

VAN ELSSEN, T., FINUOLA, R. (2013): Policies and strategies of Green Care in Europe. – In: GALLIS, C. (Edit.): Green Care for Human Therapy, Social Innovation, Rural Economy and Education. Public Health in the 21th century. Nova Science Publishers: 189-213, New York.

Chapter 10

Policies and Strategies of Green Care in Europe

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Abstract

“Green Care” farms put the “multifunctionality” demanded by the policy makers into practice. Social farming, as a part of Green care, contributes to the creation of jobs in rural areas. It includes agricultural enterprises and market gardens which integrate people with physical, mental or psychological disabilities; farms which provide opportunities for the socially disadvantaged, for young offenders, those with learning disabilities, addicts, the long-term unemployed and active senior citizens; school and kindergarten farms and much more besides. Social farming (SF) includes elements such as provision, inclusion, rehabilitation, training and a better quality of life.

The “Witzenhausen Position Paper on the Added Value of Social Farming” as part of the SoFar project was compiled in a participatory process. It describes the situation on European level and tries to identify problems and challenges of social farming in Germany (on national level). Based on this activity, the “European Manifesto on the Added Value of Social Farming” as a “call to decision-makers in industry, administration, politics and the public to support social farming in Europe” was elaborated and discussed. In the present 2007-2013 programming cycle of structural funds, SF is funded by EAFRD (rural development) as well as by the European Social

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Fund (ESF). Actually Commission's proposals contain interesting perspectives for SF taking into account the growing interest that SF is meeting in Europe. There has been the launch (January 2012) of the procedure for an European Economic and Social Committee - EESC own initiative opinion concerning SF ("NAT/539 Social farming"). The initiative was taken by the EESC Section Agriculture, Rural Development and Environment and has had the official name of "*Social farming: green care and social and health policies*". The results are presented in this chapter.

Keywords: Green care, policies, inclusion, multifunctionality, manifesto, position paper, European Social Fund

Introduction

"Green Care" and "Social farming", in a Green care context, are being developed throughout Europe: farms which put the "multifunctionality" demanded by the policy makers into practice, contributing to the creation of jobs in rural areas through the creation of social services. Social farming is a part of Green care and includes agricultural enterprises and market gardens which integrate people with physical, mental or psychological disabilities; farms which provide opportunities for the socially disadvantaged, for young offenders, those with learning disabilities, addicts, the long-term unemployed and active senior citizens; school and kindergarten farms and much more besides. Social farming includes elements such as provision, inclusion, rehabilitation, training and a better quality of life.

Starting with the European Community of Practice (CoP) Farming for Health, research activities were set up: the COST Action 866 Green Care in Agriculture and the EU research project SoFar. What will be the future of Green Care and Social Farming in Europe? A view across Europe shows different directions of development.

Farming and Social Work – a Combination Including Challenges

Beginning a "green care in agriculture" - activity can be based upon two different starting points: either an institution that includes farming or gardening activities, for example a workshop for people with learning disabilities establishing a social farm; a hospital starting horticultural therapy or a school that builds up a small farm for children with special needs. The other starting point can be a typical food production farm that wants to widen its activities by integrating social work, i.e. by caring for individuals in specific circumstances or in need of help, or by orienting the whole farm towards a school farm, a farm caring for people with addiction or for long-term unemployed.

Throughout Europe a wide range of social farming activities exists regarding the amount of income coming from the element; the financial sources of the social element; the type of residential arrangements, ranging from day-care to living and working communities in which service-users and professionals live together; the professional background of people working on the farm and the institutional basis of the farm. These range from private farms or NGOs

to the different church and anthroposophic initiatives and Camphill communities that combine biodynamic farming with Rudolf Steiners' approach to curative education.

A wide range of motivating factors can be identified among social farming actors and initiatives. They range from "introducing a surplus income for the farm", to providing an opportunity for the farmer's wife to work from home"; to finding a new field of activity" towards idealistic motives to change society, i.e. combining social activities with Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) or their integration into eco villages. For example, in Germany for many actors "authenticity" is important, in the sense that social farming should be "real farming" - a farm that grows food and provides not only care purposes – not a petting zoo. In this sense, developments in social farming across European countries differ from each other. For example in the Netherlands many existing care farms do not produce any food.

At the same time, in the Netherlands, social farming is well perceived by the public, visits by the Netherlands Royal Family to care farms produce a big media response, green care is a "warm, soft theme" for the media. The farmers' organisations have their own support centres that advise farmers and place users on farms. In Norway the government has become aware of the opportunity to keep rural landscapes alive by supporting family farms integrating care activities. Different ministries work together supporting social farming activities in an efficient way which is often not the case in other countries. On the other hand especially in countries in which green care is subsidised copycats appear more frequently: farmers that discover green care as an interesting business and an additional income only. Therefore quality assurance is becoming an issue, and there is a need to work on common goals in social farming in order to provide a high standard of services.

Therapeutic Agriculture?

Farming and social work contain potential areas of conflict. How much social work can a farm bear? If after mowing the grass a thundercloud appears and the dry hay has to be brought to the barn quickly, a conflict between social and farming needs appears. Also there is a lack of professional and interdisciplinary education: Farmers need pedagogical skills, and social workers lack farmers' knowledge. Both professions often need additional educational and qualification tools that are not available in many countries. For example, in Germany only two agricultural universities offer social farming as an elective course, and at universities offering social science programmes, there are no offerings for this interdisciplinary subject at all, not even on an optional level.

The idea behind social farming and green care is more than just the opportunity to develop specialised farms into which people with special needs can be integrated.

In fact, "education", the development of people in the sense of "developing personal attributes" and "multifunctionality" are aims of social farming. Green care can be more than just a "tool to reach therapeutic goals" - it allows participation in labour processes; it allows people to achieve feelings of being productive; it invokes experiences using all the senses and it allows people to re-connect to the environment, to nature, to animals, plants and the soil. The quest of industrial farming – which is how to further reduce human labour and manual work – can be reversed in relation to a social farm.

The issue is no longer the provision of any work for its own sake, but offering work opportunities that makes sense, that become useful for the environment, for nature, for animals, plants and the soil.

Green care can not only “use” nature for purposes of therapy, but furthermore provide services to care for nature and landscape development in a multifunctional way.

There are lots of activities on traditional farms that have been rationalized more and more and that can be combined with green care activities on social farms. Through such activities social farming is able to become “therapeutic” not only for humans, but also for the environment and the cultural landscape. The development is still at its very beginning, but it offers an interesting perspective and a challenge for the future.

The Term of Inclusion between Social Darwinism and Change of Society

There is a new impulse concerning the development of green care through the demand for “social inclusion” of people with learning disabilities. While “integration” means to include someone who does not comply with the norm, the term “inclusion” changes the point of view in another direction: the person who is different from the common standard shall be deemed to be part of the whole and of the spectrum of normality.

