



Social innovation

**Solutions leading to thriving agriculture,
forestry and rural areas**



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Colophon

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CAP innovation with a social purpose

In addition to its environmental and economic sustainability goals, the 2023-2027 Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) offers particular support for innovative solutions that help address social challenges. The social objectives of the CAP, specifically under **objective 8**, play a major role in promoting “jobs, growth and equality in rural areas”. The CAP goals stimulate social inclusion and local development in agriculture, forestry and rural areas.



Social innovations are new ideas that meet social needs, create social relationships and lead to the formation of new collaborations.

They can be products, services or models that address unmet needs more effectively. Social innovation improves societal well-being and has more impact when it is co-designed by communities, by people from both the private and public sectors, including agriculture, forestry and rural areas as well as the employment, education and advisory sectors.

This brochure puts the spotlight on innovative projects that tackle social challenges through innovation, knowledge exchange and new ways of working together. They specifically illustrate solutions for social inclusion on the farm, better health and well-being, and revitalised and resilient rural communities.



Social innovation on the farm

Social farming makes innovative use of agricultural resources and a farm's natural environment to provide care activities and social services.

This enables people who face challenges in life to carry out activities in an agricultural setting, in ways that benefit their well-being and development.

Target groups include people with mental health challenges or intellectual, physical or sensory disabilities, youth-at-risk, the elderly, people with substance abuse issues and refugees. New target groups are emerging all the time.

Social farming activities contribute to rehabilitation, therapy, social inclusion and education. Social farming can help people develop new connections and skills, which may provide pathways to training or employment. This is especially the case in rural areas with fewer job opportunities and services.

Social farming also forms part of a more inclusive and sustainable rural development setting, giving farmers the opportunity to diversify their sources of income, develop new business models, open up the farm to a wider public and build new networks that can promote the farm and its products.





Supporting synergies in social farming

Integrating people with special needs into 'regular' farm businesses can result in a synergy rather than a handicap. With this in mind, an Operational Group from Hesse, Germany, explored how social collaboration can support farm development.

Eight farms participated in the project, with some already employing people with disabilities and others still in the development phase. Farmer Frank Radu says: "For me, it matters that the people on the farm do something that gives value to their lives. Agriculture has many activities that are ideally suited for them to do. A social collaboration offers workforces that can benefit the farm's productivity. It brings agriculture closer to society, showing people that it is about more than economic food production."

"Social farming lets farms grow without expanding in size. Empty farms can be given a new function and provide social and ecological inclusion," says Project Coordinator Dr. Thomas van Elsen. The project has developed training for farmers and newcomers in social farming and contributed to coaching for agricultural advisory services. A new start-up will accompany farmers who are establishing a social farm.



More info in the **Operational Groups database** or on the **project website**.





'Egg-citing' collaboration between poultry and people

The story of 'Egg & People' starts with sustainably and locally produced eggs from happy free-range hens. The Dutch organisation employs people with disabilities and refugees as 'support farmers', also with the aim of creating human happiness.

All hens under the Egg & People label forage freely in natural areas. They sleep in mobile coops that can be transported to other feeding areas. Michiel is one of the Egg & People support farmers who collects, sorts and packs the eggs and takes care of the hens one day per week.

"People with disabilities cannot always join the job market, but Michiel carries out valuable on-farm work. The range of the chicken coop is at perfect scale for him, because it has let him grow from working under close guidance to working independently," says co-founder Erik van den Oord.

In collaboration with the organisation Refugee Team, Egg & People also offers employment to refugees, facilitating their integration into society.

Interested entrepreneurs and communities can set up their own small-scale poultry business through the cooperative called 'Eggstra', which provides hens and a mobile coop and which offers advice on how to take care of them, marketing tools and network connections to integrate support farmers into their business.



More on the **project website**.



More social farming inspiration?

The **EU CAP Network Focus Group 'Social farming and innovations'** collected good practices and inspiring success stories in social farming, including opportunities to develop social farming models and to strengthen the links between agriculture and other sectors.



An Italian Operational Group is adding a new perspective to social agriculture by applying the 'Montessori' educational method on farms in the Marche region.

New agricultural activities for young children – the traditional target group for Montessori education – but also for the elderly and for people with disabilities, help increase the multifunctionality of the farm and contribute to well-being across generations.



