

EU CAP NETWORK FOCUS GROUP SOCIAL FARMING AND INNOVATIONS

Quality assurance in social farming

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Introduction

This Mini Paper focuses on the need for a quality assurance system for Social Farming (SF) in Europe. This is to ensure that certain qualities of services, competencies and ethical values are associated with SF that paying customers will recognise and be willing to pay for.

The reality and conditions in the European countries are very diverse. There are examples of countries with local or national quality systems for SF and others where it doesn't exist. In these countries, some institutions/farmers felt the need to develop at least one brand of SF associated with their own products (trademarks), to differentiate them among potential customers and for the development of a brand, some quality criteria were created. So, for Social Farmers, even if there isn't an official Quality Assurance System for Social Farming in Europe or in their own country, it is possible to define their own criteria.

But are there any benefits of a quality assurance system for social farming in Europe? Yes, there are. It is important to understand that a quality assurance system comes with directions and standards for economic, social, and ecological sustainability. Private farms, institutions, and with SF projects will always benefit from these guidelines. But there are also other reasons:

- › To guarantee values such as Transparency and Confidence, decreasing the risk of social washing or free labour;
- › Standards for funding applications, investors and customers who are immediately aware of the products or services differentiation;
- › Quality certification can be an interesting added value for a marketing strategy;
- › It allows all organizations/farms that provides services also in the social sector to engage in external evaluations of process, outcomes or even impacts of their own activities, at a European level.

This focus group recognises that there is a need to look into this matter on a national level but some basic aspects, preferable, could be on EU level. That would strengthen SF position regardless of country.

The certification process that leads to an official label/brand, considering quality indicators and others, could be essential for the development of Social Farming in countries where it is not recognizable as a social, economic and/or farming activity. For the European countries open, this certification process can be useful for innovation and development of SF, creating new opportunities of investments and investigation.



Dissertation

Overall, social farming (SF) in Europe includes a variety of ecosystem services such as biodiversity, sustainable living environment and natural ecological circles. On-farm basis, the key issues cover vast varieties of aspects ranging from the physical setting, provided service to social and ethical values. In addition, the type of SF businesses varies both within each region or country but also between countries. There are private own farms, cooperatives, municipalities, and official/governmental that run SF. This per se is a challenge when a quality assurance system is established. There are already several types of quality assurance systems existing in Europe. Those differ in terms of criteria (inclusion and exclusion criteria) and the extent of what is included in terms of aspects and who is “the” legitimated evaluator. Still, there is a need for basic qualities that are mutual for all SF in Europe, which would in turn strengthen the selling point for SF services and products. Below is a European review of the different existing quality systems, as an inspiration to develop quality systems and transparency of products and services of social farming. That in turn can improve relationships between social farms and local health/social services.

In **Poland**, activities in the field of social farming are undertaken in the agricultural sector with the active participation of a public agricultural advisory services. Work is underway for 4 types of social farms:

- › care farms
- › therapeutic farms
- › educational farms
- › social inclusion farms

At present, only educational farms in Poland have a quality assurance system.

‘Zagroda Edukacyjna’ [Educational Farm] is a registered trademark for farms combining agricultural activities with professional educational services. Only facilities verified and recommended by the agricultural advisory system, located in rural areas and conducting didactic classes based on their own agricultural resources, have the right to use the name 'Educational Farm' and the logotype.



Recommended farms form the Polish National Network of Educational Farms coordinated by the Agricultural Advisory Center Branch in Krakow. The network operates on the basis of voluntary cooperation on three levels: central (national Agricultural Advisory Center in Krakow), regional (16 regional Agricultural Advisory Centres) and local (over 300 educational farms). The network does not have legal personality.

The concept of Educational Farms is based on the potential of a farm, its unique technical infrastructure, production and farming activities, the skills and experience of farmers, the values of a rural family and the local tradition and culture. In the formal



layer, the thematic scope of classes conducted by individual homesteads concerns the implementation of at least two of the five educational goals indicated in the regulations, i.e. in the scope of:

1. plant production,
2. animal production,
3. processing of agricultural products,
4. environmental and consumer awareness, and
5. the heritage of the material culture of the village, traditional professions, handicrafts and folk art.

Educational Farms promotes sustainable and ecological agriculture, agricultural biodiversity and seasonality, traditional products and regional cuisine, as well as a number of other aspects of rurality. They are also open to integration and therapeutic activities for people in need of support.