The discussion originated in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities that was adopted in December 2006 and entered into force on 3rd May 2008. The Convention follows decades of work by the United Nations to change attitudes and approaches to persons with disabilities. It takes to a new height the movement from viewing persons with disabilities as “objects” of charity, medical treatment and social protection towards viewing persons with disabilities as “subjects” with rights, who are capable of claiming those rights and making decisions for their lives based on their free and informed consent as well as being active members of society.

The Convention is intended as a human rights instrument with an explicit, social development dimension. It adopts a broad categorization of persons with disabilities and reaffirms that all persons with all types of disabilities must enjoy all human rights and fundamental freedoms.

It clarifies and qualifies how all categories of rights apply to persons with disabilities and identifies areas where adaptations have to be made for persons with disabilities to effectively exercise their rights and areas where their rights have been violated, and where protection of rights must be reinforced.¹

Concerning social farming there are many activities to facilitate people with certain disabilities into first labour markets. There can be opportunities for at least some users of services in sheltered workshops or social farms. The disadvantage of training people for the social Darwinism of the first labour market is that they have to leave the sheltered space of surroundings that have been adapted to their special needs.

But the goal of “inclusion” can also be understood in a different way. The UN convention can also be a chance to change society in terms of the “deficiency-oriented” thinking on

¹ (www.un.org/disabilities/default.asp?id=150).

people with special needs. Within a social farm many users have the chance to find work and activities that fit their “special abilities” - their one-sided talents.

The sheltered spaces represented by many social farms can create spaces of humanity, of care and devotion - attributes that could be a future aim for society as a whole!

From National Position Papers towards the European Manifesto on the Added Value of Social Farming

The “Witzenhausen Position Paper on the Added Value of Social Farming” was compiled by participants of the workshop “Added value in social farming” from 26 to 28th October 2007 in Witzenhausen/Germany which took place as part of the SoFar project. This was done in a participatory process after at the 1st German platform in the SoFar project participants proposed to write a position paper to support Social Farming in Germany.

The first page of the manifesto describes the causes for elaborating this position paper. It starts with an explanation what social farming means. The second paragraph is about the situation on European level. The third paragraph tries to identify problems and challenges of social farming in Germany (on national level).

The following 7 paragraphs about requirements have been ranked carefully due to priorities and relevance. Each headline

- 1 Recognition of the added value of social farming for society
- 2 Creating transparency in the legal framework
- 3 Fostering communication and the exchange of experience
- 4 Setting up a central network and advisory service with coordinating responsibilities
- 5 Promotion of education and training opportunities, supervision and coaching
- 6 Support for interdisciplinary research on social farming
- 7 Promotion of European cooperation is followed by explanations.

The final chapter (‘outlook’) tries to mention perspectives and chances for the future development.

The German version of the position paper is published in a book (van Elsen and Kalisch 2008). Both the German and the English Version are available as Downloads.²

The German position paper has been presented at the 2nd international SoFar platform in Brussels to the SoFar project team. Afterwards it was discussed whether to elaborate national position papers in European countries and a European position paper as a task for the CoP Farming for Health and to follow this process at the working group “policies and green care” of COST 866 in Thessaloniki.

Afterwards in 2009 at the national Italian conference in Modena there were presentations of several initiatives for position papers in other countries (The Netherlands: Pit Driest; France: Gerald Assouline; Italy: Saverio Senni, Francesco Di Iacovo and Roberto Finuola etc.).

² <http://www.sofar-d.de/?Positionspapier>.

Then crucial points were elaborated to be included into a first draft for an international version by COST 866 working group 3 members (Aideen McGloin, Deirdre O'Connor, Hans Wydler, Gerald Assouline, Francesco Di Iacovo, Piet Driest, Pedro Mendes Morreira, Katriina Soini, Thomas van Elsen).

The second draft was presented and discussed at the Farming for Health CoP conference in Pisa within a panel discussion with Katja Vadnal (Slovenia), Piet Driest (The Netherlands), Larry Masterson (Ireland), Joachim Brych (Germany), Ferruccio Nilia (Italy) and Gerald Assouline (France) and Thomas van Elsen (Germany). After a third draft the manifesto was finalized at the COST conference in Antalya (2009).

European Manifesto on the Added Value of Social Farming

Call to decision-makers in industry, administration, politics and the public to support social farming in Europe

Compiled by the participants of the Conference *Farming for Health* from 25-27 May 2009 in Pisa/ Italy

European demands

Farming and Healthcare both face strong demands and challenges across Europe. Rural development tries to keep people and services in rural areas as a means of preventing landscape degradation and depopulation. Agriculture is highly valued for its cultural and multifunctional contribution within Europe. Small-scale farms and human labour on farms need specific approaches to survive and develop and the cultural landscapes, diversity of genetic resources, species and biotopes need attention in order to survive and flourish. In recent times, we see that EU countries' subsistence agriculture needs to find coherent pathways of adaptation and transition.

Health care (both in terms of prevention and cure) is another challenge facing all of Europe. The inclusion and participation of people with disabilities, migration and demographic changes are further challenges that Europe has to face. There is growing awareness of the need to take into account the social aspects of disability, rather than regarding it only as a 'medical' or 'biological' dysfunction. There is also increasing recognition of the importance of the contextual/environmental factors within which an individual's functioning and disability occurs.³

Both the future of agriculture and farming and the future of health care require a paradigm shift. This coincides with the Global and Sub-Global IAASTD⁴ Reports. The IAASTD development and sustainability goals were endorsed at the first Intergovernmental Plenary and are consistent with a subset of the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs): the reduction of hunger and poverty, the improvement of rural livelihoods and human health, and facilitating equitable, socially, environmentally and economically sustainable development. Successfully meeting development and sustainability goals and responding to new priorities and changing circumstances requires a fundamental shift in agricultural knowledge, including science, technology, policies, institutions, capacity development and investment.

³ See www.who.int/classifications/icf/en.

⁴ International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development, www.agassessment.org.

Such a shift would recognize and give increased importance to the multifunctionality of agriculture, accounting for the complexity of agricultural systems within diverse social and ecological contexts. To offer external benefits like human rights, welfare and inclusion of people with special needs are challenges for farming within societies of the future.

Social Farming as a contribution to Europe of the future

Can Social Farming help reconcile some of these demands and problems?

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.

Requirements and priorities

The added value created for society by social farming must receive recognition and targeted support. The diversity of social and cultural services and the social endeavour for people and nature need public support in order to maintain and develop the various fields of activity in social farming and its foster its identity. The integrative and educational work in particular, but also the health provision and therapeutic effects of social farming (through meaningful work and therapy, responsible use of natural resources, sustainable nutritional education) must be recognised, encouraged and researched further. The potential cost-savings for health insurance schemes and the health sector as a result of health improvements appears to be an additional argument.

Improving and developing Social Farming across Europe requires an enabling environment. A fruitful co-operation between the different sectors of policies and administration (health/ social/ agricultural/ employment) is needed - at European, national, regional and local levels. Furthermore the production and exchange of research knowledge, professional and practical knowledge across Europe is an essential requirement.

