in maintaining the environment or public gardens and parks, so they are not registered in agricultural sector (i.e. as farms) but as services’ providers. In the case of care services’ cooperatives (A kind) that practice agriculture, the farm is usually a juridical distinct entity.

Social cooperatives may vary a lot in size – from very small (e.g. family-based organisation) to very large ones (hundreds of members). This is related to different model of organizations underpinning different visions (small or large scale oriented), and also to entrepreneurial capacity of development. In many cases they have communitarian features, offering also opportunities of permanent stay or life in common. The staff can be formed by professional operators in the field of social/care and education (this generally occurs in the ones providing care services – kind A – but not in all cases) and/or (usually in lower degree) by persons with agricultural background or with no specific qualifications. Members can include: ordinary workers, disadvantaged workers, volunteers, and users. Particularly, as mentioned, disadvantaged workers must be at least the 30% in “B” cooperatives, whereas volunteers cannot exceed the 50 %.

In many cases the 2 kind of cooperatives work in partnership, playing complementary roles; in this perspective, social cooperatives for labour integration (“B” kind) are often started from pre-existing care services’ social cooperatives (“A” kind). This way, users of care-services are also offered opportunities of labour integration (e.g. finding a job once finished a therapeutic programme). The law allows also for the creation of cooperatives with a double nature (“A” + “B”) and of consortia of cooperatives. Consortia are mainly intended to create processes of aggregation and so to facilitate negotiation to enter contracts or agreements with local public bodies. As mentioned, these ones have a different nature in the case of the 2 kind of organisation: (1) contracts and agreements for care services (i.e. payment of fees) – “A” cooperatives; (2) agreements or contracts for other kind of services (e.g. maintenance of environment, public gardens, etc.) as opportunities to create labour integration – “B” coops.

Strong cooperative relations between social coops and public bodies, as well as with other third sector organisations (e.g. voluntary-based associations) are typical features. In many cases social cooperatives are originated by associations, in order to start more structured social entrepreneurial activities and/or vice versa - associations are created to broaden the scope of activities and/or participants from pre-existing social entrepreneurial initiatives. Therefore, social cooperatives have usually strong interaction with local society. Particularly, most of the social (cooperative) farms have started opening-up their experience to the outside wider community in the last years, through diverse ways: direct selling (farm shops, supplying of consumers’ groups or small retailers), school visits, agro-tourism, and diverse forms of educational, socio-recreational initiatives. These practices have become common among all kind of farms in the last years. However in these cases, they have additional special “social” meanings – both on the side of the farm (e.g. reinforcing social inclusion of disadvantaged persons, developing new opportunities for the social enterprise), and on the side of citizens too (e.g. enhancing social participation, practicing new forms of solidarity).

An ideal-type of “social farm” is described by Senni (2005) through the following features:

- High level of diversification (of products and services);
- Organic or environmental-friendly farming;
- Labour intensive;
- Openness to the outside (i.e. citizens, local community);
- Direct selling and/or community supported agriculture (e.g. solidarity groups of purchase).

These features are recurring in many of the cases described (annex I).

Social cooperation has diverse sectorial organisations that are represented at local, regional and national level (e.g. Legacoop, Confcooperative). The reference policy sector is social/welfare, that however, for what concerns care, is closely integrated with health (e.g. local health companies – ASL- manage both health and social services). Social cooperatives that operate in farming and are registered as farms/agricultural enterprise (i.e. double registration) do refer to the agricultural sector too.

(Private farms - for profit enterprises)

While social/care services and labour integration are specific goals and usual practices for social cooperatives, this is not the same for private agricultural businesses. As mentioned, there are not standardized procedures or univocal reference frameworks yet. Therefore, social/care practices in more “ordinary” farms still are rather heterogeneous, or pioneering experiences. Private farms are usually not accredited to offer care services, whereas they can be involved into training programmes (i.e. traineeships), agreements for socio-therapeutic integration and in the employment of disadvantaged categories. These activities are usually carried out in cooperation with public bodies (i.e. local administrations, public socio-health services) and/or with third actors (e.g. third sector organisations). They usually do not provide for any monetary compensation to the farmers. Beyond personal motivations (e.g. wish to help others), these practices may be appealing to farmers for: a) meeting needs for supplementary labour resources – particularly, traineeships are not paid by farms, and labour integration occurs through subsidized contracts; b) reinforcing linkages with public institutions and local community.

