

EU CAP NETWORK FOCUS GROUP SOCIAL FARMING AND INNOVATIONS

Brokerage and advisory support

**Biancamaria Torquati (coord.), Elzbieta Dziasek,
Angela Galasso, Eliška Hudcová, Maria Partalidou,
Thomas van Elsen**

July 2023



1. Introduction – Motivation

1.1 What's the minipaper about? (problem)

This mini-paper starts with the observation that the level of knowledge about social farming among farmers, social workers, and policymakers is low and insufficient in many countries.

For this reason, in social farming practices, it is necessary to set up training activities to prepare qualified advisors. They must be able to combine the rules set by the public policymakers, the needs of the social farmers, and the needs highlighted by social workers, taking due account of the different users and of the different paths of social agriculture activities.

In order for advisors to support social farmers, they need to be aware of its value and gain knowledge on how to stimulate and empower the farming community to take up such activities within their farms

1.2 Why is this minipaper needed?

Social farming involves collective learning processes and the construction of networks, which are possible through the participation of various subjects of the territory.

It is, therefore, necessary to understand how tools for technical assistance and training and support to businesses can be set up, define recognized training paths, disseminate information on social farming among policy makers, develop model contracts between farms, social cooperatives and/or public bodies.

We need to understand how to foster partnerships and discussion forums. They are central to the promotion of innovative projects in rural areas.

In rural areas, new development models require the involvement of several actors: public sector operators, farmers, and third-party operators.

There are a number of issues that need to be addressed:

- Who and how can support social farmers?
- What role do – and can - brokers and advisors (either private or public) play?
- How do we spread knowledge on social farming amongst mainstream agricultural advisors/brokers?
- How can the results of the research be transferred to farmers?



2. Dissertation

Extension and advisory organizations have multiple roles to play during the development of innovative activities in agriculture: they have to act as change agents, value extractors, and knowledge and information brokers (Charatsari et al., 2020).

Although the rise of social farming spawned a growing interest in the issue of skills that extensionists or advisors should acquire to facilitate the development of social agriculture, the focus remains centered on individuals/ case studies rather than on organizations.

The issue “Brokerage and Advisory support” of social farming is not very present in the scientific literature, which means that little research has been carried out on this topic. Specific works mostly refer to presentations made at conferences describing practical experiences (Paolini, 2015; Król, 2019). In any case social farming is an opportunity and a new arena for farm extension/advisory service (Di Iacovo and O’Connor, 2009).

Therefore, it is necessary to build efficient Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation System (AKIS) in all countries to support generating innovation and exchanging knowledge between advisors, farmers and foresters, researchers, rural networks, national and regional authorities, media, all people involved in education and training, and consumers.

EIP operational groups and European projects are certainly useful, but these are temporary, and limited in time: it is necessary to understand how to move to an innovation transfer “system”.

Who and how can support social farmers?

In Italy, for example, following the MSc in Ethical-Social Agriculture AICARE – Italian Agency for Responsible and Ethical Countryside and Agriculture (a network of Independent consultants) was born. AICARE¹ has relationships with universities and other public and private organizations. The activities are financed through public financings such as rural development programs (RDPs), partners and sponsors, and the voluntary work of members. The AICARE’s work is more comparable to that of the innovation broker than to that of consultancy, indeed in ten years some innovations have been introduced: knowledge and dissemination of social farming and sharing information and expertise, scouting and visibility to the virtuous experiences, a network between practices and practices-society, analysis of new emerging business models, policy making to connect farms with social, institutional and economic actors.

Still in Italy, there is the interesting case of Marche Region to support social farming. Since 2011, the Marche region regulates social agriculture within the framework of the regional law on multi-functionality and diversification of agriculture. The Marche region, first of all, has activated regional partnership tables/forums with the aim of modeling certain types of social agriculture services like kindergartens, active longevity,

¹ AICARE: <https://www.aicare.it/>



horticulture, and social education. It has delivered timely work tools. As regards kindergartens, for example, it has set clear rules on this matter: quality kindergartens format, pedagogic format, architectural format, farm format, and communication format. Subsequently, when the rules and regulations were defined, it facilitated the creation of local partnerships by acting as an innovation broker, carrying out training activities for farmers and technicians, and communication activities. An IT platform, named INNOVAMARCHE², is part of this path: it serves as a working tool for the regional agency acting as an innovation broker and for potential Operational Groups. INNOVAMARCHE also organizes Info Days, Open Days, and networking events for the Operational Groups (also on social farming). This good practice is interesting for three reasons: first of all, it is produced by a public body, the Marche region; secondly, the Region has acted by facilitating the innovation processes that characterize social farming, through systemic action; thirdly, a quality label has been drawn up for regional kindergartens which meet all formats.