Social farming enterprises already provide society with added value at several levels within multifunctional agriculture. The measures for supporting social farming detailed in this position paper call upon politicians, ministers, scientists, consumers and the wider public to be aware of, recognise, maintain and promote these services. Social farming

opens up the social, cultural, educational and therapeutic potential of managing the land. For people with special needs it can offer good living conditions and places where their individual abilities are valued and enhanced. So for them social farming is a step towards inclusion into society. We do not want to see social farming as merely another specialist option for agricultural enterprises, but also as a possible building block for a more socially-minded future. Social agricultural enterprises within transparent systems offer opportunities for the personal development of those in need of help; a sustainable approach to managing nature and the revitalisation of rural areas. When many individuals act in concert and develop social values, small-scale alternatives to advancing rationalisation, greater competition and price wars can begin to emerge. The added value of social farming opens up prospects for a potential paradigm shift and transition pathways for agriculture and social work. The approach of social farming coincides with initiatives like networks for fair trade, solidarity, human salutogenesis and many actors see themselves as part of a movement and process of transition that improves societal demands not only in rural areas.

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Social Farming Perspectives in New 2014 – 2020 Programming Cycle

Social Farming (SF) is an increasing phenomenon across Europe and EU also is beginning to support it in terms of sharing activities with some initiatives as Cost Action 866 – “Green Care in Agriculture”; SoFar - Social Farming (a multi-country specific support action funded by the EU Commission); SF European Network for Rural Development (NRN) Joint Thematic Initiative; Multifunctional Agriculture in Europe (MAIE Project).

In the present 2007-2013 programming cycle of structural funds, SF is funded by EAFRD (rural development) as well as by the European Social Fund (ESF). In some countries SF is formally mentioned in official documents, in Italy for example, the National Strategic Plan for Rural Development (NSP) has included SF among the key actions of Axis III. The Italian National Strategic Plan indication was collected from all the Italian regions that were laid down specific actions in favor of SF in their Rural Development Programs (RDP). So the social farms start-up is regarded in measure 311 and SF has been included among the services that can be delivered within the measure 321 (basic services to the population in rural areas). In order to the ESF, the 'social inclusion' axis also funds SF initiatives, usually related to social cooperatives and / or third sector with still very limited participation of private farms.

This last consideration calls into question the lack of synergy between the two funds: although the EAFRD and ESF regulations have had required member states to indicate in advance the synergies between them. The National Strategy Plan for Rural Development and the National Strategic Framework for regional policies have in fact provided moments of connection between them.

But at regional/local level the two policies have been implemented with no single point of contact in a compartmentalized logic. The regional authorities responsible for rural development and those responsible for regional policies have been implemented their

activities separately. Even the managing authorities have been implemented their programs separately. The programs are therefore sometimes overlapping, while some areas or territories remain outside of all programs.

Therefore, the Commission has provided for the 2014-2020 cycle measures to overcome the problem.

Actually Commission's proposals contain interesting perspectives for SF taking into account the growing interest that SF is meeting in Europe.

In fact Member State or their Regions include SF in their Programmes, some Ministries are working together to support better the phenomena and the awareness of SF potentiality are growing in private farmers, farmer organisations, local institutions, and the world of medicine also is looking at SF with new eyes. As stated above, this interest was on the other hand already highlighted by the various initiatives at EU level (COST Action "Green Care", SoFar program, European Network for Rural Development, MAIE Project, ...). Finally, we can mention the launch (January 2012) of the procedure for an European Economic and Social Committee - EESC own initiative opinion concerning SF ("*NAT/539 Social farming*").

The initiative was taken by the EESC Section Agriculture, Rural Development and Environment and has had the official name of "*Social farming: green care and social and health policies*". It is a "own initiative opinion". According to the EU Treaty, the EESC opinions are normally required by the Commission, the Parliament or the Council. In some limited cases, the Committee may issue own initiative opinion expressing its views on any matter it thinks fit. The decision to issue an opinion on SF implies a strongly positive assessment of the phenomenon by the Committee. Opinion has been approved by the Committee in plenary session December 12, 2012 after a long preliminary work began in January 2012.⁵ Particularly, the activities of the EESC working group on SF led to clear indications of what the EU and member states could do to develop SF in Europe further. First of all the Committee takes note of the fact that SF is an innovative approach (social innovation) that brings together two concepts: multipurpose farming and social services/health care at local level. It contributes to the diversification of agricultural activities as well as to the well-being and the social integration of people with particular needs.

This can explain why SF has spread throughout Europe in a variety of forms that have some similarities but also numerous differences in terms of approach, how they relate to other sectors, and funding. In the EESC opinion a SF definition is needed at European level in order to identify the activities that are covered by SF and to define a framework and criteria – including quality criteria – that these activities must meet in order to benefit from support under the various policies. However, this definition must not be too narrow so as not to set in stone a situation that is constantly evolving.

In the opinion SF is provisionally defined as "*a cluster of activities that use agricultural resources – both animal and plant – to generate social services in rural or semi-rural areas, such as rehabilitation, therapy, sheltered jobs, lifelong learning and other activities contributing to social integration (according to the definition used in COST (European Cooperation in Science and Technology) Action 866 – Green Care). In this sense, it is about – among other things – making farms places where people with particular needs can take part in daily farming routines as a way of furthering their development, making progress and improving their well-being*".

⁵ The full text of the opinion is attached at the end of this article.

The Committee also notes that since there is no EU or national regulatory framework for SF, there is a lack of coordination between the various policies or institutions concerned. The EESC believes that the EU institutions and national and regional authorities and institutions should encourage and support social farming by putting in place an appropriate and conducive regulatory framework and implementing some measures.

The first measure proposed by the Committee concerns statistics on SF: available statistics on SF are few and partial. The EESC thinks it would be useful, therefore, to launch a programme of statistical research in order to quantify and analyze in greater depth its presence and the forms it takes in the Member States. The resultant database could be extended to promote research programmes in all of the Member States.

Particular attention is given to the research subjects: in the EESC opinion SF must be underpinned by interdisciplinary research in different spheres in order to validate empirical results, analyze 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 European level by the SoFar and COST Action projects in the next Horizon 2020 framework programme (2014-2020).

Regarding the networks, the EESC also considers it crucial to put in place and bolster social farming networks in order to share lessons learned, pool experience and raise awareness. Also desirable are a joint representation of SF interests at the political level and the establishment of an “*umbrella organization*” at European level. This would reinforce both exchanges between those involved and the role of civil society organizations.

In addition, particular attention should be devoted to the training of those involved – those with particular needs and benefiting from these services as well as service providers – in order to ensure a high level of quality and skills in SF operations. The DIANA- and MAIE-projects funded by the LifeLong Learning scheme have developed valuable approaches in training for actors involved in SF.

The Committee also expressed the view that a closer cooperation between policies affecting SF is necessary to develop it. A matter of fact, if it is to become entrenched throughout Europe, SF 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 means that it should be recognized and provided with targeted support by public authorities to give it sustained access to funding for various aspects of this type of farming.

Equally, it could be useful for the European Commission to build up a permanent system bringing together all the directorates-general concerned. The Member States could make similar arrangements. The Commission should also encourage a comparative study to be carried out of the social health systems – and how much they cost – in the Member States in order to boost any savings that could be made through social farming projects.