The cases we observed comprehend 2 distinct realities:

- Farmers’ cooperatives which are animated by strong mutuality and/or based on community life. In a way they are very similar to social cooperatives though different in juridical terms (farmers’ cooperatives are inspired/regulated by a principle of “internal mutuality” - not external as for social cooperation - therefore they are not included in “third sector”/non for profit organizations). These are cases of rather strong/consolidated enterprises (doing relevant economic activity) that have, in practice, also adopted a philosophy of external mutuality, absorbing many disadvantaged persons as trainees, volunteers and workers. In this way they have established sound links with local public services and administrations as well as with the whole community.
- Ordinary farms (i.e. run by families or professional operators) which have recently started to cooperate into social/care farming initiatives promoted by public bodies and third sector organisations. In these cases also strong linkages and strategies of cooperation are created inside the local community, involving farms actively. In some of these cases, we may speak of a transformation of the farming system/style according to a “social farming” fashion (e.g. shift to labour intensive produce, new forms of “community supported agriculture”).

As mentioned, an increasing attention on social farming is emerging in the agricultural sector at all levels. Particularly, during the last years, some public institutions have started exploring the field through actions of research, networking, training and promotion (e.g. Pisa and Viterbo University faculties of agriculture, Tuscany regional agricultural agency- ARSIA-, among others.). Agricultural organisations at regional and national levels have become involved on the topic as well. Particularly sensitive are some relatively minor organizations connected to organic farming – AIAB, ACLI Terra, ALPA - who have started to promote new specific concepts and networks (e.g. “social bio-farms”). A distinct network has been launched from a group of stakeholders in Latium region to all the country (“network of social farms”). The topic has started to be introduced in articles of agricultural magazines but also through journals and media addressed to wider public. It is apparent that we are in a phase of crescent ferment around the topic which is bringing to the rising of few initiatives from different sides, with a spontaneous and sometimes redundant dynamics. However these ones are giving evidence to the phenomenon reaching new subjects; as well they create new opportunities of exchange and confrontation among diverse experiences and sectors.

Economic dimension

(Social cooperation)

As explained, social cooperatives, though having the obligation of no profit, do operate with an entrepreneurial structure/organisation in steady way, producing relevant results in terms of economy and employment in the territories in which they are active. In this sense, social cooperation may be viewed as the most structured segment of “third sector”. This is reflected in the predominance of paid personnel, and in the higher yearly turnover per person (compared to other third sector organisations, e.g. associations). These results are mainly produced thanks to contracts entered with public institutions (56,5 %) and secondarily by the selling of goods and services (26,5 %.)

Tab. 3- Employment and economic results of social cooperation in Italy and Tuscany (general values, non specific of agricultural initiatives)⁶

	Italy	Tuscany
Total workers	190.000 (employed: 161.000; contracts of collaboration: 28.000; non paid: 32.000 [volunteers: 28.000; conscientious objector: 4.000])	15.000 (paid workers; 9 % of total employment in the region)
Staff of social cooperatives (average value) -	28 paid workers, 4 volunteers	36 paid workers, 3 volunteers
Total economic yearly turnover	4,5 billions €	217 millions €
Economic yearly turnover (average value per s. coop)	720.000 €	847.000 €

In terms of employment and economic results, social cooperatives that provide social/care services (A kind) are usually stronger than s. cooperatives for labour integration (B kind). In Tuscany, the former produce the 80% of the overall yearly turnover of social cooperation. The gap between the 2 kinds of social cooperatives is evident in figures of table 4.

