

A photograph of several people working in a large, open agricultural field. In the foreground, a person in a blue shirt is bent over, working in a row of young plants. Other people are visible further back, some standing and some working. The field is surrounded by a fence, and in the background, there are rolling hills and a clear sky.

# CONDITION PAPER on Social Farming

**SoFarm - Support of Social and  
Inclusive Farming**

Erasmus+ Programme – Strategic Partnership  
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## 1. Introduction

“Social farming is an innovative approach that brings together two concepts: multipurpose farming and social services/health care at the local level. It makes a contribution to the ambit of agricultural production to the well-being and the social integration of people with particular needs. (...) Social farming has spread throughout Europe in a variety of guises that have some similarities but also numerous differences in terms of approach, how they relate to other sectors, and funding. (...) Since there is no EU or national regulatory framework for social farming, there is a lack of coordination between the various policies or institutions concerned. (...) Available statistics on social farming are few and partial. (...) Social farming must be underpinned by interdisciplinary research in different spheres in order to validate empirical results, analyse its impact and benefits from different perspectives (social, economic, health, individual, etc.), and ensure the dissemination of experience on the ground. To this end, it would be expedient to promote and develop the cooperation efforts initiated at the European level. (...) Throughout Europe, social farming needs a conducive environment, greater civil society involvement, and fruitful collaboration between different policy areas and administrations (health/social affairs, farming, employment) at European, national, regional, and local levels.”

This quotation taken from the “Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on ‘Social farming: green care and social and health policies’ (WILLEMS 2012) is still valid.

Within the Erasmus+ project SOFARM a **comparative summary of the current situation of social farming** in the partner countries Czechia, Slovakia, Poland, Italy and Germany involved in the project has been elaborated. The main outcomes of this work package shall be a comparative state-of-the-art report that maps and compares the current situation in the partner countries, regarding data, legislature and support as well as current perspectives of development in each partner country, depending on which data were available in each of the countries. This paper shall provide the target groups with the most current information about the conditions for social farming in the partner countries.

## 2. Methodology

The partners of the project received a **questionnaire** (= template containing guided questions to make the feedback comparable) about Social Farming in order to collect data from the five countries involved. This covered the following items: 1. Description of the situation in each country, 2. Laws, legislation, and regulations, 3. A SWOT analysis, 4. Challenges, next steps, and 5. Conclusion. The SWOT analysis should identify strengths, weaknesses, obstacles, and threats related to Social Farming in each country.

A **SWOT analysis** pulls information from internal sources (strengths of weaknesses) as well as external forces that may have uncontrollable impacts on decisions (opportunities and threats). Originally a SWOT analysis has been set up as a strategic planning technique that provides assessment tools. It has been used to identify core strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats leading to fact-based analysis, fresh



perspectives, and new ideas. SWOT analysis was first used to analyze businesses. Today, it's often used by governments, nonprofits, and individuals, including investors and entrepreneurs.<sup>1</sup>

Each partner included at least one **interview** with an external expert who was supposed to contribute with knowledge that expands the own knowledge by adding a different point of view. I.e., PETRARCA e.V. with a background in organic farming and ecology chose an expert from the social sector. It was recommended to include the following list of questions: “How would you like to introduce yourself? What means social farming to you? In which role do you see yourself within the field of social farming? When was the first time you got in contact with social farming? What are your own experiences in the sector of social farming? How would you describe the situation of social farming in your country? Do you think that it is important to collaborate with other countries in order to get a better understanding of social farming? Where do you see its strengths? Which three words would you use to describe social farming? What do you feel are the main objectives of social farming? Where do you think the field of social farming will be heading towards over the next few years?”

PETRARCA e.V. collected the national reports from Czechia, Slovakia, Poland, Italy and Germany and has elaborated the international report as an additional extract.



*Project team meetings in Prague (15.11.2022), Rožňava (28.3.2023) and Krakow (5.9.2023)*



<sup>1</sup> Available at: [www.investopedia.com/terms/s/swot.asp](http://www.investopedia.com/terms/s/swot.asp); [www.techtarget.com/searchcio/definition/SWOT-analysis-strengths-weaknesses-opportunities-and-threats-analysis](http://www.techtarget.com/searchcio/definition/SWOT-analysis-strengths-weaknesses-opportunities-and-threats-analysis)



### 3. Social Farming in the five countries involved in SOFARM

Is it useful to *define* Social Farming? In the Middle Ages, there had been a serious conflict in philosophy between the so-called “realists” and the “nominalists”. The former stated that a term is characterized by its *ideal content*, while the latter was convinced that a term is just the meaning of words. “Realists” would have avoided to define a term, as defining always means limiting the contents of a term to a certain frame set by the observer.

Looking at “Social Farming”, the *understanding of its contents* is not the same in all European countries. Also, the term itself differs: there are countries that prefer to talk about “care farming” or “green care” instead; and some countries exclude pedagogical farms from social farming. The “European Manifesto on the Added Value of Social Farming”, compiled by the participants of the Conference *Farming for Health* from 25-27 May 2009 in Pisa/ Italy as a call to decision-makers in industry, administration, politics and the public to support social farming in Europe *characterized* Social Farming as follows:

**Social Farming** adopts a multifunctional view of agriculture and produces some collective goods. The main products, in addition to saleable produce, are health and employment, education or therapy, a better environment and a care for biodiversity. Agriculture offers opportunities for people to participate in the varied rhythms of the day and the year, be it in growing food or working with domestic animals. Social farming includes agricultural enterprises and market gardens which integrate people with physical, mental or emotional disabilities; farms which offer openings for the socially disadvantaged, for young offenders or those with learning difficulties, people with drug dependencies, the long-term unemployed, active senior citizens; school and kindergarten farms and many more. Prevention of illness, inclusion and a better quality of life are features of social agriculture. It can offer good living conditions for those who are strongly dependent on long-term care.

**Throughout Europe**, social farming initiatives are springing up. Farming enterprises are increasingly becoming the focus of developments in rural areas, creating work and employment for the socially and physically disadvantaged and providing care for the elderly. They are taking on an educational role and developing new sources of income through enhanced reputation associated with their production and the provision of social services. Social farming needs political and financial support.

Also, the feedback of all partners pointed out *the diversity* of Social Farming in their countries. In the **Czech Republic**, social farming can be both a farm employing people with medical or social disabilities and an entity that is mainly an educational center for youth and raises a few animals as a sideline. There may also be farmers and breeders who include visiting disabled people. All types have their own meaning and contribution, still, this setting causes the reluctance of individual ministries to take over social farming as a whole in their program. Currently, social farming is the closest to social entrepreneurship and therefore naturally falls under the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. The Association of Social Farming, the



overarching organization of social farming in the Czech Republic, describes social farming in the following way: *"The mission of social farming is not only the production and sale of agricultural products but also: the possibility of offering new jobs on farms, providing social services, educational activities and carrying out various types of therapy for a wide range of people, especially those with health and social disadvantages."*<sup>2</sup>



*Social Farming in Czechia.* © SOFARM

In **Slovakia**, thanks to social farming disadvantaged people have an opportunity to maintain or improve their health, social and psychological condition, integrate into society, or obtain employment. It uses agricultural activities and the farm environment for therapy, rehabilitation, social integration, education, integrated employment, and social services. It allows farmers to diversify their income by obtaining other sources of financing. Even though the concept of social farming is relatively new, the services it includes are implemented in various forms in places all over Slovakia, even if they do not use this term and are not even connected to each other. It has no basis in a specific policy or institutional framework yet.



*Social Farming in Slovakia.* © Druživa

<sup>2</sup> *Socialni zemedelstvi* [online]. Czech Republic: Association of Social Farming [cit. 2023-01-26]. Available from: [www.socialni-zemedelstvi.cz](http://www.socialni-zemedelstvi.cz)



In **Poland**, social farming is still a little-known term. It covers a wide variety of activities responding to needs of a caring and social nature. Terms often used interchangeably are: care farming, farming for health, social farming, green care, green exercise, and agricultural therapy. Potential target groups for this type of farm are: people with mental disabilities, people with restricted mobility, people leaving prison, people with addictions, children and young people with special educational needs, so-called "difficult youth", unemployed people, people burned out professionally, and elderly people. A care farm can be a refuge, as it facilitates contact with other people, enables people to open up, break down certain barriers, and make new acquaintances and friends. Thanks to such places, people can feel needed, stop thinking about everyday problems at least for a while, and stay active. Time spent on the farm can contribute to the well-being of vulnerable people, improving their health.



*Social Farming in Poland.* © Thomas van Elsen

In **Italy**, since the 2000s, social farms have grown more and more. The Italian agricultural context could be optimal for the development of social farms. Contact with nature and animals, a lifestyle that respects the environment, the climate and the fruits of the earth, working the land could 'cure' illnesses, disabilities or mental, physical, social and economic hardships. The social farm has its role: caring for individuals, providing employment and making them feel a useful part of the community. In many social farms, often there are therapeutic activities to improve the health of people with disabilities, autism, but also people with economic or social hardship. More and more people would like to take part and would like to invest in social farming. Despite this, however, there are some difficulties and criticalities in the system, which hinder social farms at the moment. The dependence on public funding and the precariousness of the system hinders the growth of the sector. Also, the poor collaboration between social farms within the same territory and the lack of communication limit the development of social farms in Italy.