Most farms in Italy do not have a consultant because few farms can afford it and the figure of the public consultant no longer exists (not only in social farming). In addition to those of the accountant, the labor consultant, and the mandatory matters by law (e.g. food safety), there are two “consultant” figures: the neighbor (another farmer) and the supplier of technical means. While social farming particularly needs specifically trained advice.

What role do – and can - brokers and advisors (either private or public) play?

In Poland, social farming is supported by the public agricultural advisory system. The system consists of 16 voivodeship agricultural advisory centers (ODR) providing a wide range of information, training, and advisory services for farmers and rural residents, and the national Agricultural Advisory Center (CDR), which improves the knowledge and skills of the advisory staff and raises and unifies the standards of services provided by advisors for farmers and inhabitants of rural areas. Agricultural advisory centers are state organizational units with legal personality, reporting to the minister responsible for rural development. The structure on the whole employs over 3500 people. It is part of AKIS – Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation System. The activity of the state agricultural advisory service has already inspired many farmers to include social services in their activities and resulted in the development of the concept of various types of social farms. The Agricultural Advisory Center Branch in Krakow initiated the Polish National Educational Farms Network.³

Tasks related to social farming are assigned to Rural Development Departments. In the case of educational farms, in each voivodeship agricultural advisory center, there is at least one advisor who officially acts as the voivodeship coordinator for educational farms, closely cooperating with the Agricultural Advisory Center in Krakow as the

² Innovamarche <https://www.innovamarche.it>

³ www.zagrodaedukacyjna.pl



national coordinator of the Polish National Network of Educational Farms - the network has been operating since 2012. A similar network of advisers and coordinators dealing with the implementation of care farms is being created, but at the moment there is a shortage of specialists in this field. In the last two years, training and networking of care farms have been indicated by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development as one of the priority areas of agricultural advisory activity in Poland.

In the Czech Republic, social farming is supported by the Ministry of Agriculture where the Working Committee on Social Farming was set up in 2014. It comprises farmers, social workers, academics, officials, entrepreneurs, ministry representatives, and local action groups. The body consulted when the current Act on Registered Social Enterprise was discussed before its presentation in the Government. The Committee became the beginning for establishing the Association of Social Agriculture in 2017. Since then, it is the main body in Czechia to provide informational and advisory services. It organises workshops, practical field trips and gives examples of best practice examples. It constantly cooperates with the Nationwide Rural Network, the Association of Regions, the Local Action Groups, and other institutions on the topics related to social farming. In the past its representatives offered consultancies within the project Social Enterprise Support run by the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs. Then, there are life science universities giving seminars and courses in social farming, the most often within social economy and multifunctional agriculture course. The most active is the University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice. From the social side skills and competencies, the Protestant Theological Faculty at Charles University (Prague) became important element in terms of implementing “green” social innovations in social work and social services.

In Germany, there is no centrally organized advisory service for Social Farming, although the need and thus the demand for it has been expressed several times. In a position paper from 2008, the need for contact persons and advisory services for Social Farming is emphasized in order to make the structure of laws, responsibilities, agencies, networks, financing and initiatives more transparent. This could support social services in agriculture and be guidance for training and funding opportunities. It is still difficult to identify farms for people with special needs that meet the requirements for adequate care. On the other hand, farms that are interested in social activities find themselves overburdened to provide the professional competence requested in social services. At this point, the lack of advice and professional support becomes obvious once again. Due to the federal structure in Germany, the conditions for a central organization are more difficult because of varying legal framework conditions. Furthermore, different ministries are assigned different responsibilities, which creates opaque conditions for the interdisciplinary field of Social Farming. This diversity of laws must become more transparent for all actors (van Elsen and Kalisch, 2008). The question arises where suitable advisory institutions could be located. For the nationwide and international networking of the different actors, especially the farms and interested companies, the German Association for Social Farming “Deutsche Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Soziale Landwirtschaft (DASoL)” was founded in 2009⁴.

⁴ Deutsche Arbeitsgemeinschaft Soziale Landwirtschaft: www.soziale-landwirtschaft.de/startseite/



However, consulting in the actual sense cannot be provided by this association, only within the framework of mutual exchange.