Regarding care farms, within the scope of the project "GROWID: Care farms in the face of rural change and demographic challenges", a model of a care farm was developed as a set of the most optimal legal, institutional and organizational solutions for Poland. An inter-ministerial team appointed by the Minister of Agriculture is currently working on the final shape of the model and the introduction of care farms to the Polish legal order.

The assumptions of the model were developed on the basis of social and economic research and an analysis of good domestic and foreign practices. Among others, the quality systems of care farms from the Netherlands, Norway and Italy were analysed¹, which we quote below:

In the **Netherlands** conditions that care farms must meet are as follow:

- › Owning a farm, which means that there is one or more buildings on the farm, i.e. a stable,
- › greenhouse, barn, house and appropriate care and/or own selling facilities.
- › Having space in the yard and in the form of a meadow, arable land, garden, orchard, nursery or greenhouse.
- › Conducting agricultural activity – professionally or as a hobby in the field of agriculture, animal husbandry, orchards, flower cultivation, etc.
- › Owning agricultural crops and/or livestock and products from the farm, such as dairy products or eggs for the welfare farm's own needs and/or for sale.
- › Involving charges in activities on the farm according to their abilities and preferences in accordance with the objectives set out in the care plan.
- › Having sufficient knowledge of agriculture and healthcare to guide people in their care and meet care needs – a principle that applies to both the farmer and his employees.

¹ Katalog dobrych praktyk w zakresie powstawania i funkcjonowania gospodarstw opiekuńczych [Catalog of good practices in the field of establishing and functioning of care farms], CDR Kraków 2022



Care farms in the Netherlands identified are Kwaliteit Laat Je Zien's own quality mark!
 (Quality shows itself!)



The quality mark has existed since 2002 and is an industry quality mark of the Federation of Agriculture and Care. It has been developed for and in partnership with care farmers to help care farms comply with laws and regulations. The Federation of Agriculture and Care issues certificates for the provision of care services for three years, while farm owners are required to submit, once a year, detailed reports on the entire farm. The quality label promotes the unique values and characteristics of care farms as special places where agriculture and care meet - regardless of whether it is a large farm or just a small vegetable garden.

In **Norway**, the unique name 'Inn på tunet' is used for a care farms. The name was registered in 2011. Inn på tunet is defined as properly prepared and confirmed quality social services provided on the farm. The services ensure the increase of competences, personal development and well-being of the charges. A social farm is a used property for agriculture, forestry or horticulture. Service offer is related to the farm and life and work in it.



All farms wishing to call themselves 'Inn på tunet' must be approved based on the IPT quality standard. It is developed under the Norwegian Agricultural Quality System (KSL) and is operated by the Matmerk Norsk Norwegian Food Foundation. Approved farms are certified for two years.

In **Italy**, there is a National frameworks Law (Law 18 August 2015, n. 141, Provisions on social farming) that is in the first phase of its implementation: it has established the essential principles with the aim of helping to launch and guide the legislative action of the Regions. However, social farming is still a difficult model to define. Fourteen Italian regions (out of a total of twenty) and the Autonomous Province of Bolzano have so far introduced legal regulations relating to social farms. In the remaining regions, there is no system for social farms registration and operation. Some regions have set up identification marks for the recognition of social farms.

In the Veneto region, the areas of activity related to social farming were enacted by the Regional Council in the regional law of 28 June 2013. The law introduces a regional register of farms engaged in social farming activities. Registered farms use the name and logo "Social Farm in Veneto".





The regional list of social farms is divided into 4 sections corresponding to the four types of promoted activities:

- › "Socio-professional internships" - entities that implement an active policy of social and professional integration for disadvantaged and vulnerable groups on a farm,
- › "Independence and rehabilitation courses" - entities implementing the paths of independence and rehabilitation,
- › "Educational, social, training initiatives" - entities whose aim is to learn about the rural world, agricultural biological and production cycles. They are addressed to minors: agro-kindergartens, agro-nurseries, centres for children conducting recreational and didactic activities. The target group is also adults and the elderly.
- › "Social Reintegration of Prisoners and Former Prisoners" – entities that, as part of their agricultural activity, implement social reintegration projects for minors and adults.

