



FARM' IN

INCLUSION THROUGH
SOCIAL FARMING



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1.2. Definitions and approaches to Social Farming

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Social farming conceptualization





Social farming is an emerging topic for different stakeholders across Europe: farmers, farmers' organizations, social and health care services, regional and national authorities.

But what does Social Farming mean?
What does it include?





Social is a polysemic word, that recalls many meanings and, in the agricultural field, refers to different areas: nutrition, environment, teaching, free time, landscape, traditions, inclusion, etc.



According to a very broad meaning of the word, some people believe that all agriculture is social.

Definitions of Social Farming

There is no unique definition of social farming recognized at EU level. However, the definition by Di Iacovo and O'Connor (2009), synthesize the main characteristics of these practices:

Social Farming (SF) is both a traditional and innovative use of agriculture. It includes all activities that use agricultural resources, both from plants and animals, in order to promote (or to generate) therapy, rehabilitation, social inclusion, education and social services in rural areas.



Differences and similarities

SF is associated with many different initiatives and practices across the EU. Differences include the purposes and objectives, the users or client groups, the activities and services offered, the farm's role and engagement, involved actors, financial aspects, institutional support, etc.

Practices and initiatives, nevertheless, rely on the use of the farm's agricultural resources, including the natural environment of the farm, for the provision of care activities and social services.




Target groups and activities/services

Considering the experiences from the different EU countries, it is possible to identify some key target groups of social farming: people with mental health challenges, people with intellectual, physical or sensory disabilities, youth-at-risk, the elderly, people with substance abuse issues, refugees, etc.

Due to the innovative nature of SF, new needs and new target groups emerge all the time.

The Focus Group on Social Farming used the term 'health/social care/education/unemployment/social inclusion' to encompass the full range of service types from which participants are typically drawn.



Different settings... different practices

Social farming can take place within a variety of agricultural settings and contexts, depending on the resources, problems, solutions adopted, but also on the regulatory framework of the different countries.

The activity can in fact be carried out in “traditional” farms, farms/gardens attached to health and social care services, farm-based work integration social enterprises or within the context of community projects.





Social farming approaches




Models/approaches

- A wide range of factors, as well as the specific approach/model of SF, influence the practices in different countries and regions.
- It follows that there is no 'best' model to be considered in developing or organizing social farming. On the contrary, it has to be developed organically according to specific conditions and contexts, based on problems, needs, actors, users and resources.