The EESC welcomes the Commission's proposals for the 2014-2020 period. In fact they open up new avenues for SF. Nevertheless, it would still seem to need better support in the future programming period. To this end, the EU and the Member States should coordinate recourse to the different policies relevant to SF. The EESC thinks that the Member States and the various authorities (national and EU) tasked with and responsible for the management of EU funds should work more closely together in order to remove barriers to access to structural funds and to facilitate this access for those in the front line.

In particular, the Committee finds that the Common Strategic Framework (CSF), provided for the 2014-2020 legislative package, makes it possible to combine funds as a part of a multiple financing strategy.

In this connection, the Commission should call on the Member States to refer to SF in their planning and to take an integrated approach in designing particular programmes that enable the sector to benefit more from the various structural funds. Another possibility would be to conceive thematic sub-programmes devoted to social farming or to support Leader projects in this sphere.

The point of view of the EESC is certainly acceptable considering the many innovations introduced in the legislative package for the 2014-2020 programming cycle are of direct interest to SF.⁶

At the base of the proposals, there is the consideration that the implementation of the Structural and Cohesion Funds in the 2007-2013 programming period has been criticized in that the limited funding available was fragmented on many projects thus diluting the effectiveness of the actions. The Commission is thus proposing that these Funds, which are assigned clear policy objectives by the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), can better pursue these objectives through a closer coordination in order to avoid overlap and maximize synergies, a full integration into the economic governance of the European Union, and a contribution to the delivery of the Europe 2020 objectives by engaging national, regional and local stakeholders.

To get a real synergy in the use of Structural Funds, the Commission proposed, in addition to the specific regulations for each Fund, a joint regulation which is an absolute novelty: the proposal COM(2012) 496 final, released on 11.9.2012, as a Common Provisions Regulation (CPR) for all structural Funds. The CPR is laying down common provisions on the structural funds: the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund. All these funds are covered by a Common Strategic Framework scheduled for the first time in EU regulation.

Based on the CPR, each Member State adopts a Partnership Contract and operative programs related to the various funds. In this way, the CPR is being proposed by the Commission, with a key element being the adoption of Partnership Contracts which will set out the commitments of the partners at national and regional level linked to the Europe 2020 objectives and the National Reform Programmes.

With the aim of facilitating the development of the Partnership Contracts and Operational Programmes, the adoption of a Common Strategic Framework (CSF) is also being proposed by the Commission to increase coherence between the five Funds in terms of the policy commitments made in the context of the Europe 2020 strategy and investments on the ground. The CSF seeks to improve coordination and secure the more targeted use of European funds. It is expected to improve coordination between the different EU funds by focusing the national and regional authorities' activities on a limited set of common objectives.

The CSF shall in particular provide to member states *“elements that provide clear strategic direction to the programming process and facilitate sectoral and territorial*

⁶ The legislative package for the 2014-2020 programming cycle and regarding all structural fund was submitted by Commission in October 2011. Some proposed regulations were subsequently amended following the debate with the Council and the European Parliament.

coordination of Union intervention under the CSF Funds and with other relevant Union policies and instruments in line with the objectives and targets of the Union strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth."

The original CPR Commission proposal (6 October 2011 - COM(2011) 615 final) foresaw the adoption of a Common Strategic Framework (CSF) which: "...translates the objectives of the Union into key actions for the CSF Funds, in order to provide clearer strategic direction to the programming process at the level of Member States and regions. The Common Strategic Framework should facilitate sectoral and territorial coordination of Union intervention under the CSF Funds and with other relevant Union policies and instruments. The Common Strategic Framework should therefore establish the key areas of support, territorial challenges to be addressed, policy objectives, priority areas for cooperation activities, coordination mechanisms and mechanisms for coherence and consistency with the economic policies of Member States and the Union." (Recitals 14 and 15). Article 12 of the proposal foresaw that the CFS would be adopted by the Commission as a delegated act.

Both the Council and the REGI Committee of the European Parliament have signalled that they wish to see the CSF adopted as an annex to the regulation and not as a delegated act. Consequently the Commission have presented an amended legislative proposal (11.9.2012 - COM(2012) 496 final) which splits the elements of the CSF between a new annex (Annex I) to the CPR and a delegated act.⁷

As a result of these changes this is the basic structure of new programming cycle 2014-2020:

- 1 a Common Provisions Regulation (CPR) for all structural Funds;
- 2 a specific Regulation for each Fund (one in common for ERDF and ESF);
- 3 a Common Strategic Framework (CFS);
- 4 eleven common thematic objectives for all CFS Funds;
- 5 a Partnership Contract for each Member State;
- 6 Operational Programmes (OP) for ERDF and ESF;
- 7 Rural Development Programmes (RDP) for EARDF.

The pivot of the system is therefore the CPS that is designed to maximize the contribution of the CSF Funds and to provide clear strategic direction to the programming process at the level of Member States and the regions. It should facilitate sectoral and territorial coordination of Union intervention under the CSF Funds and with other relevant Union policies and instruments. The CSF should therefore set out the means to achieve coherence and consistency with the economic policies of Member States and the Union, coordination mechanisms among the CSF Funds and with other relevant Union policies and instruments, horizontal principles and cross-cutting policy objectives, the arrangements to

⁷ The new annex contains four sections on 1) means to achieve coherence and consistency with the economic policies of Member States and the Union, 2) coordination mechanisms among CSF Funds and with other relevant Union policies and instruments, 3) horizontal principles and cross-cutting policy objectives and 4) arrangements to address territorial challenges. These sections will largely build on sections 3, 4 and 5 of the Commission staff working document and relevant elements of its Annexes I and II, adapting the language to the requirements of regulatory text. The delegated act will in turn contain two sections: 1) sections on indicative actions of high European added value and corresponding principles for delivery and 2) priorities for cooperation.

address territorial challenges indicative actions of high European added value and corresponding principles for delivery, and priorities.