*Social Farming in Italy* © Massimo Vollaro

Social Farming in **Germany** is understood as the combination of agriculture with social and/ or pedagogical work. There are Green Areas of Workshops for Disabled People (WfbM; Agriculture, Gardening), often run by church or other suppliers), anthroposophical living- and working communities, pedagogical School Farms and Kindergartens, and also further farms mostly specialized on certain target groups (prevention from addiction, long term unemployed, homeless people, resocialising prisoners, youth help, migrants/ unaccompanied youngsters, seniors, seniors suffering from dementia, as well as community supported agriculture (CSA), and urban/intercultural community gardens.

Most of the farms are organic. A driving force at present is the UN declaration on the rights of people with disability and its claim for inclusion. The national law on inclusion BTHG (2016) allows different care providers; in the long run, a shift from large farms specialized in certain target groups towards normal farms providing work for persons with special needs is expected. There are different developments in the German federal states; the federal structure of Germany is a challenge and a chance as well. And there is a growing demand for training and education.

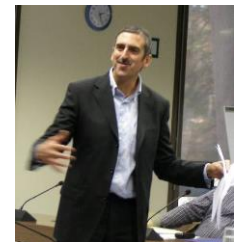
Social farming offers perspectives on the multifunctionality of land management, income diversification of farms, social entrepreneurship, rural attractiveness, and quality of life. Social farming is a way of involving more people in farming and making it 'multifunctional' beyond food production. Our online survey in the federal state of Hesse conducted in 2018/2019 shows that farms and social organizations are also interested in combining social and educational work with fields of work in agriculture - which creates new perspectives for companies, people, and rural areas.



*Social Farming in Germany* © PETRARCA e.V.



S o c i a l F a r m i n g



*SoFar project (2006 – 2009); Franco Di Iacovo (University of Pisa)* © PETRARCA e.V

Within the European So Far project (2006-2009), the project team elaborated on different stages of development, using the following terms to characterize the situation in the countries

- Novelties: when mainly individual initiatives are built, it can be assimilated to the pioneering stage
- Niches: in this case, relationships start to be established and a new arena starts to be defined. Single project groups are collaborating inside but not connected
- Paradigms: relationships and exchange of information increased, and new knowledge is established;
- Regimes: a new set of rules starts to be defined, affecting institution and the juridical framework
- Stagnation: a situation in which something stays the same and does not grow.



By looking at the graph (fig.1) there are countries like Ireland and Slovenia located at the stage of “novelties”. According to the definition of DI IACOVO & O’CONNOR (2009) ‘novelties’ describes the phase “when mainly individual initiatives are built, it can be assimilated to the pioneering stage”. Compared to the countries involved in SOFARM, this might be the case for **Slovakia**, maybe already entering the second stage “niches” where case relationships start to be established and a new arena starts to be defined, also thanks to the activities of Druživa. Regarding the figure, it is obvious that it describes the situation 15 years ago, as in Ireland meanwhile a well-developed network of social farms exists.

In **Poland**, the network of educational farms is well developed and consists of 300 farms with their label. Next to the educational sector, social farming in this country is still in its infancy. One region was well supported by an EU project and there is an advisor in each region who supervises the social farms, but they are mostly educational farms. The Polish politicians are involved in a few projects but do not improve the state of social farming on a national level. The educational farms are self-sufficient, while the farms of the EU project are dependent on these funds. The financial situation of social farms as well as the low popularity of such farms and the unwillingness of the farmers to adopt new ideas are reasons why the concept of social farming is still in the phase “niches” (TORNIER 2020).

The **Czech Republic** is according to the expert in the second stage of development. With its existing umbrella organization, working committee in the ministry of agriculture and courses on social farming at two different universities are some basics already set. However, Czech society is skeptical of the idea and the politicians except for the existing working committee are not engaged in social farming. Also, the aspect of financing is very limiting in this country. A website on this topic exists with a map showing the registered social farms in the Czech Republic. The number of farms is still low since almost only private individuals take the initiative to start a social farm and financial limitation plays a role (TORNIER 2020).

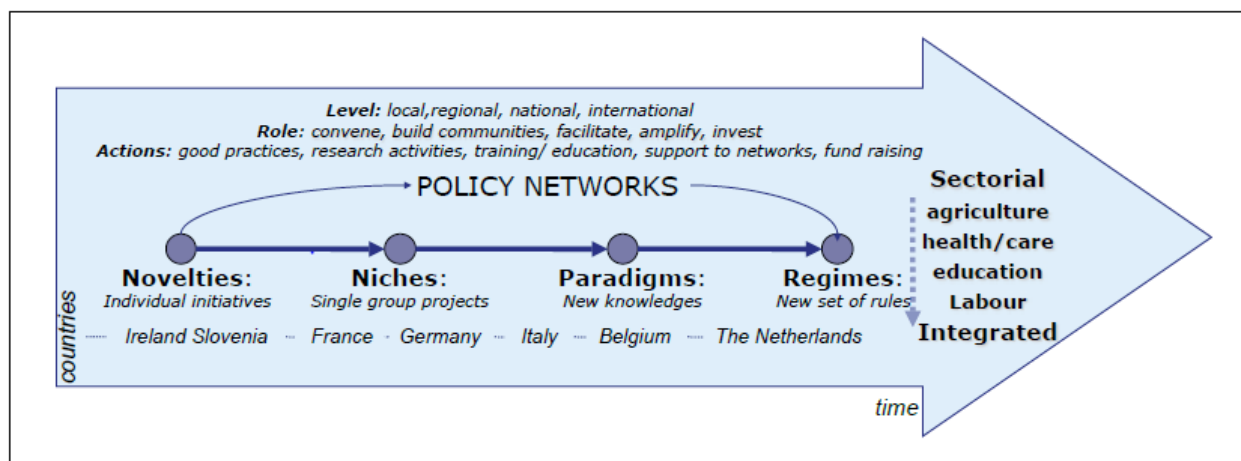


Figure 1: Stages of development of Social Farming in European countries 15 years ago (DI IACOVO & O’CONNOR 2009: 178).

**Germany** today can be seen in the phase “Paradigms”, which stands for “relationships and exchange of information increased, and new knowledge is established”. In Germany, social farming is combined with a



productive component of agriculture, especially in the literature. The composition of federal states makes a uniform description of the federal states difficult. There are different laws and responsibilities in each of them causing big differences in social farming in the various federal states. Courses on social farming are offered at universities, there are also regional and national associations offering workshops and seminars. Politics is partly integrated into social farming, again different from federal state to federal state in Germany. In Germany, the personnel budget is nationwide. The “workshops for people with disabilities”, need to have a minimum number of clients. By implementing the federal participation act and the budget for work and other suppliers, there might be an increase in social farms in Germany.

**Italy** is at the level of “Regimes” as “a new set of rules start to be defined, affecting institution and the juridical framework”. Since 2015 Italy has its own legislation for the promotion of social farming and the national association of farmers and initiators of the idea was established even 4 years earlier. The discourse of work integration plays an important role next to the educational farms. Projects on confiscated land of the mafia as well as the idea of social farming are well known and acknowledged by the Italian society. There are approximately 3000 social farms distributed all over Italy. Regional labels for these farms exist as well as cooperatives with retail companies like supermarkets. Therefore, some farms are self-sufficient. Also, the cooperation of different ministries is working on the regional level, funding is coming from the social sector, but also from enterprises who want to invest in social activities. In addition to the national association, which launched a chart of principles that can constitute a form of quality assurance, there are also regional associations for social farming. Seminars, workshops and courses are offered by such associations as well as by universities and research centers (TORNIER 2020).

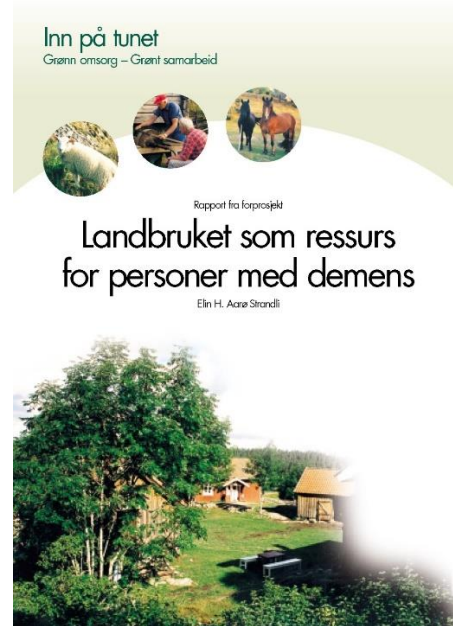


*Many farms in the Netherlands offer daycare for the elderly suffering from dementia* © Thomas van Elsen

In the 15-year-old figure, The Netherlands had been located at the level of “Regimes” as well. Care Farms in the Netherlands were supported already in 1999 by the National Support Center Agriculture and Care, which was subsidized by the Ministry of Agriculture as well as the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sports. With this support, the idea of social farming was well distributed in the Dutch society and many initiatives started. But in 2008, the financing by the ministries stopped, and a new federation was established financed by the care farmers themselves. The number of listed farms by the association is 1250 based on



a report by VAN DER MEULEN et al. 2019. While the initiatives increased especially after implementing the personal budget, the curve has flattened after 2011. Besides the personal budget, financial support is coming directly from the national health care reimbursement system from AWBZ. As the care farms initially welcomed people with intellectual disabilities, the farms are now open to a wider range of target groups and even try to provide space for a variety of those at the same time.