Tab. 4 - Economic results of the 2 different kind of s. cooperatives in Italy and Tuscany (general values, non specific of agricultural initiatives)

	Social/care services (A kind), Italy	Social/care services (A kind), Tuscany	Labour integration (B kind), Italy	Labour integration (B kind), Tuscany
Average yearly turnover per enterprise	770.000	800.000 €	473.000	335.000 €
Average yearly turnover per worker		16.000 €		13.500 €
Average social capital per enterprise		53.000 €		20.000 €

A similar trend is common in all regions. It is important to remark again that “A” cooperatives usually receive daily attendance fees per user, whereas the entries for “B” cooperatives are represented only by goods and services sold. Besides the average values above-reported do not give an appropriate representation of actual situation: in practice we observe a restricted number of very large cooperatives (with relevant economic turnover and number of employers) and numerous small or very small ones. The latter can be characterized by evident “diseconomies”. Therefore, particularly in the sector of social/care services, we assist to a process of concentration. However, economic growth can produce two different patterns of development, that reflect also two different kind of “philosophies” and cultural backgrounds: a) dimensional growth of the organisation (this is more frequent for a-confessional cooperatives that see scale enlargement as a positive factor in order to reinforce organisation and professional quality of services); b) creation of spin-offs, i.e. new organisations (more frequent among Christian inspired initiatives that usually see small

⁶ National data are taken by Istat (2006), and referred to 31/12/2003, whereas the Tuscan ones are taken by Iommi, 2005. The same is for table 5.

scale as more appropriate for purposes of care and social inclusion; however these smaller cooperatives are usually supported by federations or consortia in organisational and administrative aspects).

According to the National Institute of Statistics (Iommi, 2005), in 2001 there were 444 persons employed by social cooperatives and working in the agricultural sector in Tuscany⁷.

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 (“A” kind) the agricultural component is usually secondary in economic terms - it is often hardly all square and/or agriculture is compensated/supported by the entries from social/care services. Being agriculture in these cases a secondary business, it can be difficult for these farms to access to subsidies provided by agricultural policies. For these reasons (and for other ones as well) there can be often a juridical separation between the farm and the care services’ social cooperative.

Cooperatives for labour integration (“B” kind) can be either very small and with difficult economic conditions or rather 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, we see that current scenario (e.g. increased interest for countryside, new sensitivity for environmental and social values orienting consumption) is offering new opportunities to social farms. Some are exploiting at their best this potential developing relevant business and “social” economies (see Annex II). In this sense, of particular importance appears the emergence of new forms of marketing in which the “social” factor adds value to food produce.

As already mentioned, there are also many “B” cooperatives that work in gardening and/or in environmental services. These activities do not need any land, have limited initial costs, and do not require highly specialised know-how (compared to farming). Moreover, as explained, social cooperatives can enter agreements with public institutions and private enterprises that facilitate them to obtain jobs. Therefore, it is much easier to start business (and thus creating opportunities for labour integration) through this way, rather than by installing a farm.

(Private farms)

As explained, private (social) farms do not usually have any direct compensation for “social” activities. In these cases agricultural business is usually more consolidated (compared to social cooperatives). Disadvantaged persons (people that usually have less intense disabilities) can provide a certain support in labour. In these cases the cost of labour is reduced (voluntary-based job, subsidized contracts for employment), providing some economic advantages for the farms.

The availability of additional labour force can produce changes in the farming system (e.g. allow the introduction of more labour-intensive and/or different activities). The “social” component can create relevant changes on the side of marketing also. New patterns of retailing are created: the local community supports the farm through the buying of its “social” food (e.g. purchase by families and organised groups of consumers, direct selling, supplying of school canteens, creation of local little markets). In some cases this brings to a profound restructuring of the farming system (e.g. organisation) and/or style (e.g. socio-cultural, identity perspective), resulting also in relevant economic results (see the case of Colombini’s farm, annex II).