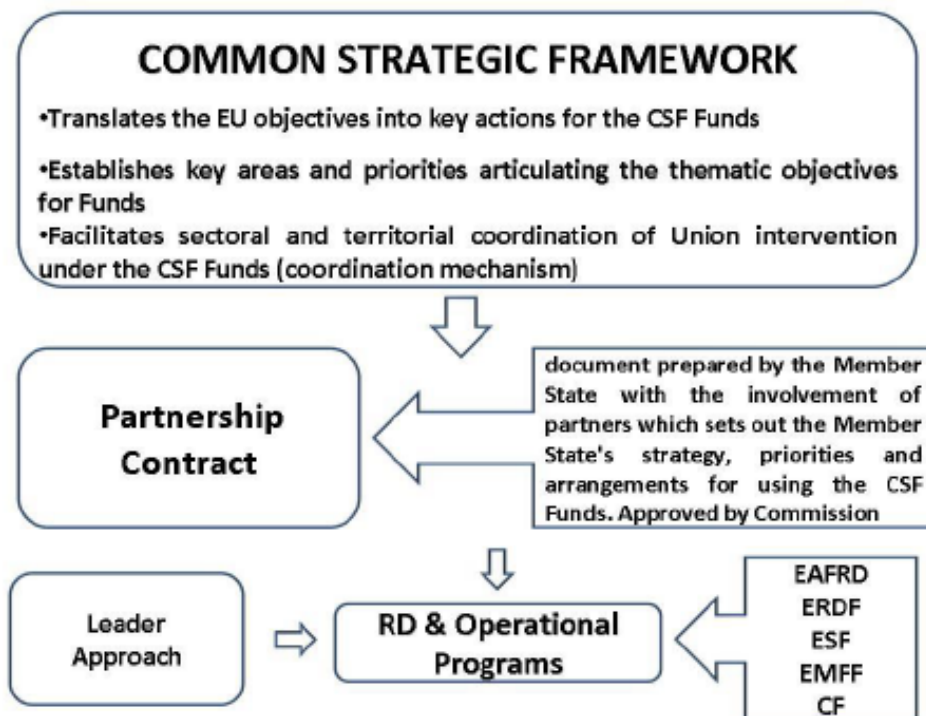


Figure 1. Common Strategic Framework.

The Common Strategic Framework shall establish:

- 1 means to achieve coherence and consistency of the programming of the CSF Funds with the country-specific recommendations under Article 121 of the Treaty and the relevant Council recommendations adopted under 148 of the Treaty;
- 2 coordination mechanisms among the CSF Funds, and with other relevant Union policies and instruments, including external instruments for cooperation;
- 3 horizontal principles and cross-cutting policy objectives for the implementation of the CSF Funds;
- 4 arrangements to address the key territorial challenges and the steps to be taken to encourage an integrated approach that reflects the role of for urban, rural, coastal and fisheries areas, as well as the specific challenges for areas with particular territorial features referred to in Articles 174 and 349 of the Treaty, to be addressed by the CSF Funds;
- 5 for each thematic objective, the key indicative actions of high European added value to be supported by each CSF Fund and the corresponding principles for delivery;
- 6 priorities for cooperation for the CSF Funds, where appropriate, taking account of macro-regional and sea basin strategies.

In brief, thematic concentration, coordination between the Funds and integrated territorial approach are the key words for the achievement of the objectives that the CSF translates into

key actions for each of the Funds. The CSF then defines the coordination mechanisms and plans that can go activate the integrated package combining the various funds and the extension of the Leader approach (previously planned only for the EAFRD) to all the funds themselves.

On the basis of the Common Strategic Framework, each Member State should prepare, in cooperation with its partners and in dialogue with the Commission, a *Partnership Contract*. The Partnership Contract is then the document prepared by the Member State with the involvement of partners in line with the multi-level governance approach, which sets out the Member State's strategy, priorities and arrangements for using the CSF Funds in an effective and efficient way to pursue the Union strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, and which is approved by the Commission following assessment and dialogue with the Member State. The Partnership Contract should translate the elements set out in the Common Strategic Framework into the national context and set out firm commitments to the achievement of Union objectives through the programming of the CSF Funds.⁸

For the Partnership Contract and each programme respectively, a Member State should organise a partnership with the representatives of competent regional, local, urban and other public authorities, economic and social partners, and bodies representing civil society, including environmental partners, non-governmental organizations, and bodies responsible for promoting equality and nondiscrimination. The purpose of such a partnership is to respect the principle of multi-level governance, ensure the ownership of planned interventions by stakeholders and build on the experience and know-how of relevant actors. The Commission has recognized the power to adopt delegated acts providing for a code of conduct in order to ensure that partners are involved in the preparation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of Partnership Contracts and programmes in a consistent manner;

The Commission requires member states to concentrate support to ensure a significant contribution to the achievement of Union objectives in line with their specific national and regional development needs. Ex ante conditionalities should be defined to ensure that the necessary framework conditions for the effective use of Union support are in place. The fulfilment of those ex ante conditionalities should be assessed by the Commission in the framework of its assessment of the Partnership Contract and programmes.

Eleven thematic objectives common to all funds are established by the CPR (Article 9).⁹ Each Fund shall support the thematic objectives in accordance with its mission in order to

⁸ The Partnership Contract shall set out:

- a. arrangements to ensure alignment with the Union strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth;
- b. an integrated approach to territorial development supported by the CSF Funds;
- c. an integrated approach to address the specific needs of geographical areas most affected by poverty or of target groups at highest risk of discrimination or exclusion, with special regard to marginalized communities, where appropriate, including the indicative financial allocation for the relevant CSF Funds;
- d. arrangements to ensure effective implementation;
- e. arrangements to ensure efficient implementation of the CSF Funds.

⁹ These are the thematic objectives:

1. strengthening research, technological development and innovation;
2. enhancing access to, and use and quality of, information and communication Technologies
3. enhancing the competitiveness of small and medium-sized enterprises, the agricultural sector (for the EAFRD) and the fisheries and aquaculture sector (for the EMFF);
4. supporting the shift towards a low-carbon economy in all sectors;
5. promoting climate change adaptation, risk prevention and management;
6. protecting the environment and promoting resource efficiency;
7. promoting sustainable transport and removing bottlenecks in key network infrastructures;

contribute to the Union strategy. Thematic objectives shall be translated into priorities specific to each CSF Fund and set out in the Fund-specific rules.

In the SF perspective thematic objective n. 9 (*promoting social inclusion and combating poverty*) is particularly relevant covering the promotion of social inclusion of less empowered people which are the usual beneficiaries of the SF activities. It means that SF initiatives could be financed by CSF Funds. This is particularly true if we consider the role played in Commission proposal by local development.

A Community Led Local Approach (CLLD) based on LEADER approach is proposed in the draft regulation (Articles 28-31) and concern all the Funds covered by the CSF. In Commission's view CLLD is a specific tool for use at sub-regional level, which is complementary to other development support at local level. CLLD can mobilise and involve local communities and organisations to contribute to achieving the Europe 2020 Strategy goals of smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, fostering territorial cohesion and reaching specific policy objectives.¹⁰

The most interesting feature of this methodology is will allow for connected and integrated use of the Funds to deliver local development strategies. In this way it is possible to increase consistency and to encourage the creation of multi-Fund local community-led strategies. Several features in the Common Provisions for the CSF Funds are aimed at simplifying the implementation of community-led local development for the beneficiaries:

- A single methodology for CLLD will be applicable across all Funds and regions – enabling all territories to benefit from EU support for capacity building, local public private partnerships and their strategies, networking and exchange of experience;
- Support from the CSF Funds will be consistent and coordinated. This will make it easier for beneficiaries to create multi-Fund strategies better adapted to their needs and areas, for instance, in an area that contains both rural and urban aspects. This will be ensured through coordinated capacity-building, selection, approval and funding of local development strategies and local action groups;
- Lead Fund: In the case of multi-Fund strategies, there will be the possibility to finance the running costs and organisation of the local development strategy through one single Fund (i.e. the Lead Fund);

Interesting aspects for SF can also be found in the proposals for individual funds. Regarding rural development, the EAFRD legal proposal - COM(2011) 627 final/2 -, retains the long-term strategic objectives (competitiveness of agriculture, environment, a balanced

8. promoting employment and supporting labour mobility;

9. promoting social inclusion and combating poverty;

10. investing in education, skills and lifelong learning;

11. enhancing institutional capacity and an efficient public administration.