*Social Farming in Norway – Animal-assisted therapy with farm animals.* © Bente Berget

Another country must be mentioned here: Norway. Until recently, the Scandinavian country was regarded as the model example of social farming in Europe. Various actors have recognized that social farming can be used to preserve farms in regions where agricultural production is not possible according to world market standards. Different ministries and authorities pulled together in an exemplary manner. However, with the shift of public funding to a more local level a few years ago, the Norwegian model collapsed. Growth farming and intensification are now being promoted. At the same time, many farms gave up in the course of the generational change - a fiasco that shows the problem of dependence on public funds (VAN ELSEN 2020).

## 4. The legal framework of Social Farming in the five countries

An important driving force on the international level is the **UN- Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities**<sup>3</sup> (2008). It claims for *inclusion* instead of *integration*, accepting people who are different from the average as being part of normality. Society shall develop in a way to include people with special needs in normal life. The whole focus is changing with the convention: society shall not focus on the aspects of disability of so-called handicapped people but shall overcome the deficit-oriented thinking by focusing on

<sup>3</sup> Available at: [www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-persons-disabilities](http://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-persons-disabilities)

the abilities instead of the disabilities of people with special needs. The convention strives for an inclusive society. European countries are requested to adapt their national laws considering the ideas of the convention. I.e in Germany in 2016 the Federal Law on Inclusion (“Bundesteilhabegesetz”) was set up, strengthening the rights of people with special needs. This law is starting to have a strong influence on the development of Social Farming in the country.

Are there special laws related to Social Farming? For which target groups? How is the support of different people in need of support regulated? Are there requirements to ensure the quality of work on social farms? Are there tables comparing data, differences in the relevant legislature, state approach and state support, definition by law (if any), and similar?

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## CZECH REPUBLIC

Basic laws of **Czech** legislation which have some effect on social farming are the laws for agriculture and food processing and the laws connected to social area, employment, and labor. From other laws it is as well Civil Code, Act on Business Companies and Cooperatives, and Decree on interest-based education.<sup>4</sup> Social farming is associated with social entrepreneurship in the newly prepared Act on Social Entrepreneurship (the social farm will be directly defined for the first time in Czech legislation). For this reason, the following text is focused on this area.

The Czech support system has been generating and shaping only a certain, narrowly profiled part of the sector with support. The legislation basically only deals with the medically and mentally disabled, which is a relatively narrowly defined group that does not, however, include a number of people with specific needs, for example socially excluded people. The consequence, among other things, is that the public can see essentially only the type of businesses that, for example, employ the physically and mentally disabled. In the Czech Republic, we lack support, direction and motivation to employ people from socially excluded locations, single parents, people with weaker work habits, people on probation, people who need more specific working conditions and background, burdened by foreclosures, work opportunities associated with care and therapy for the elderly, etc. Furthermore, there is a lack of direct financial support for the creation of jobs and conditions for assistants and psychosocial workers.

In the Czech Republic, neither the term "social farm" nor the term "social enterprise" are precisely defined and none of these terms is enshrined in Czech legislation. The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs started to prepare the Law of Social Entrepreneurship in 2022. This law should also include the term “Social Farm”. Currently, farms can obtain two statutes in the Czech Republic, associated with social enterprises, namely the designation "Social Enterprise" and entity on the "Protected Labor Market".

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<sup>4</sup> PŘÍRUČKA PRO ZEMĚDĚLCE A VEŘEJNOU SPRÁVU V OBLASTI PODPORY A REALIZACE SOCIÁLNÍHO ZEMĚDĚLSTVÍ V ČR [online]. [cit. 2023-01-30]. Available at: [www.szif.cz/cs/CmDocument?rid=/apa\\_anon/cs/dokumenty\\_ke\\_stazeni/eafrd/csv/publikace/1548835489627.pdf](http://www.szif.cz/cs/CmDocument?rid=/apa_anon/cs/dokumenty_ke_stazeni/eafrd/csv/publikace/1548835489627.pdf)

Social enterprises have to meet several basic characteristics:

- Social benefit (you employ a certain minimum percentage of disadvantaged employees)
- Economic benefit (you return at least 51 % of your profit to the development of the company)
- Environmental and local benefit (you preferentially use local resources, mainly satisfy the needs of the local community and its demands, behave environmentally)<sup>5</sup>

A social farm can adhere to the stated principles and be a Social Enterprise, but this is not yet a condition. The status of a social enterprise is suitable for some types of grants and subsidies, especially from European funds, regional grants, or calls from private foundations. The status of a social enterprise has certain advantages, that is, you can obtain some subsidy degrees, where the condition is to be a social enterprise, not just an employer on the protected labor market.

The second designation, an employer on the Protected Labor Market, brings direct financial benefits if the company employs people with disabilities. In theory, a social farm can be an employer on the protected labor market if it meets the conditions under the Employment Act. The term "employer on the protected labor market" is anchored in our legal system, and is dealt with in the Employment Act mentioned above. If you meet the conditions set out in the law, you are entitled to financial compensation. These contributions according to the Employment Act can be drawn by companies that employ persons with disabilities and have more than 50 % of employees from this category. There has to be a written agreement with the Labor Office to get recognition as an employer in the protected labor market.



*Social Farming in Czechia.* © SOFARM

A farm can enter this Protected Labor Market, but the system is not set up for the conditions in agriculture, which are quite different (cyclicality and seasonality, therapeutic level). Another complication is the small number of employed disadvantaged people (they do not reach 50 % of employees). An employer in the protected labor market does not have to meet the conditions given for a social enterprise if he does not

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<sup>5</sup> Tessea [online]. 2022 [cit. 2023-01-31]. Available at: [www.tessea.cz/cz/socialnipodnikani/definice-tessea](http://www.tessea.cz/cz/socialnipodnikani/definice-tessea)

want to have the status of a social enterprise. A social farm is therefore a social enterprise and not an employer on the protected labor market. And vice versa.

The National Plan for the Support of Equal Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities for the period 2021-2025 is currently active. Measure 11.1.7 includes the premise of continuing to support and develop projects implemented in cooperation with the Ministry of Agriculture, the Agrarian Chamber of the Czech Republic and the French social agricultural insurance company MSA for the purpose of occupational rehabilitation of persons with disabilities in the form of their employment in agriculture. To create conditions so that persons with disabilities have the opportunity to use their skills in working on farms and in crafts related to rural life. There is no detailed information available about its use by social farms.

Concerning the number of Social Farms in the Czech Republic, several large flagships have been operating social farms for quite a long time. The overview of the Association of Social Agriculture indicates an approximate number of 40 farms (in the broader concept of social farming, i.e. not only those with disadvantaged employees). Our current estimate of farms that employ disadvantaged people is 30 farms. However, this does not include farms and entities that do not subscribe to the concept of social farming, either because they do not know that they are social, or because they move in the gray/black zone in the way they employ their disadvantaged employees. There is interest in farms that can operate on the protected labor market (financial benefit of claim subsidies), and there is a higher interest among young people who perceive the need for work in agriculture, know the value of food and have grown up in the trend of gentle and kind treatment of the land and care for the landscape. Social farms in the Czech Republic are both non-profit organizations and limited liability companies. Farms can be part of church institutions. There are no social farms established by the state in the Czech Republic.

As a financial model, the farm's own business and looking for additional financing, for example, a combination of food production and services (such as accommodation, rentals), educational activities, tourism, plus state support, is proving itself. Agricultural subsidies for land can also be a strong player (for an area of 20 hectares, the amount is approx. 300,000 CZK). Another model is a contribution to the employment of the disadvantaged (that is, entry into the protected labor market) and the additional sale of products, for example, through community support agriculture.

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## SLOVAKIA

Social farming has no basis in legislation, particular policy or institutional framework. Possibilities for the development of social farming in accordance with legislation in the social field can be perceived in two basic levels:

**1. Therapeutic dimension of social farming** - a) Act no. 448/2008 Coll. on social services and amendments to Act no. 455/1991 Coll. on trade, as amended, b) Act no. 305/2005 Coll. on the social legal protection of children and on the social guardian and on the amendment and addition of certain laws as amended.