Therefore, in these cases what seems relevant is also the territorial dynamics triggered by the social initiative: enhancement of social networks and social participation, new collective multi-actor actions that can produce relevant effects on the economies of farms and territories. A new concept of “corporate social responsibility” in agriculture is prospected also. According to this concept - usually been applied to large-scale enterprises and in other sectors so far – enterprises would follow a different rationale: their goal would not be that of an immediate profit, but rather of (long-term) strategic positioning in the working context (e.g.

⁷ No more recent data or referred to all the country was found available.

improving internal and external relations). In this perspective, ethical behaviours requiring extra-costs would serve the enhancement of enterprise's reputation in front of investors and consumers, that, in turn, would result in economic benefits for the business in the long term. As described in annex II, Colombini's farm was recently awarded in a national competition inspired by this concept (i.e. "corporate social responsibility"). The National Institute for Agriculture Economics (INEA) is working at present to create guidelines for applying principles of "corporate social responsibility" in agriculture.

Policies and evolution of social farming

At present, concepts and practices of "social/care farming" are not defined by any specific national regulations. The lack of scientific evidences of therapeutic effects of agriculture makes care farming accepted with difficulty within the conventional health system, though some regions have recently acknowledged/included new practises within their protocols (e.g. "pet therapy" addressed to some specific targets). The emerging interest on the topic is likely to produce changes for the next future.

Actually, as explained, social farming practices are regulated by/inscribed into broader policies of social and agricultural sectors mainly. Below we describe the evolution of these sectorial policies and their effects on social farming practices.

(Evolution of social cooperation and social sector policies)

The institution of "social cooperation" (L. 381 of 1991) has brought to a relevant quantitative growth of these special forms of enterprises and social/care practices during the 90s – particularly of "A" kind coops that are active in the field of social/care and educational services. This had influence on qualitative features as well, e.g. competences of operators, organisational patterns of services and production, modalities of relation with public bodies. The evolution was different from region to region, according to the backgrounds and different ways of application of the legislation at regional scale. Thus, a series of further, diverse juridical norms and reforms were introduced in relation with social cooperation and the management of health, social/care and educational sectors at regional level, producing the transformation of traditional welfare into what is now called as "welfare mix" model. The phenomenon have developed initially more in the regions of northern and central Italy, while during the last years there was a relevant growth in southern regions (this can be explained with the achievement of a phase of maturity for the former). In all, during the years 2001-2003⁸ there was an increase of 11,7 %, bringing to the total number of 6.159 social cooperatives at national level. Tuscany may be seen as one of the regions that has particularly aimed at promoting sound practices of consultation / integration between public sector and "social-private" organisations.

Current welfare model may be seen as based on principles of "subsidiarity" (the State operates through social enterprises – i.e. social cooperatives - which are closer to final users) and "quasi-market" (procedures of public selection of social enterprises operating in the fields of health, social/care and education). Thus, on one hand there is a framework of rules (e.g. minimum standards, features of operators) given by the public "purchaser", on the other one there is a mechanism of competition among (social) enterprises. This policy framework has produced entrepreneurship dynamics in the third sector (e.g. mentioned processes of specialisation, enhancement of quality of operators, organisation and performance of services), new public-private contractual practices, and new perspectives of "participatory" territorial governance.

This model, though having had the need of periodic adaptations / reforms, has proved to be successful so far, enhancing "economic and social efficacy" (Iommi, 2005). Last evolutions are promoting social cooperatives' participation in public planning (i.e. from the implementation of services to the planning of social/health programmes together with local public bodies). In this perspective, strategies of aggregation (e.g. consortia) and coordination among actors are becoming increasingly important, also because of an enhanced competitiveness. Current challenges are mainly related to the need of maintaining economic sustainability together with high quality of the system (e.g. maintaining adequate margins of income for the enterprises so that they can do future investments); this is closely connected to a crescent gap between the need to reduce public expense vis-à-vis an increasing demand for social/care and educational services. In this

⁸ These are the last data available by the National Institute of Statistics, Istat.

perspective, a new system of “accreditation” (similar to what already existing in other countries) is a possible prospect. This model is already under discussion and experimentation in some regions at local level. This system would open-up the “market” (i.e. demand and offer) of social/care and educational services. An enlarged public of users would be able to afford “purchase bonds” for services, that would be offered by “accredited” structures, both for profit or non. In this framework the role of the State would be mainly that of establishing criteria, systems of information and monitoring.

