



FARM' IN

INCLUSION THROUGH
SOCIAL FARMING



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1.5. Co-therapy and Social farming

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Nature and agriculture

Contact with nature and natural environments contributes to human health and well-being throughout the lifespan.

Numerous studies have highlighted that the relationships between natural elements, green spaces, landscapes, and outdoor activities produce a wide range of positive effects, including benefits for physical health, mental health, cognitive development and social interactions.



Co-therapy

Social farming \leftrightarrow Green care (Northern Model)

Care farming is an intervention aimed at promoting health and well-being through the use of a farm environment as the central element and has been used for various client groups (Hassink et al., 2010)

Coexistence of different types of SF activities, mainly in the Mediterranean Model

Care farming

- Care farms serving people living either provide adult day services during weekdays, or 24-hour care as an alternative for regular nursing homes. There is a small number of care farms providing evening or weekend services to people or respite services to family caregivers.
- Care farming varies both between and within countries. They generally have some degree of commercial farming (i.e. crops, livestock, and woodland) combined with health, social and/or educational care services.

Care farming


In some European countries, many farmers and staff members have an education in agriculture, health care, and/or social care (e.g. social workers, registered nurses, nurse assistants, nurse aides, occupational therapists, educational staff).

Care farms often collaborate with staff of regular care settings or could be organised as a part of the municipal care service. Volunteers to assist with the services are common (Hassink et al., 2012).



Care farming in Europe

The Netherlands and Norway are considered to be at the forefront of providing and seeking care on social farms, with 1250 social farms in the Netherlands and 400 registered and an unknown number of unregistered social farms in Norway ().



Care farming is being implemented in other countries, although exact numbers are often unknown. Estimations indicate: Austria (n=600), Belgium (n=670), France (n=900), Ireland (n=100), Italy (n=675), South Korea (n=30), Switzerland (n=1000), United Kingdom (n=230), and no estimations available for Japan, Poland and the USA.



De Bruin et al., 2020

Nature-based interventions and green care activities consist of a broad range of programs and services that use plants, animals, and/or landscapes to create therapeutic and treatment interventions designed to address the health and care needs of the general population or specific population groups.

The interventions are diverse not only in their targeted groups but also in their design and setting: wilderness therapy, animal-assisted therapy, care or social farming, gardening and horticultural interventions.



Wilderness therapy

- Wilderness therapy is an outdoor behavioral healthcare used for the treatment of behavioral disorders, substance abuse, and mental health issues, mainly in young. Patients spend time living outdoors with other peers and professionals.
- Possibility of using the spaces of the farm, in particular the wooded areas



Animal-assisted interventions

Animal-assisted interventions include animals in health, education and human services aimed at reaching therapeutic gains in humans (IAHAIO, 2028) and improving behavioral, social, emotional, cognitive or physical functioning and typically include defined goals and measured outcomes (Maber-Aleksandrowicz et al., 2016).

Specific laws regulate the exercise of these activities and specialized skills are required.



Animal-assisted interventions

At least one person must be responsible for the health, behavior, and welfare of the animals involved in these programs. This person is critically important to the wellness and welfare of the animal.

While the owner bears ultimate responsibility, the Responsible Person may be a handler or other authorized agent.

To ensure the welfare of human and animal participants, a veterinarian should also be actively involved in all AAI programs.



Horticulture therapy

Horticultural therapy includes activities facilitated by registered horticultural therapists to achieve specific goals within an established treatment, rehabilitation, or vocational plan.

The American Horticultural Therapy Association (AHTA) has defined it as an intervention that involves gardening and planting activities indoors or outdoors that are therapeutic in reducing stress, decreasing blood pressure, and increasing self-esteem through stimulation of the five senses (visual, auditory, gustatory, tactile, and olfactory) for improved mental and physical health.




Horticulture therapy

Many studies have demonstrated its therapeutic effects, such as reducing stress and anxiety, stabilizing mood swings, enhancing self-esteem, increasing a sense of community, and improving physical health. The effects vary according to the populations, settings, and interventions of horticultural therapy.


It is often used with the elderly, both in residential facilities and on farms, which welcome them every day or a few days a week



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Example: Care Farming for people with dementia

Care farms have radically redesigned the environment for people living with dementia. Using a co-creation method involving older people, their families, staff, management, architects, and designers, a framework to conceptualise potential environmental working mechanisms has been developed (De Boer et al., 2021).

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Example: CF for people with dementia

Three important components that impact the daily life of people living with dementia have been identified:

Physical environment: Care farms have a small-scale character breathing out a home-like and familiar atmosphere, which makes people with dementia feel safe and comfortable. People have free access to various indoor (e.g. kitchen, living room, work shed) and outdoor environments (e.g. garden, farmyard, stable, greenhouse). They are exposed to normal daily life stimuli

Social environment: using the environment to facilitate an inclusive atmosphere that stimulates mutual connections between people and creates a community. The closeness and social interaction are a result of the activities, so that all participants feel included and able to participate

Organizational environment: person-centred approach, emphasis on people's abilities, autonomy, dignity, and respect for someone's lifestyle, habits, and preferences.

Activities and effects

People spent more time outdoors, engaged in physically activities and everyday and meaningful activities included a wide range of domestic, farm and leisure activities such as folding laundry, preparing meals, weeding the soil, watering the plants, walking the dog, feeding animals, sweeping the lawn, fixing broken furniture/tools, etc.

They experienced freedom of movement and choice at farms regarding how and where they would spend their days. This facilitates feelings of autonomy and meaning in life.

Conclusions

- Agricultural activity can have therapeutic effects, but this purpose must be made explicit and achieved with professionals.
- Therapeutic activity can (must) be carried out in collaboration with public socio-therapeutic services.
- It can represent an activity connected to agriculture financed by politics or private individuals
- Often, it represents one of the social agriculture activities that are carried out within a farm

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