Social rehabilitation as an independent activity is carried out on the basis of accreditation (§88), which is granted by the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family on the basis of an application. After obtaining



accreditation, it is necessary to register in the Register of Social Service Providers at the higher territorial unit in the place where the professional activity will be carried out.

## 2. Support for the employment of disadvantaged citizens in the labor market in the field of social farming

- a) Act no. 5/2004 Coll. on employment services on amendments to certain laws, b) Act 112/2018 Coll. on the social economy and social enterprises and the amendment of certain laws. In different laws, the concept of a person with a disability is defined differently.



*Social Farming in Slovakia. © Druživa*

Support for employment of citizens with disabilities: a) Act no. 311/2001 Coll. Labor Code, b) Act no. 5/2004 Coll. on employment services. The Office of Labour, Social Affairs and Family maintains special records of job applicants who are citizens with disabilities and job seekers who are citizens with disabilities. The special records also contain data on the decline in the ability to perform gainful activity, as well as data on the legal reason based on which they were recognized as a citizen with a disability. The employer's legal obligations in the mentioned area include, in particular, the obligation to ensure suitable conditions for the performance of work for citizens with disabilities whom they employ, the obligation to provide training and work preparation for citizens with disabilities and to pay special attention to improving their qualifications during their employment, and the obligation to keep records citizens with disabilities. Other contributions for an employer who employs citizens with disabilities are the contribution to keep a citizen with a disability in employment, the contribution to cover the operating costs of a protected workshop or a protected workplace and to cover the costs of employee transport, a contribution to support the employment of a disadvantaged job seeker and a contribution to a citizen with a disability for self-employment.

The social economy gained legal legitimacy in the Slovak Republic in 2008, when it was included among the instruments of active labour market policy under Act No. 5/2004 Coll. on Employment Services. Since then, social enterprises have received targeted support in the form of a cash grant for the employment of disadvantaged jobseekers, for a maximum of two calendar years. The Comprehensive Act on the Social Economy and Social Enterprises came into force in May 2018 and since this period we can observe a more intensive progress of the social economy sector. The new Law No. 112/2018 on Social Economy and Social Enterprises, which has been in force since 1 May 2018, regulates a comprehensive legal environment for social economy actors. These are entities that, through their activities, bring positive social impacts by



fulfilling a public interest or community interest. The law defines the social economy as "the totality of productive, distributive or consumptive activities carried out through economic or non-economic activities independently of state authorities, the main objective of which is to achieve a positive social impact". In terms of activity, a registered social enterprise may be an integration enterprise, a social housing enterprise or another registered social enterprise. An 'integration enterprise' aims to promote the employment of disadvantaged or vulnerable persons through the employment of at least 30% of the total number of employees. A 'social housing enterprise' shall achieve a positive social impact by providing socially beneficial rental housing. In the category 'other registered social enterprise', social enterprises can be found in various areas, such as the provision of services (culture, education, health, financial services, social services), the production of products (healthy and safe food, products for the handicapped), innovative sales and production methods (packaging-free sales), business activities in line with environmental protection. In the social field, we see various opportunities for the development of social agriculture, in particular:

- as a social enterprise for labour integration - sheltered employment,
- as a social housing enterprise - social farms,
- as another social enterprise - social farms for health, providing rehabilitation, therapies, lifelong education, with innovative use of resources and in the context of sustainability.

Druživa is currently cooperating with the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of the Slovak Republic in preparation of a new 'Act on Agriculture', which will include the definition of the social farm and create a register of social farms. This could be a good starting point for the creation of subsidies addressed to social farmers.

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## POLAND

A care farm is a form of support for care and social integration implemented within an agricultural holding. It is therefore clear that farmers or farm household members must be involved in the setting up and operation of such a facility. However, the current legal conditions limit the possibilities of combining agricultural activity with the provision of care services. A care farm should therefore be run as a business or as a social economy entity: an association, a foundation, or a social cooperative. From the point of view of those interested in this type of activity, the need to set up or cooperate with an existing business or social economy entity may seem like an unnecessary complication. In reality, however, such solutions should be seen as opportunities rather than constraints for care farms. Indeed, the use of one of the recommended legal forms makes it possible to solve significant problems facing those setting up or running care farms. Running a care farm as a business or as a statutory activity of a non-governmental organisation provides the opportunity to benefit from ready-made models of operation and requirements that are placed on units of the social welfare system. This is very important, because care services, the provision of therapy and integration activities are areas of activity associated with a special responsibility for another human being. It is in the interest of those running this type of activity to strive to ensure the highest possible level of services offered and the safety of the people being cared for. This is only possible





if the following conditions are met: premises are required, staff are properly trained and high ethical standards are applied.



*Social Farming in Poland.* © Thomas van Elsen

All this makes it necessary for the care farm to operate based on existing organisational forms of social welfare units. This will make it possible, in a way, to automatically meet all the requirements for this type of facility. From the point of view of a person setting up a care home, it is therefore a significant simplification - it is more convenient to use ready-made models than to create from scratch an institution whose functioning will be confronted with legal obstacles at every step. The use of currently available forms of care provision within NGOs or companies has another important advantage. This concept makes it possible to use the available funding sources for this type of facility. Thus, we have funds directed to rural areas in connection with the development of entrepreneurship. In the case of social cooperatives, it is possible to take advantage of funds earmarked for the development of the social economy. It is also possible to take advantage of governmental and regional programmes subsidising the establishment and operation of care facilities. Thanks to the funding they receive for care on their farm, caretakers can modernise their farm, upgrade their farming activities or start or develop other non-agricultural activities.

In Poland, there are several options for obtaining funding for setting up care services on a farm. On the one hand, there are government programmes to support people in need of care, and on the other hand, there are regional and national operational programmes co-financed by European funds aimed at supporting the activity of dependent persons. Setting up and running a care farm must involve persons carrying out agricultural activities or people who are homemakers on farms carrying out agricultural activities. However, the provision of care services requires the setting up of a new entity (company or social economy entity) or the establishment of cooperation with an existing company, association, foundation, or social cooperative.

In Poland, the strategic anchoring of measures for social farming has been adopted in sectoral programming documents dedicated to rural development, as well as in the Strategy for Responsible Development until 2020 (with an outlook until 2030) adopted by the Council of Ministers on 14 February

2017. Indeed, according to the Strategy, the direction of intervention in terms of 'improving access to services, including social and health services' is to support the development of the social function of farms by combining agriculture with social services.

It is worth pointing to the 'Social Policy for the Elderly 2030. Safety - Participation - Solidarity', which was adopted by the Council of Ministers on 26 October 2018. This document pays attention not only to the dissemination of a network of care farms but also to the development and promotion of care professions, as well as the improvement of the competences of care providers through their participation in training and workshops. The second document is the Strategy for the Sustainable Development of Rural Areas, Agriculture and Fisheries 2030, in which on-farm care services are presented as one of the forms of care for people in need of support and diversification of income and employment in local labour markets. The third document is the National Programme for the Development of the Social Economy up to 2023 'The Economy of Social Solidarity', which indicates that care farms are to support various forms of social activity in rural areas, including ventures that promote dialogue in local communities and shape community attitudes.

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## ITALY

The social farm sector in Italy is in the middle of its development. Social farms were born and developed mainly thanks to European, national and regional funds. Thanks to these forms of investment, some country farms, especially in the region of Apulia, have had the opportunity to enhance their territory, welcome the community and make it participate in activities beneficial for health. Social farms in Italy and in particular in the Apulia region have been recognised with the status of Educational Farms (Masserie Didattiche). The government has established and recognised Didactic Farms, and with Law 26 February 2008 no. 2, the Apulia Region has set up a circuit aimed at grouping together agri-food and agri-tourism businesses that carry out traditional production activities and engage in the activity of didactic and educational hospitality (art. 1). The farmer who owns the Educational Farm is therefore valorised as the guardian of a heritage of knowledge and agri-food traditions, with a strong historical and economic content. This sort of tutor of local typicality carries out educational activities for school groups, illustrating the supply chain process, from the land to the final product. His knowledge of farming allows him to explain the production cycles, illustrate the seasonality of products, introduce new techniques of organic, integrated, and eco-friendly farming, and highlight the health and nutritional properties of the products. In the interactive lessons in the Masseria, the historical, natural, and anthropological aspects linked to the products and the territory are not neglected by the owner of the Masseria or his operator (Art. 2). To carry out these educational activities, the farmer or the person indicated by him must carry out prior qualifying training courses, recognised by the Apulia Region's Agri-food Resources Department (Art. 3). To be enrolled in the Circuit of Educational Farms, an application must be submitted to the Apulia Region's Department of Agri-food Resources, attaching precise documentation (art. 6) indicating precise agricultural production, socio-educational, logistical and safety requirements (attachment A). Following recognition according to art. 6, registration in the Register of Educational Farms can be obtained (art. 7).