(Evolution of “social farms” and agricultural sector policies)

As known, agricultural sector (e.g. policies) and rural areas have profoundly changed during the last decades. A “post-productivist” paradigm has largely become affirmed. In this perspective, farms have opened-up to citizens, changing their nature of food producers and their identities of farmers. “Multifunctionality” is a well-known, established concept among policy-makers and practitioners. In Italy, such a concept was mostly developed along the trajectories of food (e.g. typical/traditional, quality food) and environment (e.g. organic farming, landscape conservation), fostered by the advent of new forms of consumption of countryside (e.g. rural/agro tourism). Together with these processes, a renewal of rural actors and communities in rural areas have largely occurred, producing wide heterogeneity in society, entailing positive and negative effects.

During the last years, the need to broaden the scope of rural development to include social dimensions have started to be debated (Di Iacovo, 2003; Huylenbroek van and Durand, 2003). On one hand, social dimensions are related to a series of (under-expressed, scarcely visible) needs of rural populations and/or to emerging contradictions clashing with the positive image of “renaissance of countryside” (e.g. successful experiences of agro-tourism, typical food, etc.). On the other one, the “social” appears as a new opportunity for rural actors to create/offer specific identities vis-à-vis urban areas – a new possible frontier for countryside development and multifunctional agriculture. In this framework, a new concept of “social farming” (i.e. “agricoltura sociale”) is emerging, being promoted by different sides. According to Senni (2005), we can speak of “social farming” in all those cases in which agriculture is practiced in order to pursue social purposes deliberately. In this sense, we may say that the concept of “social farm” doesn’t have any reference to the juridical nature of the farm but only to purposes and kind of agricultural practices, and thus it can comprehend all typologies mentioned – non for profit enterprises, i.e. social cooperatives, for profit farms, public structures. As Senni says, “social farms” may be viewed as one further specific evolution of multifunctional farms – besides the models of agro-tourism and didactic farms.

Measures for the “social” development of rural areas, aimed at improving innovative social services, were introduced in 2000-2006 rural development plan (i.e. applications of CAP policy) in Tuscany, creating successful experiences. As well some social projects in rural areas were promoted through LEADER-plus programme. These initiatives were justified by the presence of specific social features and needs of rural areas that are not sufficiently taken into account by general social/welfare policies (e.g. aged population, relative isolation and difficulties for connections, scarce potential for scale economies and innovation); at the same time the importance of human and social resources in rural development have become apparent in last decade. The new rural development plan in Tuscany (2007-2013) has included measures for innovative social services again, this time joining them with objectives of diversification of farms, and thus with a concept of social farming. Particularly measures that support specific investments on farms are provided. However, in general terms we may say again that the topic of “social farming” is still relatively very new in the agricultural world, though gaining increasing attention at all levels.

(Relations with agro-environmental and landscape dimensions)

As already mentioned, recurring features of social farms are organic or environmental-friendly farming. Practices of conservation of biodiversity (e.g. breeding of traditional farm animals) are often found too. These features appear to suite a logic of diversification and intense labour typical for social farms, as well as to be coherent with an overall values’ perspective (i.e. environmental and social values joint together).

Particularly some interviewees remark the importance of landscape and nature (broad sense) as means of rehabilitation for disadvantaged persons; though, it is generally remarked that policy measures for landscape conservation usually provide very limited resources. A peculiar feature already mentioned is the entrustment of “green services” to social cooperatives for labour integration (“B” kind) by public and/or private bodies too. As explained, this is facilitated by the law (i.e. systems of agreements, right of priority in competitive tenders). However, in many cases these jobs are rather low profile and/or connected to urban environment, e.g. cut of vegetation along roads or water streams, maintenance of public gardens and parks, recycling of urban waste.