¹⁰ The Leader approach is characterized by:

(a) focused on specific sub-regional territories;

(b) community-led, by local action groups composed of representatives of public and private local socio-economic interests, where at the decision-making level neither the public sector nor any single interest group shall represent more than 49 % of the voting rights;

(c) carried out through integrated and multi-sectoral area-based local development strategies;

(d) designed taking into consideration local needs and potential, and include innovative features in the local context, networking and, where appropriate, cooperation.

territorial development of rural areas) but leaves the axis structure in favor of a vision based on six priorities:

- 1 knowledge transfer and innovation in agriculture
- 2 competitiveness of agriculture and farm viability
- 3 promoting food chain organization and risk management in agriculture,
- 4 restoring, preserving and enhancing ecosystems dependent on agriculture
- 5 supporting the shift towards a low carbon and climate resilient economy in agriculture,
- 6 promoting social inclusion poverty reduction and economic development in rural areas

Where the last priority is directly linked to SF; the development of local infrastructure and local basic services in rural areas are in fact considered an essential element of any effort to realize the growth potential and promote the sustainability of rural areas. It means that development of services and infrastructure leading to social inclusion and reversing trends of social and economic decline and depopulation of rural areas should be encouraged. And SF enters fully in all these activities.

On measures envisaged in the scheme of regulation two deserve consideration from the point of view of SF: “*Farm and business development*” (art. 20) and “*Basic services and village renewal in rural areas*” (art. 21). The first provides that a support shall cover:

- (a) business start-up aid for:
 - (i) young farmers;
 - (ii) non-agricultural activities in rural areas;
 - (iii) the development of small farms;
- (b) investments in non-agricultural activities;
- (c) annual payments for farmers participating in the small farmers scheme.

Where measure (a) (ii) and (b) can certainly finance SF initiatives. The other measure - *Basic services and village renewal in rural areas* – provides that a support shall cover in particular:

- (a) the drawing up and updating of plans for the development of municipalities in rural areas and their basic services....;
- (b) investments in the setting-up, improvement or expansion of local basic services for the rural population, including leisure and culture, and the related

The draft Regulation on the ESF (COM(2011) 607 final /2) too contains interesting perspectives for SF: it proposes to target the ESF on four ‘thematic objectives’ throughout the European Union:

- (i) promoting employment and labour mobility;
- (ii) investing in education, skills and lifelong learning;
- (iii) promoting social inclusion and combating poverty;
- (iv) enhancing institutional capacity and an efficient public administration.

Where objective iii is directly connected to SF. Each thematic objective is translated into intervention categories or ‘investment priorities’. In addition, concentration of funding is required to achieve a sufficient and demonstrable impact. In addition, the ESF draft Regulation gives some indications to ensure this concentration among which the suggestion that at least 20% of the ESF allocation should be dedicated to ‘promoting social inclusion and combating poverty’. So we can imagine a territorial approach in which EAFRD and ESF contribute concurrently to fund SF initiatives promoting social inclusion of people with disabilities. Another possibility for SF comes from the expected strengthening of social innovation and transnational cooperation under the ESF, through an incentive in the form of a higher co-funding rate for priority axes dedicated to them, specific programming and monitoring arrangements, and a stronger role for the Commission in the exchange and dissemination of good practices, joint actions and results across the Union.

It is now necessary that these possibilities are realized in the Partnership Contracts and, at regional level, in the EAFRD rural development programs and ESF/ERDF operational programs. The national planning should be focused on an integrated use of funds for specific interventions in favour of SF. This is even more important when considering the financial dimensions of various funds: the current state of the financial proposals (for which you must also provide a substantial reduction as a result of ongoing negotiations on the EU budget) ESF and EAFRD absorb 61.8% of the total resources allocated to the Structural Funds against 20.8% for rural development (the rest goes to the Cohesion Fund and the Fisheries Fund). Hence the need for SF operators, but in general for all over the world agricultural, to change their views looking over rural development in the direction of regional policies to exploit the possibilities offered by the new multi-fund vision.

Conclusion

The development of Green Care in Agriculture in European countries can be seen as a bottom-up approach consisting of a multitude of activities. Both the future of farming and the future of health care require a paradigm shift, and policies on regional, national and European level are asked for support. The initiative taken by the EESC Section Agriculture, Rural Development and Environment “*Social farming: green care and social and health policies*” is an important step considering the multifunctionality of agriculture and the importance of Green Care approaches to increase benefits like human rights, welfare and inclusion of people with special needs within societies of the future.

Annex

European Economic and Social Committee

Brussels, 12 December 2012

Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on Social farming: green care and social and health policies (own-initiative opinion)

Rapporteur: Ms Willems

On 19 January 2012, the European Economic and Social Committee, acting under Rule 29 (2) of its Rules of Procedure, decided to draw up an own-initiative opinion on *Social farming: green care and social and health policies*. The Section for Agriculture, Rural Development and the Environment, which was responsible for preparing the Committee's work on the subject, adopted its opinion on 22 November 2012.

At its 485th plenary session, held on 12 and 13 December 2012 (meeting of 12 December), the European Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion by 124 votes with 3 abstentions.

1. Conclusions and recommendations

- 1.1. Social farming is an innovative approach that brings together two concepts: multipurpose farming and social services/health care at local level. It makes a contribution in the ambit of agricultural production to the well-being and the social integration of people with particular needs. The EESC has been prompted to draw up an own-initiative opinion on the matter by the substantial expansion in social farming.
- 1.2. 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.
- 1.3. Nevertheless, a definition is needed at European level in order to identify the activities that comprise it and to define a framework and criteria – including quality criteria – that these activities must meet in order to benefit from support under the various policies. However, this definition must not be too narrow so as not to set in stone a situation that is constantly evolving.
- 1.4. 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. The EESC believes that the EU institutions and national and regional authorities and institutions should encourage and support social farming by putting in place an appropriate and conducive regulatory framework and implementing the measures set out below.
- 1.5. Available statistics on social farming are few and partial. The EESC thinks it would be useful, therefore, to launch a programme of statistical research in order to quantify and analyse in greater depth its presence and the forms it takes in the Member States. The resultant database could be extended to promote research programmes in all the Member States.
- 1.6. 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 European level by the SoFar and COST Action projects in the next Horizon 2020 framework programme (2014-2020).
- 1.7. The EESC also considers it crucial to put in place and bolster social farming networks in order to share lessons learned, pool experience and raise awareness. Also desirable are a joint representation of social farming interests at the political level and the establishment of an umbrella organisation at European level. This