*Social Farming in Italy – Cooperativa Sociale Aretè. © Thomas van Elsen*

At the national level, it is with Law No. 141 of 18 August 2015, bearing 'Provisions on social agriculture', that the pre-existing experiences of social agriculture are recognised and consolidated, and fundamental elements of clarity are introduced with regard to the purposes, the normative definition of what is meant by 'social agriculture', the subjective delimitation, the methods of public recognition of operators, and the identification of the beneficiaries of the activities. In fact, the 2015 law promotes social agriculture 'as an aspect of the multifunctionality of agricultural enterprises aimed at the development of interventions and social, social-health, educational and social-work integration services, in order to facilitate adequate and uniform access to essential services to be guaranteed to persons, families and local communities throughout the national territory and in particular in rural or disadvantaged areas'. For the purposes of the law, 'social agriculture' means activities aimed at achieving social and labour insertion of disabled and disadvantaged workers and minors of working age included in social rehabilitation and support projects; social and service provision and activities for local communities through the use of the tangible and intangible resources of agriculture to promote, accompany and implement actions aimed at developing skills and capacities, social and work inclusion, recreation and useful services for everyday life performances and services that flank and support medical, psychological and rehabilitative therapies aimed at improving the health conditions and social, emotional and cognitive functions of the subjects concerned, also through the help of farmed animals and the cultivation of plants projects aimed at environmental and food education, the safeguarding of biodiversity and the dissemination of local knowledge through the organisation of regionally recognised social and educational farms, such as initiatives to welcome and accommodate pre-school children and people with social, physical and mental difficulties.

In the field of social farming in Italy, the main actors operating historically are the social cooperatives, which emerged in Italy in the 1960s/70s. They aim to pursue the general interest of the community in the human promotion and social integration of citizens, through the management of socio-medical and educational services and the management of business activities aimed at the employment of disadvantaged persons such as civil invalids, former patients of psychiatric hospitals, drug addicts, alcoholics, minors in family difficulties, and prisoners.



Social cooperatives were introduced into the Italian legal system by Law 381 of 1991 and Decree 112/2017 as a recognised Social Enterprises. It qualifies as a particular form of Cooperative Society aimed at pursuing the general interest of the community in the human promotion and social integration of citizens. Social Cooperatives are divided into two types:

- type A - aimed at providing social, socio-medical and educational services, vocational education and training, extracurricular training, and job placement;
- type B - carrying out different activities - agricultural, industrial, commercial or services - aimed at the labour insertion of disadvantaged persons.

Specifically, “type B” social cooperatives are more active in agricultural production and processing activities with the inclusion of disadvantaged persons, who must be at least 40 % of the members. All agricultural activities carried out within the social agricultural cooperative are designed and managed to meet the specific needs of disadvantaged persons. The work team that makes up the social cooperative aimed at social farming is complex and requires the presence of various professional figures such as psychologists, social workers, educators and trainers. A fundamental part of social farming activities is to rethink the way in which they are carried out. For example: if the subjects are people with physical/motor disabilities, one will need to think of work plans that favour the work of the people.

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## GERMANY

There is no specific legislation on social farming in Germany. The entitlement of various target and user groups of social farming to financial state support is regulated by the "Social Security Code" and is extremely confusing for those affected as well as for farmers who want to integrate social offers into their farms. There are also offers for children on farms, some of which are supported by the funding programs of the federal states, measures to support the long-term unemployed, senior citizens living on farms and the integration of refugees. The variety of responsible offices leads to a confusing situation, which has led to social farming companies mostly specializing in just one target group in order to be able to cope with the administrative effort.

In Germany after 1945, people with intellectual disabilities were concentrated in so-called “workshops for people with disabilities” with a minimum of 120 people. Their legal mandate is to prepare people with disabilities for the first labor market, which, however, is rarely successful. Transitional forms of work in workshops, some of which maintain farms themselves, but mainly carry out industrial assembly. The workshops cooperate with companies outside the workshop, i.e. also in agriculture, and offer so-called "internships" or "outside jobs". The concentration of offers on workshops for the disabled has its historical cause in the 3rd Reich, in which mental disabilities were considered "unworthy life" and those affected were killed. In order to ensure that people with disabilities are treated well, when the Federal Republic of Germany was founded they were legally employed in large units, which seemed to make it easier to guarantee humane treatment. With the increasing demand for inclusion, this concentration seems less and less contemporary and increasingly proved to be an obstacle for initiatives and companies that wanted to offer supervised jobs. The Federal Participation Act (BTHG) passed in 2016 takes this into account,

which, in addition to workshops for the disabled, also enables so-called “other service providers” to create supervised jobs. In practice, however, the implementation of this intention is still in its infancy.



*Social Farming in Germany.* © Thomas van Elsen

A job in a workshop for disabled people is guaranteed by law for people with disabilities. In the past, many workshops ran their own farms to supply themselves with food, as it became less and less profitable. Today, on the other hand, the motive for running a farm is to provide attractive jobs, since the variety of work on a farm allows a wide variety of meaningful activities. This can go so far that social organizations set up new farms if no cooperation partners can be found in agriculture.

While the transition from school to working life for people with disabilities is regulated and guaranteed by law and a secure income is also guaranteed for social farms through care rates, it is far less secure for a farm to generate an income by involving other target groups. Therefore, there are, for example, hardly any farms that are involved in the field of long-term unemployment.

Unlike in the Netherlands and Austria, there is no certification system tailored to social farming. As in other fields of work, quality assurance in social work is carried out via audits.

There are no reliable figures on the number of social farms in Germany, as these are not recorded centrally. The German Community of practice for Social Farming DASoL defines social agriculture as the combination of agricultural production with social and educational work. Based on this, more than 1.000 social farms should exist.

## 5. SWOT Analysis - strengths and weaknesses of social farming in our countries

The idea to compile a SWOT analysis was inspired by the SoFar project. 15 years ago, each partner country carried out national platforms, in which each country compiled a SWOT table according to the practitioners' points of view. Based on this, the final report contained a common table with key European aspects (DI IACOVO & O'CONNOR 2009: 157).

Within SOFARM, each partner collects strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of social farming in the different countries; including their own experiences as well as aspects that were contributed by the interviewed experts. The results are to be found in the annex.

Despite many common aspects, there are also differences due to the different state of development and the different history of each country. The availability of land for new start-ups in countries with a history of large-scale farming enterprises, the sources of financing, the availability of networks, etc. are different and cause different viewpoints.

The following synthesis (table 1) tries to represent the common grounds and key elements identified from the national SWOT analyses.

**Table 1: Synthesis of the SWOT analyses in the partner countries**

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The therapeutic effect of being in the farm environment, caring for plants and animals</li> <li>● The diversity of farms provides workplaces adapted to the needs</li> <li>● Strong intrinsic motivation and personal engagement of many stakeholders</li> <li>● Partly own processing and marketing of the farm's own products</li> <li>● Strong impact on rural development and creation of added values in rural areas</li> <li>● Creation of sources of income, for the most disadvantaged and economically fragile groups as well as for farms</li> <li>● Social Farms as pioneers in social and ecological inclusion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Lack of technical assistance for new projects due to the scarce presence of appropriate guidance and consultancy services</li> <li>● Lack of communication and collaboration between Ministries of Health, Social Affairs, Agriculture, Regional Development, Education and Labour</li> <li>● Lack of recognition and support from society and related areas (medicine, social work, education)</li> <li>● Lack of training, clear funding system, uncertainty about continuity of funding, need for specialised training and courses, need for specialised staff...</li> <li>● Availability of land – fragmentation of land</li> <li>● Bureaucratic and legal hurdles</li> </ul>



Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Partnerships with local businesses and organizations</li><li>● Powerful stories of social farmers</li><li>● Interest of young farmers in multifunctional and sustainable farming</li><li>● Increasing interest and inquiries from target groups and private individuals</li><li>● Need for new concepts of social services, potential for providers of social work</li><li>● Options for children and pupils to reconnect to nature</li><li>● New forms of economic cooperation and for revitalizing rural areas</li><li>● Perspectives of offers for an aging population - increasing numbers of older people in need of care.</li><li>● The enrichment of the existing system can lead to significant savings in local government budgets.</li><li>● Growing interest of ministries and administration</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Insufficient support from the state, insufficient legal definition, bureaucracy, and disciplinary thinking of ministries</li><li>● Lack of financial resources from public finances and subsidies, uncertainty in obtaining them.</li><li>● Insufficient conditions for the development of small farms</li><li>● Legal framework - lack of coordination between policies and institutions concerned.</li><li>● Poor communication between farmers and owners of social farms, lack of networking.</li><li>● Unresolved need for quality assurance</li></ul>

## 6. Challenges, next steps, outlook

Social Farming is quite complex and diverse – regarding the diversity of target groups and the diversity of Social Farms that already exist. The interdisciplinarity is a challenge – to find a common language and understanding, to find ways of support, of financing, of implementation, and of quality control.

As mentioned above, Norway has been the lighthouse of Social Farming in Europe for a long time, starting with an interdisciplinary collaboration of different ministries. The idea was to support the many small-scale farmers across the large country by implementing social activities on their farms, supporting health, education and care, and providing added value for different sectors of society. So, starting interdisciplinary collaboration and working groups can be an important starting point for more.