Read more in the **Operational Groups database** or on the **project website**.



"The human being is at the centre of everything we do."

A social farm in Romania is creating jobs, reducing waste and providing healthy local products, freshly delivered to local consumers.



Read the full article.



Better on-farm health and well-being

The high number of physical risks in agriculture and forestry due to tractor, machinery or animal handling accidents shows the importance of good health and working conditions in the sector.

Stress and poor mental health also have an impact on farmers' overall well-being. Common stress factors include manual labour, climate pressure (extreme weather, loss of crops), insecure income, growing administrative burdens, increasing consumer demands and a volatile market. Many farmers may find it hard to communicate their stress, especially when they live in isolated rural areas with fewer opportunities to share their worries in a community.

A number of innovative projects across the EU are making efforts to improve the safety, health and well-being of farmers, foresters and rural communities. They refer to advice on farm management or precision farming to reduce work time and administrative burdens. New collaborations or networking activities with farmers and advisors can stimulate knowledge exchange and good practices. Dedicated initiatives can signpost farmers to get support from health professionals or farm mentors.





Engaging farmers through on-farm mentoring

To reduce the number of accidents that occur on Irish farms every year, Operational Group 'Farmers4Safety - Managing risk together' has promoted a shift towards more safety and well-being through peer-to-peer mentoring.

The project has engaged six farm mentors who created open lines of communication with farmers and their families. They shared useful safety and well-being tools directly on the farm, at networking events or in discussion groups.



"Farmers are more comfortable in their own yards, and most of them don't have the time to attend events. We make it easier to access information by bringing it directly to them."

MARY OAKLEY
Farm Mentor

The approach has created a co-learning environment where farmers can share their concerns with their peers. Peer-to-peer mentoring has led to more knowledge exchange on good practices, tackling social isolation and improving collaboration. In busy periods, farmers now assist each other to ease their workloads. This shows the value of allowing European farmers to voice their own needs and experiences, placing them at the forefront of efforts to foster knowledge and innovation – a key objective of the CAP.



More info in the **Operational Groups database**.



Farming well, feeling well



The Horizon 2020 thematic network **Farmwell** promotes social innovations from across the EU to improve the mental, physical and social well-being of farmers and their families.

Farmwell's social innovations database features initiatives to improve mental health at agricultural schools, lower administrative burdens and bring together farmers in cooperatives, learning networks or at farmers' markets to tackle isolation and connect with consumers.



Discover the database and inspiring video stories.





How are you today?



Local support organisations such as **Agri'Collectif** in France or **Boeren op een kruispunt** (Farmers at a crossroads) in Belgium offer direct support lines for farmers facing economic, family-related or psychological issues.



"Farmers sometimes face difficulties they cannot cope with alone. By listening, we respectfully offer technical, administrative, legal, social or psychological solutions tailored to the needs of farmers and their families."

CHRISTIAN PETITEAU

Senior Advisor at Agri'Collectif





Co-designed innovation for thriving rural communities

Many hands make light work, as the saying goes. In that sense, innovative solutions for agriculture, forestry and rural areas can have a bigger impact when they are co-designed and co-created.

Many collaborative or community-led projects are finding novel ways of working together to create innovations that can contribute to the socio-economic and environmental development of rural areas.

Social innovation can especially be of benefit to marginalised rural areas, including forests, arid or mountainous regions. Efficient collaboration between rural communities, private and public sectors can help revitalise rural areas, empower the people that live in them and build resilience vis à vis current and future challenges.

The **Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas, including the Rural Pact**, engages rural communities, with the aim of fostering socio-economic and territorial cohesion, to improve access to services, facilitate social innovation and ensure social resilience thanks to better access to training or employment opportunities.





A Network of Model Villages

In Spain, the Galician regional government has set up a series of 'Model Villages' to give abandoned land a purpose, through collaboration between inhabitants, landowners, farmers and municipalities.

Under current climate conditions, abandoned land and unmanaged biomass are associated with a high level of risk of wildfires that pose a threat to nearby villages. In the Model Village of O Penedo, the Rural Development Agency of Galicia (AGADER) has launched a dynamic plan to recover 25 hectares of land in the town's immediate surroundings. More than 120 landowners with 660 parcels of land are concerned. The parcels of land will host an extensive pig farm of a local, traditional breed, with plans for a new value chain with local restaurants.