- would reinforce both exchanges between those involved and the role of civil society organisations.
- 1.8. In addition, particular attention should be devoted to the training of those involved – those with particular needs and benefiting from these services as well as service providers – in order to ensure a high level of quality and skills in social farming operations.
 - 1.9. If it is to become entrenched 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 means that it should be recognised and provided with targeted support by public authorities to give it sustained access to funding for various aspects of this type of farming.
 - 1.10. Equally, it could be useful for the European Commission to erect a permanent system bringing together all the directorates-general concerned. The Member States could make similar arrangements. The Commission should also encourage a comparative study to be carried out of the social protection systems – and how much they cost – in the Member States in order to boost any savings that could be made through social farming projects.
 - 1.11. The EESC is very pleased to note that the Commission's proposals for the 2014-2020 period open up new avenues for social farming. Nevertheless, it would still seem to need better support in the future programming period. To this end, the EU and the Member States should coordinate recourse to the different policies relevant to social farming. The EESC thinks that the Member States and the various authorities (national and EU) tasked with and responsible for the management of EU funds should work more closely together in order to remove barriers to access to structural funds and to facilitate this access for those in the front line.
 - 1.12. The Common Strategic Framework makes it possible to combine funds as a part of a multiple financing strategy. In this connection, the Commission should call on the Member States to refer to social farming in their planning and to take an integrated approach in designing particular programmes that enable the sector to benefit more from the various structural funds. Another possibility would be to conceive thematic sub-programmes devoted to social farming or to support Leader projects in this sphere.
- ## 2. General comments
- 2.1. Almost all of Europe's rural areas have experienced the development of social farming since the end of the last century as a new, economically sustainable practice and experience with it is constantly expanding. While social farming is the umbrella term for these activities, the expressions "farming for health", "care farming", "green care" and "green therapies" are also used. Each of these refers to different practices or operations in the care, social reintegration, training and rehabilitation of the disadvantaged or the training of people with particular needs. These activities enable those in difficulty to re-establish contact with productive activity and the natural environment and contribute to their well-being, improved health and social inclusion; they facilitate learning and boost self-esteem and

hence participation in the life of society. In this sense, social farming is an innovative approach that brings together two concepts: multipurpose farming and social services/health care at local level. On the one hand, it ties in closely with the multipurpose nature of farming and is part and parcel of the concept of rural development, giving farmers the opportunity to diversify their sources of income. On the other hand, it benefits society by delivering social services and improving existing services for those living in rural areas by drawing on agricultural and rural resources in the broadest sense.

- 2.2. Although social farming practices in Europe share similarities in being closely related to traditional rural economy activities and taking place on the farm (organic farms, labour-intensive farms, high degree of multifunctionality, local outreach, diversification and increased flexibility), there are also many differences between countries given their history, approaches and focus. Although approaches vary, there are essentially three main ones:
 - an institutional approach, with the prevalence of public/health institutions (the main approach in Germany, France, Ireland and Slovenia)
 - a private approach based on therapeutic farms (the main approach in the Netherlands and Flanders in Belgium)
 - a mixed approach based on social cooperatives and private farms (the main approach in Italy).
- 2.3. Their focus is also different: in Italy and France, social farming is mostly connected with the social and healthcare sector; in the Netherlands it is closer to the health system; in Flanders it is nearer to agriculture and in Germany, Great Britain, Ireland and Slovenia it lies somewhere between the social/health and health sectors.
- 2.4. Financing patterns differ from country to country:
 - public projects and charity based on voluntary associations (Italy and France) and social cooperatives (Italy)
 - public funds (health/care/education sectors) directed to public bodies (Germany, Ireland and Slovenia), farms (Netherlands) and social cooperatives (Italy)
 - rural development policies to support the launch and development of social farms in the 2007-2013 programming period (Italy)
 - direct access to food markets for ethical products and direct selling (France and Italy).

In reality, however, funding methods are often more diverse and mixed.

- 2.5. Social farming can take a number of forms. It may involve privately run farm businesses for which it provides an alternative source of income while still producing for the market; it may also involve social enterprises or cooperatives, associations and foundations – i.e., non-profit organisations. In other instances social farming – while taking place on farms – is carried out by public bodies or agencies in the health sector.

3. Definition of social farming

- 3.1. Social farming includes a broad range of different practices and so is not easy to define. Nevertheless, a definition is needed at European level in order to identify

the operations that comprise it and to define a framework and criteria – including quality criteria – that these must meet in order to benefit from support under the various policies. However, this definition must not be too narrow so as not to set in stone a situation that is constantly evolving. It must instead supply a framework that maintains the flexibility needed to encompass social farming's multitude of activities and bottom-up approach.

- 3.2. Even though social farming comprises a very wide range of activities, they always have two elements in common: a) the activities take place on a farm and b) they are designed for people who – either temporarily or permanently – have specific needs, including educational needs. As a result, social farming contributes to the well-being of individuals and helps them thrive, but it also contributes to the development of rural regions and better interaction between town and country.
- 3.3. Social farming could thus be provisionally defined as a cluster of activities that use agricultural resources – both animal and plant – to generate social services in rural or semi-rural areas, such as rehabilitation, therapy, sheltered jobs, lifelong learning and other activities contributing to social integration (according to the definition used in COST (European Cooperation in Science and Technology) Action 866 – Green Care). In this sense, it is about – among other things – making farms places where people with particular needs can take part in daily farming routines as a way of furthering their development, making progress and improving their well-being.
- 3.4. There are currently four main areas of social farming:
 - a rehabilitation and therapeutic activities
 - b work inclusion and social integration
 - c education activities
 - d personal support services.

4. Lack of legal framework at EU and national level

- 4.1. Through therapy, work and social inclusion, or education, social farming undoubtedly delivers high-value public services and contributes to sustainable development. Moreover, by virtue of the diversification of activities that it generates and the underlying dynamic, it can have a sizeable impact on local development.
- 4.2. Many instances of social farming have come about through a bottom-up process, creating local networks that enable a global development of geographical areas. This is why social farming is in line with the OECD's "New Rural Paradigm" publication (2006) and explicitly mentioned in the "Rural Policy Reviews" concerning the OECD countries (such as Italy). It was also examined at the OECD Rural Development Conference in Quebec (2009). It is worth pointing out here that some social farming initiatives are funded by 2007-2013 rural development policies (Axes III and IV of the Leader programme) and Social Fund social inclusion measures.
- 4.3. Awareness of the potential of social farming is growing at every level and farmer organisations, local communities, and health and social institutions are taking a fresh look at it. However, only certain countries (France, Italy and the Netherlands) have put sector regulations in place, either at the national or regional

level. Moreover, the absence of any linkage between the various policies and/or institutions involved in social farming is evident everywhere.

Nevertheless, its practitioners are beginning to band together to pool experience and the crucial role of spontaneous networks of social farmers has to be recognised.

- 4.4. In recent years, the European Commission has launched a number of initiatives – such as COST Action 866 – Green Care and the SoFar project (an initiative funded by the European Commission within the Sixth Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development) – to support these activities; an initiative launched in December 2009 within the European Network for Rural Development brought together seven Member States to examine the opportunities and obstacles in national and regional rural development plans cofunded by the EAFRD. A position paper on social farming was drafted by Germany (Prof. Thomas van Elsen) in 2008 as part of the SoFar project and updated in 2009.