In most countries, policies understand Social Farming as a possibility to diversify agriculture under aspects of multifunctionality and to provide farms with an additional source of income. It is remarkable that the Netherlands, one of the leading countries regarding Social Farming, has a different approach: Here care



farming is mainly financed by the health sector due to the idea that using farms as a setting for people with special needs saves society a huge amount of costs and expensive therapies.

The legal framework, laws and regulations, insurance and support for different target groups are different in each country – and a field to learn from each other. And for sure the public awareness for Social Farming and its many added values is still weak. Some of these added values and ideas for improvement are:

- Interconnecting green areas in urban areas (city farms, community gardens) with green areas in the vicinity of cities (social farms and natural areas).
- Connecting formal “green” therapies (as gardening therapy in health facilities) with ecological activities which are not directly related to healthcare institutions but they increase the well-being of their clients
- Giving hand to farmers, clients, healthcare and social care organizations that initiate innovative projects
- Creation of an interdisciplinary scientific net that could coordinate activities and develop projects in the new field and creation of a common basic conceptual framework that defines the content of social agriculture and explains the mechanisms that support health care.
- Realization of common multi-disciplinary research projects including agronomists, sociologists and psychologists, carrying out a survey in social agriculture (intending to make a broader image about the number, size and variability of social projects in agriculture), comparison of results among various targeting groups and spreading awareness and stimulating activity of managing authorities.
- Creation of a common methodology to quantify and compare economic, social and ecological benefits of social agriculture initiatives.
- Comparison of the impact of social agriculture initiatives in rural and urban areas and measurement of benefits for challenges such as rural revitalization, social cohesion, preservation of the landscape, and reducing the feeling of uncertainty and helplessness.
- Creating awareness of possible benefits of social agriculture initiatives in connection with problems in various fields, such as health care, agriculture, education and/or social security.
- Creation of conditions for initiatives that seek to connect the demands of cities with the quality of life in the country.
- Using experience and knowledge from countries that have broad experience with social agriculture and direct cooperation with them.

In the 2007-2013 Rural Development programming cycle, agricultural policy placed social farming among the 'key actions' of Axis III (Diversification of farms and essential services to rural populations) to be supported within the framework of rural development policies co-financed by the European Union and has financed the start-up of social farms, while the social and health system, despite the growing interest of the social services sphere and some medical-health facilities in such actions, has not yet recognized their beneficial potential, as in its opinion there is insufficient scientific evidence of their therapeutic efficacy, and has thus excluded social farming from the activities that can be financed by the National Health Service.



Exploiting the financial instrument of micro-credit, which by definition represents a set of objectives of a very different and transversal nature, combating poverty and social and financial exclusion, supporting employment and the growth of self-employment, women's empowerment, territorial development, could certainly contribute to the construction and achievement of that inclusive and solidarity-based growth that the European strategy has indicated as a priority.

Another aim should be overcoming barriers and competition between local farms and supporting comparison, growth, and exchange. Comparison with other European countries is also necessary. Most of the funding for this type of enterprise comes from European funds. Therefore, the dependence on public funding can be compensated for by comparing issues between different countries.

Seeking new stakeholders and new forms of investment are needed that can support agricultural farms so that they become less dependent on public funding. And communicating the work of social farms is needed, from sustainable production to the integration of staff with disabilities or other difficulties into society, communicating the activities on the social farm, so as to raise community awareness of the issue and create a network of mutual support.

The following aspects regarding advice, networking, knowledge and research needs and change are divided into short, medium, and long-term goals (table 2):

	<i>Short-term</i>	<i>Medium-term</i>	<i>Long-term</i>
<b>Need for advice</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interdisciplinary advice for the creation and realization of project and operating concepts</li> <li>• Support in drawing up contracts between social organizations and farmers (legal advice, etc.), which gives both partners planning security</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transparency regarding contact persons and responsibilities concerning advice, support and coaching of interested parties and those already active (interdisciplinarity challenge)</li> <li>• Point of contact to bring offers and requirements (demand) together</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creation of an efficient and interdisciplinary advisory structure</li> </ul>
<b>Networking needs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support for networking on social farming on regional and national levels (basic funding for online portal/ platform for networking, information and mediation, public relations work to raise awareness of social farming)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Setting up inter-ministerial and interdisciplinary working groups</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creation of efficient structures for mediation and support of seekers and providers</li> </ul>



<p><b>Knowledge and research needs</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promotion of innovation projects and flagship companies and their scientific support</li> <li>• Model project for innovative participation support (case management) on inclusion and participation</li> <li>• Recording of needs in the context of social and pedagogical work, creation of a network map and database</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analysis of synergies and added value of social farming for health promotion</li> <li>• Analysis of the potential of social farming for regional economic promotion and structural development along the value chain for the development of a support program</li> <li>• Multifunctionality as the potential of agriculture: synergies of social agriculture for biodiversity and cultural landscape</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creation of funding instruments for the development of social agriculture to revitalize rural areas and promote health</li> </ul>
<p><b>Need for change</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social recognition and fair rewards for social services in farms (generation of an income contribution)</li> <li>• Interdisciplinarity:</li> <li>• Consideration of the social dimension in tenders of the Ministry of Agriculture</li> <li>• Consideration of ecology in tenders by the Ministry of Social Affairs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing courses and collaborations with universities</li> <li>• Promotion of innovative approaches to school-agriculture cooperation in the sense of education for sustainable development (ESD) and practical educational offers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implementation of the goals of social and ecological inclusion as models or requirements of, for example, the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the European Landscape Convention</li> </ul>

## 7. Conclusion

The following conclusions were drawn by the SOFARM project partners. Were there “lessons learned” by having done this little research? New aspects that one became aware of?

### CZECH REPUBLIC

We repeatedly personally come in contact with farms and other entities of social farming, which amaze us again and again with their astonishing ability to combine good agricultural practice, and care for the landscape with the possibility of involving disadvantaged people and people in need. It fascinates us how they manage to survive and prosper despite not very supportive conditions.



Currently, we see the way to spread awareness of both the very existence of social farming and of its economic importance, contribution to society, positive contribution to improving and maintaining the good condition of our landscape and, last but not least, the production of quality food, everyday necessities.

We would like to see a situation in the Czech Republic where social farms offering employment opportunities for a wide range of disadvantaged people will be available within reach of these people and thus support even more local development. A state where farms, which serve the state by integrating the disadvantaged citizens, will have the conditions for their existence set in such a way that they can develop further, i.e. be supported by the state and not the other way around.

We see the mapping of farms, finding out their needs and limitations, providing them professional assistance, be it legal, commercial or agricultural, as necessary next steps toward a brighter future for social farming in the Czech Republic. The networking of key people both from the social farming sector and from industries that enter this sector is a main factor as well.

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## SLOVAKIA

The development of social agriculture has a positive trend. Education in this field is beginning to develop which is connected to the spread of information and knowledge about the subject among the public. Small farms develop their commercial potential, yard sale is developing. Cooperation among agricultural businesses is improving. Education materials are being developed, discussion platforms have appeared with suggestions of particular steps forward. There are more and more examples of good practice and motivation that inspire other enterprises. Thanks to a lot of successful social enterprises stereotypes are broken in terms of employing disabled employees. Despite the challenging steps of social agriculture, we encounter weak interconnectedness among sectors and systemic support that would help more significantly when it comes to projects of social agriculture.

In the conditions of the Slovak Republic, a private farmer-led approach seems ideal, for which social farming allows diversification of partial sources of income, or there may be an agreed extent of cooperation with non-profit organizations and farmer and social and health service agencies. Such an approach best illustrates the necessary flexibility of co-existence and co-operation between the private farmer and the social and health services in relation to the elderly, the physically and mentally handicapped, or the long-term unemployed people on the farm.

A deeper analysis of social farming urgently needs the support of research in the fields of therapy and medicine, in the field of social work in agriculture, and in the field of vocational agricultural training. Particular attention must also be paid to the selection, training of those involved. Training and skills development needs to be prepared and offered to those responsible and to the target group. There is also a need to map existing projects under social farming, network them, examine their impacts, problems and needs.

In the Slovak Republic too, social farming should be supported by EU institutions and the government. This requires the establishment of a legal framework for social farming at different levels of governance. Establish a central administration for social agriculture, facilitate access to targeted support from public authorities in the integration of supporting structural funds and appropriate promotion. Recognition of social farming as part of rural environment and economic development would enable the use of all initiatives supported and financed by the European Structural Funds. Rural development policy could, following innovation, make use of support mainly in Axis III (Quality of life in rural areas and diversification of the rural economy) and IV (LEADER).