Either private or public, advisors should make use of new training methods (individual consultancy, publication, demonstration, study trips) and materials about social farming management, implementation, and effects.

How do we spread knowledge on social farming amongst mainstream agricultural advisors/brokers?

One way to spread the knowledge to advisors and brokers is to use the Erasmus project results especially those that have created training material. Indeed, research⁵ shows that 17 are particularly relevant to social agriculture (Table 1).

In connection with the extension of the scope of advice on social farming, agricultural advisors must acquire new skills and competencies. The agricultural adviser must be aware of problems the owner can be faced. For this reason, he or she must have interdisciplinary knowledge, including legal regulations, in the field of conducting this type of activity; project management, human resources, etc. The material developed can be used by advisors to on the one hand develop their own skills and on the other hand evaluate the tools developed for their own cases.

The advisor must be creative and empathetic. Must have communication competencies - the ability to communicate effectively with the interlocutor, methodological competencies - the choice of the appropriate form of information transfer, and organizational competencies.

⁵ We did a website search using the following keywords: social farms course (119 results), brokerage and advisory support (1 result), social farming advisory (7 results), training program social farming (157 results), training program social farming advisory (2 results), entrepreneurial skills in social farming (145 results). Only projects relating to key actions "Cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practices" and "Partnerships for cooperation and exchanges of practices" were taken into account (the key action "Learning Mobility of Individuals" was excluded).



Table 1: ERASMUS Projects related to social farming

Project Title	Link
CARE-T-FARMS	https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/projects/search/details/2017-1-PL01-KA202-038380
Social Farming in Higher Education	https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/projects/search/details/2017-1-DE01-KA203-003583
Revitalist - Social Farm mentor training	https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/projects/search/details/2017-1-HU01-KA202-035932
Engaging farmers in social farming	https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/projects/search/details/2018-1-UK01-KA202-047975
Innovative Skills Transfer for the Development of Agricultural Entrepreneurs	https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/projects/search/details/2018-1-DE02-KA204-005173
Alliance on Interdisciplinary Learning and Entrepreneurial Skills in Green for Health and Social Inclusion	https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/projects/search/details/612623-EPP-1-2019-1-IT-EPPKA2-KA
FARMTTrain - the innovative hands-on training program on farms for adult learners	https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/projects/search/details/2019-1-CZ01-KA204-061345
Fostering inclusion through Social Farming	https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/projects/search/details/2019-1-IE01-KA202-051446
LAND-MOBILITY - Innovative and digital training materials to foster land mobility initiatives	https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/projects/search/details/2019-1-IE01-KA202-051449
Engaging farmers in social farming plus	https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/projects/search/details/2020-1-UK01-KA202-079050
SAGA Social And GAstronomic entrepreneurship in empty Europe	https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/projects/search/details/2020-1-HU01-KA204-078691
Social Farm Activities for Rural Management Services	https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/projects/search/details/2020-1-IT01-KA202-008463
Sustainable Wellbeing Entrepreneurship for Diversification in Agriculture	https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/projects/search/details/2020-1-IT02-KA203-079927
Development of social entrepreneurship - new opportunities and ways of development	https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/projects/search/details/2021-1-PL01-KA220-ADU-000030093
Multifunctional role of women as a key driver for rural development	https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/projects/search/details/2021-1-ES01-KA220-ADU-000035117
Rural Women's Empowerment through GREen Social Entrepreneurship	https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/projects/search/details/2021-1-RO01-KA220-ADU-000026954
Social Farming for the Elderly	https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/projects/search/details/2021-1-IE01-KA220-ADU-000033663

Source: own elaboration

These projects could be interesting and would really benefit social farming and training in specific areas of social farming. However, the results of these projects are not always easily accessible and this could be a problem, both in terms of lost income from them and in terms of repeating work already done which is not efficient. *How can the results of the research be transferred to farmers?*

Organize dissemination activities during which linear guides and operating manuals from research findings will be distributed.

Train the trainer: advisors might train farmers to train other farmers

3. Research needs

Research is needed in terms of the full range of skills that advisors should have in order to assist farms in developing social farming either from scratch or transforming their mainstream farm.