5. Action to be taken

- 5.1. Recognition of social farming at EU level and establishment of a regulatory framework
 - 5.1.1. In view of the public goods that it produces and its contribution to sustainable development, social farming should be encouraged and supported by the EU institutions and by governments. This includes putting in place an appropriate and conducive regulatory framework at the different levels, recognising social farming's added value and improving its governance, as well as establishing a conducive environment and fruitful cooperation between different policy areas and administrations (health/ social/farming/employment) at European, national, regional and local level. Targeted support from public authorities and an integrated deployment of structural funds to underpin social farming are also desirable, as are the promotion and support of interdisciplinary research and the bolstering of communication and exchange of experience.
 - 5.1.2. In putting in place a regulatory framework, particular attention should be devoted to the quality of social farming and setting out general criteria, including quality criteria, that operations must meet. Likewise, the necessary measures should be put in place to ensure appropriate monitoring of social farming operations.
 - 5.1.3. In addition, a permanent organisational structure, created by the European Commission and involving all the relevant directorates-general, could be useful in encouraging, monitoring and coordinating the development of social farming in Europe. Similar arrangements could be put in place in the Member States.
- 5.2. Creation of a database at EU level

Although the number of social farms is increasing in every country, they generally account for less than 1% of all farm businesses. Nevertheless, available statistics on social farming are fragmentary and scarce. It would be expedient, therefore, to launch a programme of statistical research at European level in order to quantify and more closely analyse the presence of social farming in Europe and the forms it takes. The Commission could extend this database to promote research programmes in each Member State.

5.3. Encouraging the inclusion of social farming in research programmes

- 5.3.1. The cooperation at European level begun by SoFar and the COST Action 866 – Green Care project in farming should be promoted and developed. The production and exchange of scientific, professional and practical data across Europe is very important.

Social farming needs the support of more detailed research in the areas of therapy and medicine, in social work in farming and in farming and training. This research must closely engage with work on the ground. Positive empirical results obtained in therapies with plants and animals must be validated by rigorous scientific analyses in order to secure acknowledgement from the medical community. Lessons drawn from experience regarding the efficacy of integration of people in the daily and yearly routine of work on the farm must be documented and fed into further developments in social farming.

- 5.3.2. Interdisciplinary research that analyses the impact and the benefits of social farming from various perspectives (social, economic, health, individual, etc.), ensures the transfer of knowledge gained from experience and involves people on the ground can generate innovative ideas and reinforce their entrenchment in social farming. Scientific support for pilot projects can facilitate the extension of models based on individual businesses or cooperatives across a whole region. Interdisciplinary studies and research should be embarked upon to analyse the impact of social farming in terms of possible savings for health insurance schemes and improvement to the health and well-being of recipients of its services. Some countries, including the Netherlands, have already conducted studies into these aspects.
- 5.3.3. This research could take place within the Horizon 2020 (2014-2020) framework programme, since this takes on board the social facets of research and innovation. Horizon 2020 support and coordination for social farming is highly desirable, since the programme could facilitate meetings and communication between researchers in various disciplines related to this kind of farming.

5.4. Encouraging the inclusion of social farming in education programmes

Particular attention should be devoted to the training of those involved – recipients as well as service providers – in order to ensure a high level of quality and skills in social farming operations. It would make sense, therefore, to design and make available continuing education programmes – in close collaboration with teaching and research institutions – to provide a high level of skills to the heads of undertakings and their staff responsible for social farming beneficiaries.

It would also be expedient to examine and put in place the sort of training that could be given to these beneficiaries.

5.5. Strengthening the role of civil society and the building up of networks

- 5.5.1. Innovative projects in social farming are often developed in isolation, without any awareness of – or swapping of experience with – similar projects. It is vital, however, to put in place and strengthen social farming networks so they can pool experience, help make projects known and promote best practices. A first

- step in this direction has been taken in the ambit of the European Network for Rural Development. This type of network should be bolstered.
- 5.5.2. Cooperation should similarly be promoted, as should joint publications and an internet presence.
 - 5.5.3. It would also be good to work towards a joint representation of social farming interests at the political level and to promote the establishment of an umbrella organisation at European level. Such an organisation, which would include civil society, could make it easier for social farming practitioners to compare notes and help them both technically and administratively, while also making sure that farming interests are championed at the political level. Farming organisations have an important role to play here.
 - 5.5.4. All of this could be planned and implemented under the new 2014-2020 rural development policy and be based in particular on the European Network for Rural Development and the Member States' rural development networks, so that the social farming initiative mentioned above would be expanded to include other Member States.
- 5.6. Inclusion of social farming in the sustainable development strategy and the Common Strategic Framework
- 5.6.1. Social farming has benefited from some support under current rural development policy, especially under Axis 3 (diversification) and Axis 4 (Leader) and under the "social inclusion" axis of the ESF. The recognition of social farming as an element of rural economy development should enable it to benefit from all the actions promoted and funded by the European structural funds (EAFRD, ESF and ERDF) and so access new sources of financing.
 - 5.6.2. Even if the Commission proposals for the next programming period offer a number of new prospects – in the sense that the fight against poverty, social inclusion and the diversification of farming activities are mentioned as explicit goals of this policy (and ones which can be ideally combined in social farming) –, it would still appear necessary to give social farming even more support by stressing its role in both the future programming period and the partnership contract. To this end, the EU and the Member States should coordinate recourse to the different policies relevant to social farming. The EESC thinks that the Member States and the various authorities (national and EU) tasked with and responsible for the management of EU funds should work more closely together in order to remove barriers to access to structural funds and to facilitate this access for those in the front line.
 - 5.6.3. In the new programming framework social farming is eligible for funding from several funds – and over several years. It is possible under the Common Strategic Framework to combine the different funds in a multiple financing strategy. Member States should be invited to refer to social farming in their programming and to draft specific programmes that will enable it to benefit more from the various structural funds. It really is crucially important, therefore, to convince national and local authorities to make the most of these possibilities.

Given its multidimensional and multipurpose nature, social farming – and those involved in it – could benefit hugely from a truly integrated approach that facilitates and better coordinates recourse to various funds and the associated procedures and measures.

- 5.6.4. To achieve this, it could be very useful to put in place a communications policy for the rural development sphere addressed to the Member States that could also include monitoring and reports. Another possibility would be to envisage a thematic sub-programme under Article 8 or to bolster Leader projects dealing with social farming.
- 5.6.5. Finally, the various directorates-general should step up their collaboration in order to give social farming easier access to all the structural funds by removing the difficulties that have so far prevented farmers from accessing regional policies.

Brussels, 12 December 2012.

The President of the European and Social Committee
(Staffan Nilson)

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PUBLIC HEALTH IN THE 21ST CENTURY

GREEN CARE

FOR HUMAN THERAPY,
SOCIAL INNOVATION,
RURAL ECONOMY, AND
EDUCATION



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Additional color graphics may be available in the e-book version of this book.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

ISBN: 978-1-62618-777-1 (eBook)

Library of Congress Control Number: 2013937385

Published by Nova Science Publishers, Inc. † New York