In Italy there is the pilot experience of the national label for social farming “I buoni frutti” (The good fruits) conceived and created through a self-sustainable project by AICARE with the University of Pisa. The creation of this label for social farming is based on social franchising model, with the aim of enhancing social farming products and promoting social farming projects through the dissemination of tested models for development of social farming in Italy (see: 6. References). The pilot project has 7 affiliates located in five regions, which employ 48 people, 20 of whom are vulnerable individuals, with a total turnover of around 900 thousand euros. The project has shown some benefits: it allows to build a network of social farms, to offer a training for operators and to map and advertise the services. At the same time, it has highlighted some obstacles: complex procedures in the assessment of the requirements for the admission of affiliates in the network, high costs, competition between existing national networks. This project could be improved by simplifying processes, using technology and therefore reducing costs. This would allow more social farms to join and to test guaranteeing uniform standards of services more.

Other experiences of quality assurance on products and processes are those relating to territorial routes. In some areas, networks of farms and other public and private actors have developed over the years, worktables, have been organized and territorial brands or logos have been created. The products sold in local markets (short supply chain) bear recognition of the farm, the territory and the project from which they originate.

In **Sweden**, on a regional level i.e. in the county of Skane (Skåne), the healthcare authorities have implemented nature-based interventions (NBI) in the form of social farms as an add-on to ongoing treatments for patients suffering from mental illnesses (Pálsdóttir & Kyrö Wissler, 2021a). The farms are evaluated through official procurement and are qualified for delivering services over a period of five years. The quality assurance system concerns indoor and outdoor settings, the program and the staff running the intervention. The system is based on years of research on NBI and evidence-based design for health-promoting outdoor environments (Pálsdóttir & Kyrö



Wissler, 2021b). The intervention model is a collaboration between care units that refers patients to a qualified farm. The patient can choose a SF of her/his choice for a stay of 24 days (4 hours/day) during eight weeks. Once at the farm, the patient is named “participant” as the farm offers rest and recovery without a therapeutic goal or a therapist (Kyrö Wissler & Pálsdóttir, 2021). The project is evaluated internally (by staff) and externally by experts in the field. Also, the client perspective and care units are included but not on an everyday basis. The quality dialogue with the SF providers is important during the contract time. As a part of the work, the SF farmers are obliged to keep and submit an online diary/log book for their work (entered into a secured database). This concerns the program and what is happening in the intervention. The information serves as a basis for discussion and a control visit twice a year by experts within the topics, along with representatives from the health care authorities. This is done to ensure the quality and benefits of the services provided by the social farms.

In **Portugal** CERCICA can be mentioned. CERCICA is a social cooperative founded in 1976 by parents as an alternative to the regular education for children with disabilities. It is based in Cascais Municipality, near Lisbon, Portugal. In 2013, it was possible to start a new project of organic farming aimed to the production of dry herbs and aromatics and medical plants. This project enabled the increase of the occupational and therapeutical activities, in addition to the creation of a new job for disabled people (Brito, 2016). The new products were differentiated from all others. Agricultural production, harvesting, drying, defoliation and packaging, more than 80% of all production line, was made with the help of citizens with mental disabilities. It was important to differentiate these products and the development of a logo/brand was essential using the key sentence: *Social Farming, agriculture for inclusion* (Brito, 2017). The figures below show the final label and the dry herbs package. In Portugal there are few examples of private social farms, the great majority are from non-profit organizations, municipalities. So, for CERCICA it was important to create the label for the following reasons:

- › in a very simple and fast way, it was possible to tell the story of the product to the consumer;
- › differentiation of the product from similar ones in the market;
- › quality of the product linked to ethical values and organic.



General Guidelines for a quality certification assurance in Social Farming at National/European level

1. The [EQUASS – European Quality in Social Services](#) is an initiative of the EPR - European Platform of Rehabilitation, in compliance with the European quality requirements in the provision of Social Services. It aims to improve the social services sector through the involvement of sector organizations in quality, continuous improvement, learning and development, to guarantee the quality of services to its users. That means they can prove the quality of social services to the people served and other interested parties. The EPR is the European entity that manages the certification implementation in Europe, with the members belonging to all countries.
2. A General Guidelines for a quality certification assurance in Social Farming at National/European level, can be developed considering social, financial, and environmental principles.
3. In the Annex we present 6 Principles of Quality at the first level, guided by Criterias, which in turn can have several Indicators, which will be primarily responsible for the operationalization of the quality principles at the organization/farm. We present only some examples for the indicators because they can be very diverse from country to country.