To build an effective advisory system in social farming, these steps should be followed:

1. Promote knowledge of social farming among policy makers (knowledge in the field and specific training)
2. Dialogue tools between institutions / administrations of different levels (central-regional-local) and sector (agriculture, welfare, health, etc.) that interrupt the "silo logic"
3. Clear rules developed by decision-makers
4. Integrating social farming into the planning of socio-medical and educational services by policymaking



5. Develop and implement experiments identifying social farming models that can be replicated in other territorial contexts
6. Construction of formalized agreements and contracts
7. Socio-Economic Monitoring and Assessment (identification of tools)
8. Appropriate training for advisors on inter-disciplinary issues, such as network analysis, multi-actor network, assessment and monitoring of social farming practices, formalized conventions, communication and promotion of social agriculture products, regulatory references, administrative, accounting and fiscal principles, employment contracts, and safety requirements on the farm.

The first two steps are awareness raising and dialogue among experts, researchers, and local authorities.

The next two steps are legislative, while the subsequent ones are related to scientific and technical research, and the last to training.

Steps 5 to 7 should be carried out in the context of the multi-actor network because when researchers, farmers, and technicians co-create knowledge through on-farm experimentation there can be a lasting and meaningful impact on farm profitability and sustainability.

Also, step 8 should be carried out in the context of the multi-actor network in order to design in a participatory way a training course adapted to the needs of social farming. Participatory design phases may include:

- › Analysis of existing training courses
- › Consultation between the parties
- › Declination of the need for social farming
- › The themes
- › The disciplines
- › The skills
- › Construction of training modules.

4. Ideas for further collaboration

Operational Groups that bring together multiple actors such as farmers, researchers, advisers, businesses, health and social services, environmental groups, consumer interest groups, or other NGOs to advance innovation in social farming might be an idea to move forward.

It would be useful to initiate new projects in Europe with the same goals to exchange and share theoretical approaches, survey tools, operational models for advisory support, ongoing experiments with the collaboration of the University, network of Independent Consultants, the network of Farmers Associations, Public agricultural advisory system, public and private training centers.

5. Summary

The study was prepared on the basis of the experience of three countries, Poland, Italy and Czech Republic. Poland gives perspective from public agencies, Italy from private



advisory, public innovation process and public academic research and Czech Republic from government and non-government organisation cooperation. The experience of Germany is also reported, which still does not have specific consultancy services. The European perspective resulting from the scope of training projects implemented in the field of Erasmus was also shown.

For a complete picture and further in-depth analysis, it will be necessary to expand the research with information from other European countries, in particular those with more developed systems of social farming.

6. References

Articles, papers, web links to research projects, etc

Charatsari, C., D. Lioutas, E., De Rosa, M., & Papadaki-Klavdianou, A. (2020). Extension and advisory organizations on the road to the digitalization of animal farming: An organizational learning perspective. *Animals*, 10(11), 2056.

Di Iacovo, F. and O'Connor, D. (2009). Supporting policies for Social Farming in Europe. Progressing Multifunctionality in Responsive Rural Areas. Press Service srl, Sesto Fiorentino (FI)
<http://www.umb.no/statisk/greencare/sofarbookpart1.pdf>

Feo, E. (2022). *Evaluation of the implementation of the EIP-AGRI Multi Actor Approach in H2020 Multi Actor Projects and Thematic Networks* (Doctoral dissertation, Ghent University).

Kamruzzaman, M., Daniell, K. A., Chowdhury, A., & Crimp, S. (2021). The role of extension and advisory services in strengthening farmers' innovation networks to adapt to climate extremes. *Sustainability*, 13(4), 1941.

Klerkx, L. (2020). Advisory services and transformation, plurality and disruption of agriculture and food systems: towards a new research agenda for agricultural education and extension studies. *The Journal of Agricultural Education and Extension*, 26(2), 131-140.

Król, J. (2019). Social Farming - New Challenge for Development of Advisers' Skills and Capabilities, European Seminar on Extension and Education, 18-21 June 2019, Acireale

Markham, N., Crawford, A., Coulson, J., Drysdale, G., Hildebrand, K., Mezenberg, C., ... & Shambrook, D. (2006). A Learning Approach to Developing Farming Systems Advisory Skills—the Vortex Framework. *Practice change for sustainable communities: Exploring footprint, pathways and possibilities*.

Paolini, S. (2015). Building bridges: AICARE experience as innovation broker in promoting social innovation throughout agriculture. 2nd International Conference Agriculture in an Urbanizing Society. Rome, Italia, 14-17 September.

van Elsen, T., Kalisch, M. (Red.) (2008): Witzenhäuser Positionspapier zum Mehrwert Sozialer Landwirtschaft. – In: Friedel, R., Spindler, E.A. (Edit.): Nachhaltige Entwicklung ländlicher Räume. VS Verlag: 209-213, Wiesbaden.