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## POLAND

The concept of a care farm should be considered in functional terms and not in legal terms. The issue under discussion combines the implementation of social policy and agricultural policy objectives. The care farm is part of the process of deinstitutionalization of social assistance in Poland, as well as a way of managing unused farm resources and strengthening the role of small and medium-sized farms. The most important motivation for undertaking care services on a farm is the desire to help another person, rather than profit goals, but the vision of gaining additional income is a significant factor. The main source of funding for stays in care farms should be provided by the municipality. Due to its political position, it is conceptually and decisively involved in rural development. European funds, especially funds from the EAFRD, should also play a major role in financing care activities on farms. Because of the lack of legal provisions relating to the issue of care farms, legal standards should be established to regulate the establishment, operation and financing of care farms, at the same time introducing a normative definition of this concept into the Polish legal order. Regulating the issue in question in a single law has its advantages. Undoubtedly, clearly defined and transparent legal regulations contained in a single act will contribute to an increase in the interest of farmers in expanding their activities by providing care services. In addition, the issuance of a separate law may be due to the important role that care farms play in building social, environmental and economic capital in rural areas. The concept of developing care farms should involve cooperation between farmers and local government units, agricultural advisors (agricultural advisory centres), or NGOs. When creating the model of care farms, the Polish legislator should refer to the legislative acquis and practical experience of the European Union Member States.

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## ITALY

Italy appears to be a country where the conditions for this type of activity are favourable. The mild climate, the landscapes, the number of rural areas in their natural state, the remoteness from the city and chaos, the wealth of raw materials available and the sustainability of local food products. All these aspects allow social farms to grow enormously. There are currently around 3.000 social farms in Italy that are involved in a wide variety of activities. The variety of services offered is one of the strengths of social farming in Italy. Educational farms deal with the education of the youngest children, from kindergarten to high school. In addition, there is a whole active plan of food education, whereby children learn about the agri-food products of their land. Another type of activity concerning the younger age groups is pet therapy and



the care of autistic or disabled children. Other activities take place with the elderly, who suffer from loneliness in cities. Social farms enhance individuals, communities, but also territory.

Many social farms in Italy, through regional or national funding, have revitalised the environment, restored farms, and made them ready to welcome the community. Another fundamental aspect is the reintegration into employment of the most disadvantaged groups in society. Ex-drug addicts, ex-convicts, or psychiatric patients through work in the countryside regain their value and self-confidence, with incredible beneficial effects on their health. Social farms in Italy also involve confiscated lands from the mafia, with precarious or crisis workers. However, it is important to state the positive aspects, but also the negative ones. A large part of these farms depend exclusively on public, regional, national and European funds. This is the reason why the activities of social farms are not constant and continuous, and often the workers find themselves, once again, precarious. However, many opportunities are in place and many advantages can still be exploited. For example, access to ethical markets could be fostered. Access to GAS (Solidarity Purchasing Groups), a tool for entrepreneurs to obtain more favourable prices in order to repay the higher cost of production, could be encouraged. In addition, the importance of a product that has been produced on a social farm could be better communicated; this will certainly catch the consumer's attention. In recent times, there has been a great interest in sustainability and respect for the land and the community, especially in the younger generations. This is both on the side of the service users and the farmers.

In short, a lot has been invested in social farms and it is certainly a booming sector in Italy, especially in Apulia. However, much can still be done, it can and must still grow and improve.

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## GERMANY

From the German point of view, Social Farming needs improved framework conditions that shall be listed as the following list of needs as an outlook for the future.

It needs ...

- interdisciplinary cooperation between the sectors of agriculture, social affairs, health and education between the ministries and at all other levels;
- Clear contact persons and responsibilities concerning advice, support and coaching of interested parties and those who are already active;
- Efficient advice on the creation and implementation of project and operational concepts; Offers must be created and matched with demand;
- the implementation of the opportunities for inclusion and participation offered by national laws, for example through innovative participation support;
- the support of networks at regional, national and international levels;
- an appreciation of social farming for public health promotion;
- the commitment to and financial support for social farming projects as part of regional economic promotion and structural development, as well as consideration in legislation;



- Promotion of innovative approaches to school-agriculture cooperation in the sense of education for sustainable development (ESD) and practical educational offers;
- Training and further education opportunities for newcomers and those active in social farming with an agricultural or social professional background.

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## APPENDIX

### Results of the national SWOT-Analysis

The following annex contains the four different tables from each country regarding strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats regarding Social Farming in each of the partner countries. In bold letters, the most important points have been highlighted.

### A.1 Strength

#### CZECH REPUBLIC

- **Natural integration of disadvantaged people**
- **The therapeutic effect of being in nature, caring for plants and animals**
- **Protecting the environment and respecting the land and nature in general**
- Attractiveness of stories in product marketing, attractiveness for the media
- Local community and local economy support
- Socially and publicly beneficial
- Diversification of production, healthy, high-quality, locally available food
- A combination of services, agritourism, educational activities, environmental care and environmental protection
- Ability to provide social and economic benefits for the local community
- Community building and supportive local networks
- Keeping jobs in rural areas

#### SLOVAKIA

- Abundance of high-quality agricultural land – Slovakia is a country with an agricultural legacy and potential
- **A well-formed Working Group for Social Farming in Slovakia**
- **Social Economy Act**
- Public procurement law favouring social enterprises
- Interest in development and cooperation on the part of the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic
- **An open platform for discussion and raising awareness - creation of an annual scientific conference entitled Agriculture as an actor of social inclusion - AGASI**





## **POLAND**

- Farm capacity - providing care services to the elderly will usually be an easier activity than therapies aimed at other groups. Also, the amount of work that will need to be done to adapt the farm for care activities will be less in this case.
- Additional source of income for farms.
- Those setting up care farms for seniors will find it easier to acquire the relevant competences than those intending to offer more specialised services for 'more difficult' groups of people requiring support,
- Vocational activation of carers of dependent persons.
- Care farms will translate into increased employment levels in Poland.

## **ITALY**

- Good responsiveness to land needs
- Strong inclusiveness of the farming environment
- Variety of services offered
- Innovation of activities, made available to society
- Creation of sources of income, for the most disadvantaged and economically fragile groups
- Support for even the most disadvantaged businesses, where it is difficult to find labour and have a positive relationship between labour costs and final revenue
- Excellent therapeutic potential of the agricultural context, linked to the characteristics of working in a rural environment. These characteristics are: simplicity and comprehension, the flexibility of roles, timing and tolerance of error, completeness and uniqueness of the production cycle, which make it possible to directly and easily link individual labour input to the economic result.
- Activities are based on collaboration, this creates motivation, a sense of usefulness and integration.
- The wide-open spaces of Italy and, in particular, of Apulia, also favoured by the mild climate, contact with nature is healthy and healing.
- Diversification of the company's activities, with positive results, both for territorial needs (work inclusion, education, recreation, etc.) and for the company itself, for income integration and reputation enhancement, since it is a company with a social impregnation. For the sale of agri-food products, for example, Masseria Salecchia (interviewee), stated that the products acquire even more value when, in addition to being organic, local and healthy, the consumer knows that they have been produced by people with pathologies or disabilities, or any other characteristic, for which they are marginalised in the city.

## **GERMANY**

- Strong intrinsic motivation and personal engagement of many stakeholders
- High level of development of integration and services for the target groups
- “Natural environment” and natural relationships
- Very diverse farms and workplaces adapted to needs



- Partly own processing and marketing of the farm's own products
- High food quality (mainly organic farming)
- Strong impact on rural development and value creation in rural areas
- Monopolistic and well-functioning structures e.g. WfbM
- Networking Structures (DASoL)
- Social farming is the first field of social work where the topic of social inclusion can really be seen. Nowadays it is a big goal of our society to implement the topic of inclusion within our society.
- Social agriculture helps small farming businesses to be able to exist
- Social agriculture means practicing farming with other people or within a community.
- You are connected with people who produce the food and at the same time you will get a special connection towards the food you eat.
- People are seen as living human beings and not “cogs in the gears” just as people who work
- It is a real need for people with learning disabilities to be a part of a community and social farming can provide this
- Farm work outside affects the health of a person in a positive way
- People who work on social farms are often very passionate about their work and this behavior otherwise you can hardly find in institutional care
- Because of their history farms are predestined to work together with other people on a farm and not just only to live and work together with their biological family

## A.2 Weaknesses

### CZECH REPUBLIC

- The administrative burden connected with managing a social farm
- **Often operating in the shadow economy**
- Legal and accounting levels of farm operation are not sufficient
- Personnel burden, especially among farm managers, pressure for universality
- Insufficient “special insurance” for disadvantaged people
- Missing legislation
- **Weak/zero communication and cooperation within the departments of the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, the Ministry for Regional Development, and the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports**
- Non-existent certification/social farm “label”
- **Weak cooperation of patronage organizations, the academic sphere, agricultural organizations, public administration, and government departments**
- Limited possibility of education in the field, non-existent professional centers
- Limited financing or investment
- Difficulty with competition from larger, more established farms
- Low skills in the promotion of the farm and products

- Social farming is at the border of several sectors (social and agricultural) and is subject to the demands of both sectors

*"Safety, health protection at work or better to be alone on the tractor than to risk someone breaking their leg, the certainty of money for the repair of the tract rather than a visit from the labor inspector."*