From the
agricultural
side

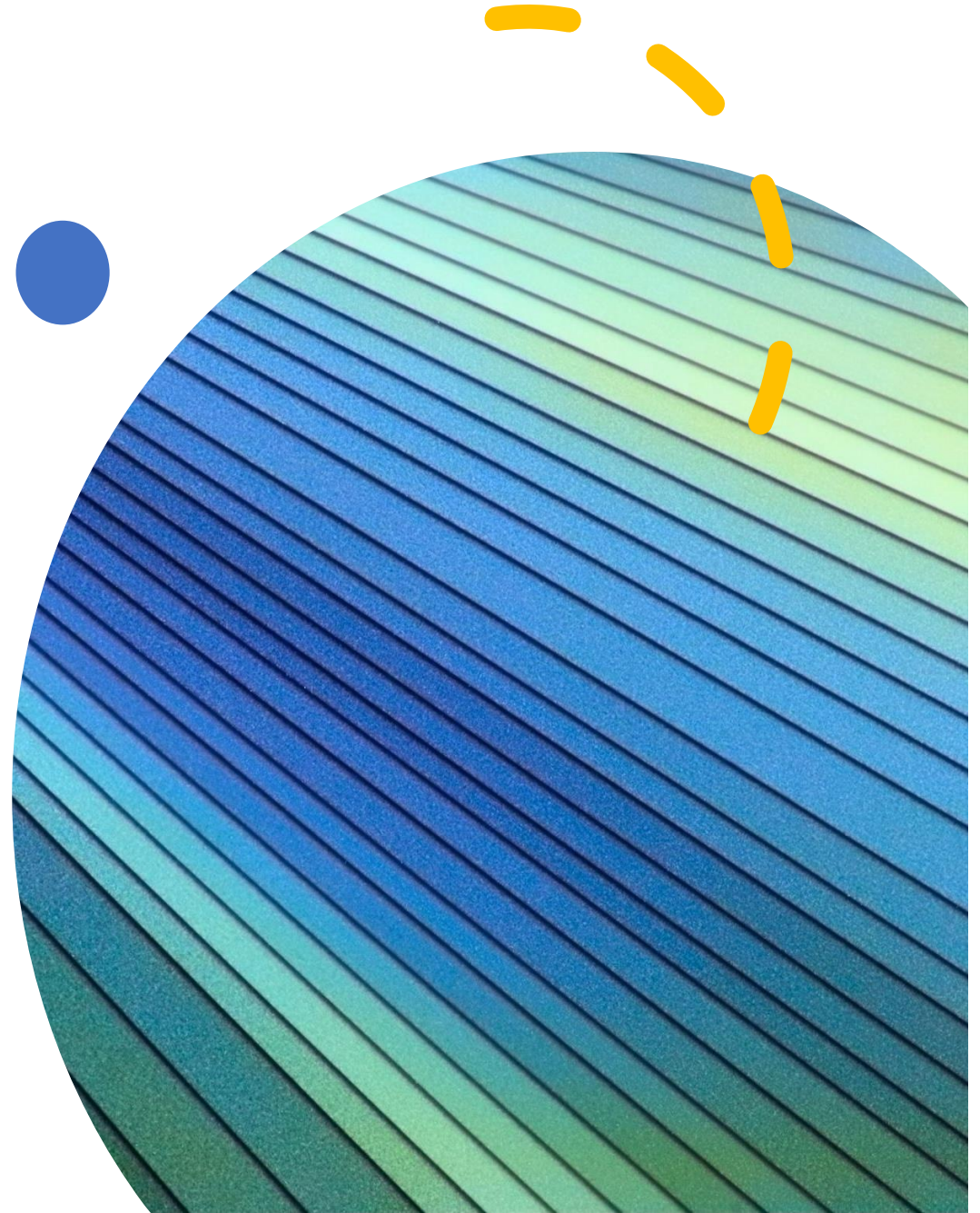
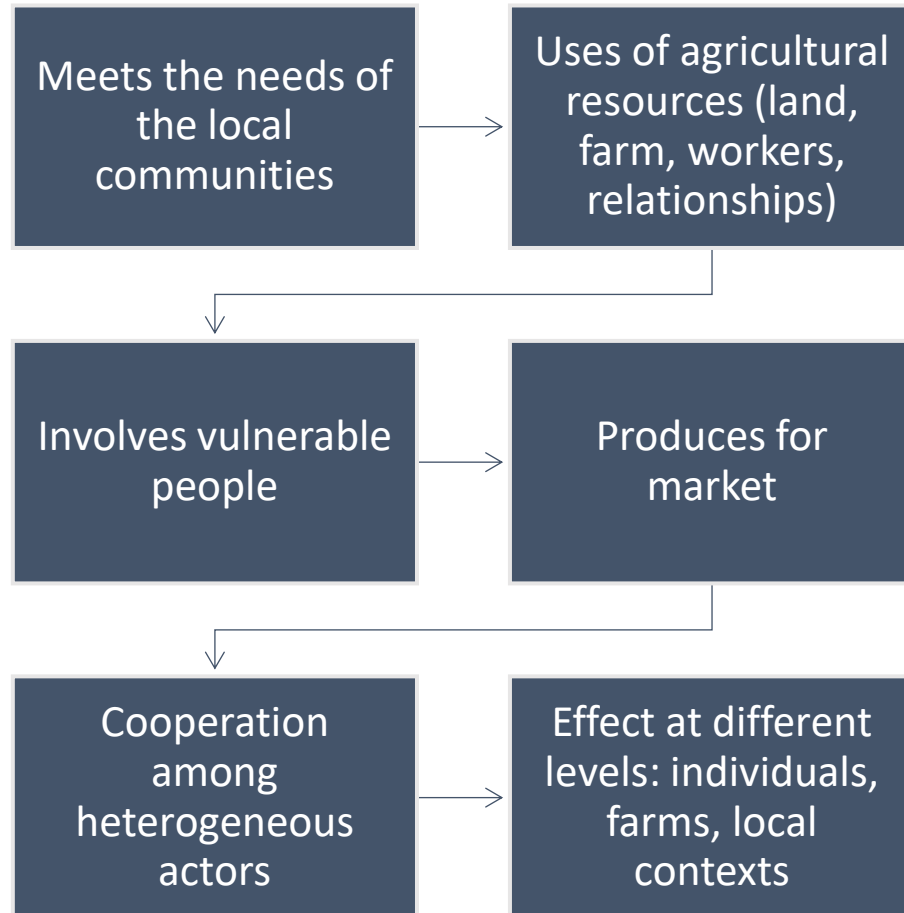
Social farming is closely linked to the multifunctional nature of agriculture and contributes to sustainable rural development. It also offers farmers the opportunity to diversify their income and experience a range of benefits and positive outcomes associated with farming.