Final Remarks

- › Based on principles of quality of social service and agricultural production and the EQUASS, it is possible to provide general guidelines for a Quality Certification Assurance of SF in Europe.
- › For the certification implementation at a European level, it is necessary to have a main entity, as the EPR (European Platform of Rehabilitation) or a European Social Farming Platform. In each country, there should have an Association/Federation responsible for the transposition and implementation of regulations at the national level.
- › In the case that there isn't an association at a national level, it is advisable that social farmers and organizations that promote social agriculture activities can promote a formal entity, such as an Association, Federation, or Platform, which can implement the regulations. Among others, this entity can promote the activity of social farming with patrons, financiers and entities that manage European funds for the social sector and/ or agricultural.
- › The certification process that leads to an official label/brand, considering quality indicators and others, could be essential for the development and innovation of Social Farm projects across Europe. The social services provided by social farming should be considered positive externalities by policy decision-makers. It can be linked and valorised as the High social value (HSV) farmland in similar with the High nature value (HNV) farmland.



References

- › Brito, Olga. 2016. “Agricultura Social na CERCICA: uma agricultura para a inclusão”. Associação Portuguesa de Horticultura. I Colóquio de Horticultura Social e Terapêutica. Cascais.
- › Social franchising and social farming, for promoting the co-production of knowledge and values: the IBF case (F.P. Di Iacovo, R. Moruzzo, P. Scarpellini, A. Galasso. S. Paolini) - 2nd International Conference Agriculture in an Urbanizing Society, ISBN 978-88-908960-3-3 (Rome, Italia, 14-17 settembre 2015). Abstract at <https://arpi.unipi.it/handle/11568/787077?mode=simple> Paper at <https://app.box.com/s/8hi1skt5loe5n4ccdgn2q6m4x4wm88uv>
- › EQUASS certification system and indicators:
[https://equass.be/EQUASS Principles Criteria and Indicators 05-20.pdf](https://equass.be/EQUASS_Principles_Criteria_and_Indicators_05-20.pdf)



ANNEX

The table below gathers 6 Principles of Quality at the national level, guided by criterias, which in turn can have several Indicators, which will be primarily responsible for the operationalization of the quality principles at the organization/farm. We present only some examples for the indicators because they can be very diverse from country to country

| PRINCIPALS OF QUALITY | CRITERIA/S | INDICATORS (SOME EXAMPLES) |
|--|---|---|
| 1. LEADERSHIP: GOVERNANCE, LEADERSHIP AND SOCIAL RESPONSABILITY | Mission, vision and values, Quality culture, Long term quality goals, continuous learning, innovation, Annual planning, Social inclusion commitment, Economical sustainability at farm/organisation level, Environmental sustainability at farm level | |
| 2. STAFF | Selection of qualified staff based on social and technical skills, knowledge, and competences; permanent requirement for competences and annual evaluation, national legislation for health, safety and appropriate working conditions and adequate reception to the beneficiaries and staff. | |
| 3. PARTNERSHIP | The organization/farm works in partnership with relevant stakeholders to ensure needed services and social inclusion of the beneficiaries. The results and benefits of its partnership for the organization and beneficiaries are evaluated regularly. | |
| 4. RIGHTS AND ETHICS | Rights of beneficiaries (human rights) and staff; ethical behaviour and wellbeing for staff, person served and their families or caregivers, insurance the respect and dignity of staff and the beneficiaries; insurance the respect for the environment and biodiversity at farm level. | |
| 5. RESULTS ORIENTATION | The organization/farm identifies its Business and Service results with reports: Financial, business and activities result with periodic reviews. Measures the satisfaction of beneficiaries, stakeholders, staff by external/internal evaluation. Actively disseminates the results of performance to staff, beneficiaries, and stakeholders. | Financial results periodically validated through independent review, to ensure financial continuity & sustainability. (Documentation of business and financial performance); |



| | | |
|---|---|--|
| <p>6. CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT</p> | <p>The organization/farm defines and implements a system of continuous improvement of results: social, financial, and environmental at farm level; Operates mechanisms, which provide information to understand the needs of beneficiaries, staff, funders, and stakeholders. It initiates improvement initiatives.</p> | <p>Demonstration of comparisons of methods, activities, results, and outcomes between other organizations/farms. Demonstration of the use of the information about future needs of the beneficiaries, to develop and improve services.</p> |
| <p>Outdoor environment – Evidence based desing</p> | | |

