

Innovation, Knowledge exchange | EIP-AGRI



Social farming and innovations

How can social farming contribute to innovation in agriculture while strengthening the multi-functional role of agriculture and connecting people from urban and rural areas?

Social farming has grown in value as an important innovation in the context of farm diversification and as a frontrunner in terms of further innovation at farm level. A Focus Group of 20 experts has sought to draw attention to and further explore social farming through the lens of innovation.

The **key findings** from the 'Social farming and innovations' Focus Group are:

- Social farming requires innovation at all levels, not just within agriculture or rural development. A multi-disciplinary and multi-actor approach is required for social farming to have a successful impact.
- The national context is of key importance and there is no specific 'best practice' model for the development of social farming. There are significant lessons to be learnt from exploring systems across the EU.
- Focus Group members laid particular emphasis on the so-called 'triple bottom line', arguing that the impacts of social farming and the subsequent innovation that it sparks stretch across economic, social and environmental spheres. Any related business models should combine multiple objectives, including additional income for the farm, which should consider areas such as social care, ethical employment, ecological inclusion, etc.

- Two broad business models emerged from the Focus Group deliberations: some farmers are paid to provide social farming support by public administrations; others are focused on additional business opportunities and direct selling and marketing of products, which have arisen as part of the social farming activity.

Finally, social farming has a major role to play in connecting rural and urban, agriculture and the wider society.

According to this Focus Group, there is significant potential for further growth across Europe. Additionally, support for such growth is an investment in farm diversification, in a model of farming which is more economically, environmentally, socially and sustainably beneficial and which delivers significant benefits for participants and society as a whole.

"...farmers have 'diamonds in their hands', but are insufficiently aware and proud of them and thus do not play them out..."

Marjolein Elings,

Dutch expert at the EU CAP Network
'Social farming and innovations' Focus Group

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Ideas for Operational Groups

The experts discussed some project ideas which could be advanced through Operational Groups. These include:

- > Social farming and migrant inclusion. Social farms can have a vital role to play in migrant inclusion, in providing work as well as community-based integrated support.
- > The inclusion of social farming participants in on-farm processing and marketing. Social farming offers the possibility of involving clients in production, marketing and distribution processes, to the mutual benefit of everybody.
- > Pilot project for implementation of social farming models for social innovation. Learning from countries that are more experienced in social farming in a transnational Operational Group could lead to the development of a roadmap, toolkit, business models, etc. for those countries where social farming is less common.

Knowledge gaps and research needs

- > Investigate how social farming services can be made available to a broader target group (e.g. people experiencing burnout, caregivers, children, refugees), thereby helping to bridge the gap and understanding between agriculture and society as a whole.
- > Research the engagement of people with the environment: how to look at a developing landscape, including its biodiversity, by connecting participants to social farming.
- > Examine the key profile requirements of a skilled adviser and (social) innovation broker in social farming.
- > Examine how can we quantify the impacts of social farming.

For more ideas for Operational Groups and research needs, please see the final report.

More Information

- > [EU CAP Network 'Social farming and innovations' Focus Group: final report](#)
- > [Mini Paper 1: Social farming for society: expanding the target groups by recognising and marketing the distinctive value of the farm environment](#)
- > [Mini Paper 2: The role of social farming in bridging the gap between agriculture and society](#)

- > [Mini Paper 3: Measuring impacts of social farming at the farm, on farmers and local community](#)
- > [Mini Paper 4: Quality assurance in social farming](#)
- > [Mini Paper 5: Ecological inclusion and social farming](#)
- > [Mini Paper 6: Brokerage and advisory support](#)
- > [Mini Paper 7: The role of LAGs \(CLLD/LEADER\) in triggering the implementation of social farming](#)
- > [Starting paper](#)
- > [Projects booklet: Studies from the EU CAP Network 'Social farming and innovations' Focus Group](#)
- > [Focus Group webpage](#)

Publications

- > [Brochure 'Social innovation - solutions for thriving agriculture, forestry and rural areas'](#)

Inspirational ideas

- > [Healthy, tasty and social vegetables in Romania](#)
- > [German Operational Group develops job opportunities for people with disabilities \(Germany\)](#)
- > [A social farm is 'connecting people' in Italy - providing employment to disadvantaged groups, protecting the environment and promoting sustainability](#)

Feedback and questions:

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Find out more about the EU CAP Network

Visit the [EU CAP Network website](#) to discover projects, ideas and resources to catalyse innovation in agriculture, forestry and rural areas.