This new function reduces the risk of fire for the village. The municipality plays a key role in engaging landowners and bringing new farmers into contact with others in the network. Local inhabitants help design actions for the village to renovate cultural heritage, maintain public spaces, social facilities or digital infrastructures.

The Network of Model Villages currently includes 21 villages across Galicia, with more set to join in due course.



More info **on the project webpage.**

Browse results of the **EU CAP Network Focus Group 'Recovery of abandoned agricultural lands'.**





Empowering women-led innovation

When women become economically and socially empowered, they can be a driving force for change, prosperity, social inclusion and innovation in rural areas.

The Horizon Europe project called FLIARA (Female-Led Innovation in Agriculture and Rural Areas) is creating a Europe-wide rural innovation ecosystem to support women-led innovative practices in farming and rural areas.

“There is a need for all individuals and communities to participate in rural innovation. Traditionally, rural women’s employment opportunities and contribution to innovation has been overshadowed. FLIARA will spotlight women as key actors of the innovation process.”

MAURA FARRELL
Coordinator

Building on the power of social networks, FLIARA will set up a Community of Practice that brings together rural female innovators to exchange ideas, experiences and innovative knowledge. Over 200 women-led innovations across Europe, 20 Innovation Ambassadors and Future Trends will help encourage future female innovations and entrepreneurship.



- More on **FLIARA**
- **GRASS ceiling** and **SWIFT** were funded under the Horizon Europe call for female-led innovation in rural areas.
- Details on the **European Gender equality strategy**
- Find results from the event **‘Advancing gender equality in rural areas in the EU’**



Fostering social innovation for marginalised rural areas

The SIMRA network (Social Innovation in Marginalised Rural Areas) has collected inspiring case studies on social innovation, with a focus on Mediterranean areas.

- V&Zapp', a rural hub to create career opportunities for young people in **Apulia, Italy**
- More well-being for local forest communities and smart carbon forestry in marginalised mountain regions - **Vipava valley, Slovenia and Slovakia**
- Community practices that cultivate abandoned lands and reintegrate a returning population - **Adriatic islands, Croatia**
- Find more inspiring examples **in the SIMRA database**.






- The RURITAGE project identifies unique cultural and natural heritage areas within rural communities and turns them into laboratories for regeneration. **More on the website.**
- The EIP-AGRI seminar entitled 'Turning forest innovation into practice' highlights social innovation for the forestry sector. **Take a look at the results.**

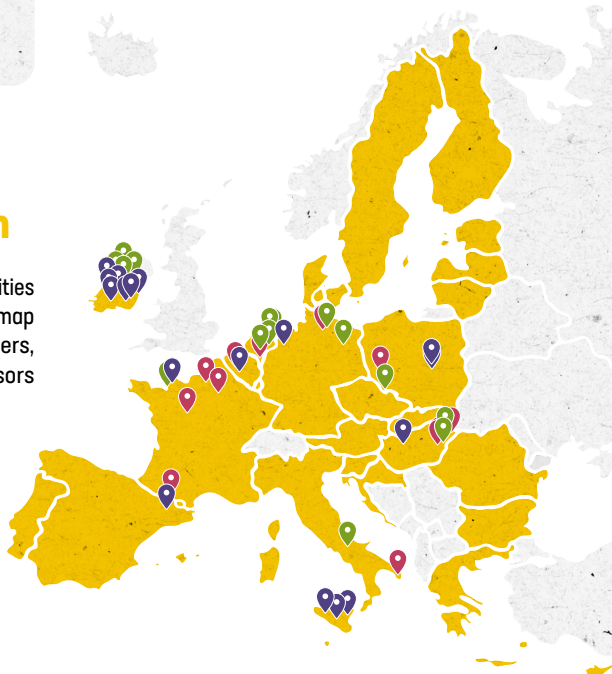
Find all the latest EU CAP Network **news and event updates on social inclusion online.**



Next generation innovation

RURALIZATION unlocks socio-economic opportunities for new generations in EU rural areas. Browse a map with interesting case studies on rural newcomers, new entrants into farming and rural successors **on the project website.**

-  *New entrants to farming*
-  *Newcomers*
-  *Successors*



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