From the welfare side (Di Iacovo, 2020)

- Northern European model: strong state intervention driven by the public social health system gives relevance to social workers and their main goals in terms of innovative and quality-based service provisions. Resources from agriculture are activated by involving diverse farmers in the public logic of intervention.
- Workfare: Where farmers are not recognized, the social sector can activate natural and agricultural resources under the financial support of public policies.
- Anglo-Saxon: charity system based on foundations able to support social farming and garden initiatives normally driven by charity groups and NGOs.
- Eastern European: SF initiatives are beginning to emerge in regimes where communities still have a relevant role due to the involvement of pioneer projects rooted in the support of different actors.
- Mediterranean welfare: different stakeholders as the consequence of a welfare mix including (besides the public) the private specialized sector (the second sector), the so-called third sector (NGOs), families (the fourth sector), etc.
- Private quasi-markets: families and users can directly buy SF services provided by private firms in accordance with established guidelines provided normally by public institutions.

Social farming



Origins of Social Farming



How and when was SF born?

Different hypotheses about the origin of Social Farming.

Some scholars affirm that agriculture is capable of welcoming everyone while respecting natural cycles: the traditional agricultural family takes care of the entire community and its problems...

... so, all agricultural activity is social, regardless of intentions



Past experiences

Europe, 18th-19th century:
experiences of involvement of
psychiatric patients or poor people in
agricultural activities.

The creation of farms connected to or
detached from asylums was
considered a new and significant
advance in the management of
psychiatric patients



Agriculture did not have a real
therapeutic function

Gheel (BELGIUM), a rural center near
Anversa, in 1821 hosted around 400
people with mental problems (around
800 in the mid-1800s), entrusted by
their families to farmers, with the
hope of healing through the
intercession of Saint Dinfna.

In the agricultural colony of Clermont-Ferrand (FRANCE), the
farm was a real detachment from the psychiatric hospital,
aimed at producing the goods necessary for the functioning of
the hospital itself. It was characterized by public and not
private management.

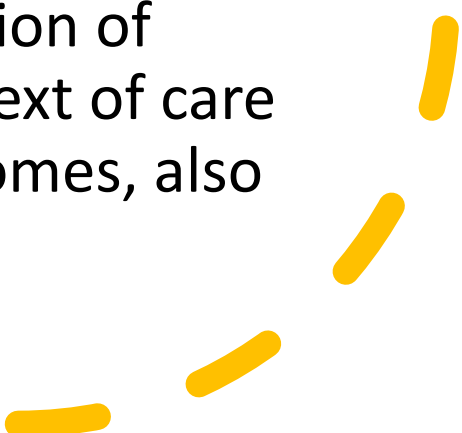
The York Retreat (ENGLAND), founded in 1796, was a country
house where Quakers with mental/psychiatric problems could
live together and cultivate the vegetable garden, obtaining
undoubted benefits for their health conditions.




Negative aspects

In the 19th and early 20th century, many monasteries, educational and therapeutic social institutions and psychiatric hospitals were associated with agricultural facilities that were used for self-supply with milk, meat, eggs, vegetables, and other foodstuffs. Sometimes, the providers also knew about the advantages of working for their patients.

In addition, the use of agriculture for social purposes in some past experiences also had some dark chapters, i.e. abuse and exploitation of children and young people in the context of care education in orphanages and youth homes, also through agricultural work

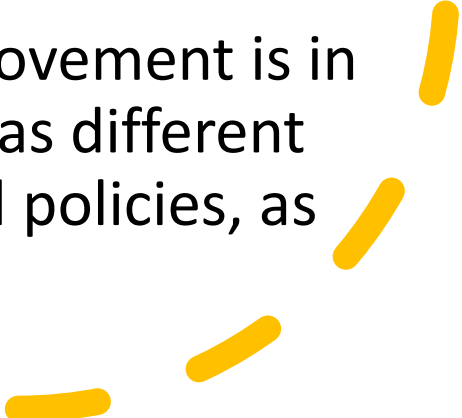




It is challenging to understand how and by whom the social farming movement originated. It seems that enthusiasts and pioneers noticed benefits for individuals working with plants and animals, as well as those in touch with nature within the local community, as well as working in a non-judgmental context.

However, many other factors such as finance, institutions, knowledge, skills, expertise and support policies are needed to build practices and interventions.

Throughout Europe, the social farm movement is in different stages of development and has different support organizations, institutions and policies, as well as different approaches.



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Focus Group 'Social farming and innovations'

https://eu-cap-network.ec.europa.eu/social-farming-and-innovations_en

All materials, in particular:

Final report, 2023, https://eu-cap-network.ec.europa.eu/publications/report-eu-cap-network-focus-group-social-farming-and-innovations_en#section--resources

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