Ferdinand Raditsch, Květná zahrada (social farm)

## SLOVAKIA

- Weak awareness and lack of education in the field
- Low support from state officials
- **Rare implementation**
- Little information about social farming – the term social farming is very little unknown
- **The fact that sectors are not interconnected (e.g.: the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development with the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family)**
- Little awareness of its benefits
- **Availability of land – fragmentation of land (majority of agricultural land belongs to or is rented from large agribusinesses)**

## POLAND

- The difficulty of having to adapt the farm to the requirements of the care business.
- Insufficient knowledge of the principles of care farming.
- Lack of skills in caring for the elderly.
- Lack of experience in non-agricultural activities.
- Ignorance of the law and the rules of care provision and financial issues.
- The need for specialised courses and training to acquire the necessary competences during the establishment phase and to improve them during the development of care activities.
- Lack of cooperation with local government.
- **Lack of training, clear funding system, uncertainty about continuity of funding, need for specialised training and courses, need for specialised staff...**

## ITALY

- Until now the regulatory system has been rather lacking and fragmented, due to the different maturity of the various sectors involved in recognising social agriculture as a valid model.
- Scarce availability of scientific references that can evaluate and accredit the experiences already underway, as well as encourage the transfer of skills from experienced subjects to new ones, who already find it difficult to start up initiatives for reasons linked to bureaucracy, the multi-sectoral nature of the bodies involved, and the scarce availability of land resources to allocate to social farming activities
- Lack of technical assistance for new projects due to the scarce presence of appropriate guidance and consultancy services in the area



- Lack of strong animation and promotion networks. Many farmers are still unaware of or do not recognise social farming activities, or do not yet possess an adequate culture for undertaking such initiatives. The risk that can be incurred in these cases, some experts claim, is that farmers decide to engage in these experiences exclusively to make a profit, motivated also by the presence of public funding, thus nullifying the true motivations and principles of solidarity and humanity that should instead characterise social farming services.

## GERMANY

- Ambiguity of terms (social farming)
- Uncertainty about a suitable form of organization for a social farm
- Diversity and different approaches (e.g. different target groups)
- Specialization of the farms on certain target groups (segregative)
- Lack of transparency and knowledge
- Lack of recognition and support from society and related areas (medicine, social work, education)
- Too little public awareness
- economic pressure
- Bureaucratic and legal hurdles
- Lack of capacity for networking and exchange
- Different framework conditions in the federal states
- The balance between life and consciousness is not easy to meet on social farms. It means that to have the idea for realizing a social farming project is one thing but to be active and try to develop and improve it is another aspect.
- Because on a farm there always is so much work to do there is not so much space to reflect on some things, to change things and to really communicate with others.
- Because of the daily workload it often is not easy to take care of yourself and not doing too much

## A.3 Opportunities

### CZECH REPUBLIC

- Increasing demand for locally grown, sustainable food
- **Partnerships with local businesses and organizations**
- **Powerful stories of social farmers (good for marketing)**
- **Interest of young farmers**
- Increasing support of less developed areas
- Increasing support of opportunities for disadvantaged people
- Increasing support of projects with a positive impact
- Increased demand for staying in nature (diversification of activities - agrotourism)
- Raising awareness of social farming
- Enshrining social agriculture in law, a product of social farming



- Establishment of a separate department for social farming
- Enhancing rural social work and social integration in the countryside
- Enhancing the protection of the environment and respecting the land and nature in general

#### SLOVAKIA

- **Increasing interest on the side of social services providers**
- **Increasing activities in the field of social farming**
- **Great level of communication with the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development**
- Possibility to start negotiations with other ministries (e.g.: Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education)

#### POLAND

- Greater availability of social services at the local level.
- An aging population - increasing numbers of older people in need of care.
- Increasing longevity - many people have to give up their working lives due to the need to care for elderly family members.
- Out-migration of young people from rural areas in many regions of Poland - need to provide care for lonely elderly people.
- Creating local community-based social service providers, involving private actors in the process.
- Availability of funding - numerous funding opportunities are now available for the establishment of care facilities for seniors, similarly, funding is available for those wishing to become entrepreneurs or groups wishing or entities wishing to establish social cooperatives.
- Through its therapeutic activities for inclusion in the world of work and social inclusion, as well as its pedagogical activities, social farming undeniably offers a high-value public service and contributes to sustainable development; moreover, thanks to the diversity of activities it entails and its underlying dynamism, it can have a significant impact on local development.
- The enrichment of the existing system will allow significant savings in local government budgets. The funds freed up will be able to be allocated to investment and development-oriented activities.
- Introducing new functions to farms will prevent the de-agrarianisation of the countryside.
- An important element of the concept of green care in Poland is that it must be provided on actual functioning farms. Using their resources to provide social services is an economically rational solution.

#### ITALY

- Ethical markets, access to these markets could be increased and increased. Niche markets where access is favoured (small-scale production, differentiated on organic and biodynamic scales)
- Encouraging access to GAS (Solidarity Purchasing Groups), a tool for entrepreneurs to obtain more favourable prices, to repay the higher cost incurred for production.
- Great interest shown by young people and women farmers in the sector, which they approach with innovative strategies, paying greater attention to the quality of production, environmental protection, and the needs of the land.

## GERMANY

- Increasing interest and inquiries from target groups and private individuals
- Need for new forms of social services
- New concepts, paradigm shift
- New forms of economic cooperation
- Potential for providers of social work
- Potential for revitalizing rural areas
- Use and expand existing networks
- political support
- Learning from projects and examples from other European countries
- Develop new services (e.g. landscape maintenance)
- Federal law on social inclusion (“other suppliers of social services”)
- Social agriculture builds a bridge between urban and rural areas
- It gives a possibility to shape rural areas and through these new situations can develop
- It gives the opportunity for people to connect with each other and to help each other out.
- The profession of the farmer automatically implements that a farmer is passionate about the work

## A.4 Threats

### CZECH REPUBLIC

- **Risky business** (employment of people with special needs)
- Insufficient support from the state, insufficient legal definition, and bureaucracy
- **Weak/zero communication and cooperation within the departments of the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, the Ministry for Regional Development, and the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports**
- Low awareness of the lay public and Public Administration
- Lack of wider awareness of social farming and its positive impacts
- **Lack of financial resources from public finances and subsidies, uncertainty in obtaining them. Low interest of workers in agriculture, low interest from the disabled (salary differences)**
- Competition of large industrial agricultural operations
- Difficulties in securing stable financing or investment and regulatory

### SLOVAKIA

- Lack of space where experience, inspiration and advice can be shared – lack of platform and networking activities
- Differing expectations and attitudes on the side of donors and implementers
- **Unwillingness of people in the agricultural sector to accept clients**
- **Unsatisfactory intersectoral relations and mutual expectations**
- **Insufficient conditions for the development of small farms**



- **Limited sources for long-term institutionalized financing**
- Little expertise and capacity to measure impact
- Little awareness of marketing in sales of agricultural products
- Unfamiliarity with standard work procedures and undeveloped working habits in case of the long-term unemployed, the handicapped and socially disadvantaged people, social disorientation, problems connected with regime measures, unawareness of value systems, physical limitations
- Concerns and fear of employers regarding work attendance, diligence and responsibility of potential employees with disadvantages and financial concerns
- Risk of high employee turnover
- Pressure from employers to pay wages outside the valid contract because of executions

## **POLAND**

- Lack of financial resources for needed investments on the farm.
- The need to change insurance from KRUS to ZUS.
- Legal framework - lack of coordination between policies and institutions concerned.
- Innovative social farming projects are often developed in an isolated way, without knowledge of similar projects or exchange of experiences. It is therefore crucial to create and strengthen a social farming network to exchange experiences, learn about different projects and draw attention to best practices.
- Lack of a clear funding system, uncertainty in the continuity of funding, need for specialised staff.

## **ITALY**

- Possible competition, for resources and market, with the world of social cooperation, as well as among farmers themselves.
- Poor coordination between the various public institutions involved in such practices. If it is, in fact, true that one of the fundamental characteristics of social agriculture is its multidisciplinary nature, as it involves a wide range of activities (agricultural, social, health, labour, educational, justice), and acts as a bridge between them, allowing operators in the various sectors to find a common language useful for their collaboration, the same synergy is not, however, found within the various administrations.
- Poor communication between farmers and owners of social farms, which hampers the growth of the area and the farms.

## **GERMANY**

- Agriculture and social affairs as two weak partners
- Large and inflexible structures of social integration
- Federalist structures make transparency and transferability more difficult
- Increasing economic pressure
- Lack of capacity for commitment to bring the topic into political programs
- Unresolved need for quality assurance
- Unresolved need for participation support (case management)



- Insufficient financing of advisory structures
- Lack of basic funding for networking
- Insufficient opportunities for education and training
- “Everything stands and falls with people” – People who can live and work on a social farm and who do not get too exhausted because of the workload. People who can take the responsibility and can also take the risk.
- That the surrounding network is big enough to be able to support social agriculture in a good way