(Benefits for society)

Some recent studies have highlighted how the entrustment of public jobs to social cooperatives for labour integration (“B” kind) have allowed to do relevant environmental interventions with limited costs, thus producing significant saving of public expense.

More in general, it is apparent how social cooperation have enhanced “social economic” efficacy of social/health public services in relevant way (Iommi, 2005). Particularly, agriculture appears to have played a relevant role in social and labour inclusion of disadvantaged categories (confront data on employment in the chapter “economic dimension”). Especially, we may remark the societal contribution provided by private farms that have been involved on voluntary bases mainly, so far (in many cases for many years).

We may also say that in the observed cases a relevant societal effect of social farming is to generate and/or reinforce linkages among diverse actors as well as dynamics of cooperation at local level (we may speak of enhancement of “social capital”). Many initiatives show to contribute to the building of vital rural communities in many ways - e.g. making them inclusive, attractive, viable. Differently from other processes of rural development based on a logic of “countryside consumption” (e.g. certain kind of tourism and/or leisure oriented initiatives), social farming appears to promote a “regeneration” of countryside - first of all human and social resources (Di Iacovo, 2004). Definitely, we would stress again the following benefits for society, provided by social farming:

- Contributing to reinforce/re-organise local systems in a globalized world;
- Contributing to create/develop new forms of territorial governance (based on local needs and resources, enhanced social participation, cooperation and integrated planning);
- Particularly, in this perspective, reinforcing urban-rural relations/cooperation;
- Contributing to promote new models of socially active farms / enterprises (e.g. being engaged with local communities, promoting collective values vs. competitive behaviours).

Conclusions: prospects

To conclude, we briefly remark some potential prospects for social farming in Italy. These ones are intended as preliminary items that will be discussed and developed through next participatory work within the national platform:

- Progressive growth of linkages, networking and cooperative strategies among stakeholders at regional and national levels: these processes are likely to grow spontaneously and thus to create a certain redundant or chaotic dynamics, though giving evidence to social farming and allowing to enter political agendas, and to increase the number of experiences;
- Progressive confrontation/integration between social and agricultural sectors: this process can create opportunities to both sectors but could also create new forms of competition;
- Creation of a new system of “accreditation” (that could include also private farms and “for profit” enterprises as services’ providers): this process could also be double faceted – creating new opportunities but also new threats (e.g. enhanced competition, change of attitudes in rural players as an effect of new market-based procedures, etc.);
- Growth of scientific research (e.g. farming-based therapeutic processes; societal impacts of social inclusion and labour integration; new models and perspectives for social economy, territorial

governance, local welfare, multifunctional agriculture, etc.): it would reinforce social farming practices, though it might also create a certain normalisation or standardisation entailing negative aspects as well.

References

- Iommi S. (ed.), (2005). La Cooperazione Sociale nel sistema di welfare toscano, 1° rapporto. IRPET, Firenze
- Di Iacovo F. Senni S., (2005). I servizi sociali nelle aree rurali, dossier rete LEADER
- Di Iacovo F. (ed.), (2003). Lo sviluppo sociale nelle aree rurali. FrancoAngeli, Milano
- Di Iacovo F., Noferi M. (2004). Agricoltura/Sociale: esperienze nelle campagne toscane, rapporto di ricerca ARSIA
- Di Iacovo F. (2004). Welfare rigenerativo e nuove forme di dialogo nel rururbano toscano, Rivista di Economia Agraria, n.4
- Di Iacovo F., Senni S., Knecht de J. (2006). Farming for health in Italy. In Hassink J. Dijk van M. (eds), 2006, Farming For Health. Springer, The Netherlands.
- Huylenbroeck van G., Durand G. (eds.) (2003). Multifunctional agriculture, a new paradigm for European agriculture and rural development. Ashgate
- Zamaro N. (2002). Le istituzioni nonprofit italiane, esigenze di analisi e appropriatezza delle rappresentazioni statistiche. Rivista italiana di politiche pubbliche, n.1, pp.151-167.
- Istat (2006). Le cooperative sociali in Italia., Roma