

Social farming operators

Functions, competences, requirements and activities



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The aspects we will address

- Social farming (SF)
- Social Farming operators
- Functions and activities
- Requirements
- competences
- Conclusions





The Social Farming

The SF is a practice that combines agricultural activities with social, therapeutic and educational interventions aimed at fostering the social inclusion and wellbeing of disadvantaged people, promoting work and social reintegration, improving the quality of life and supporting the development of local communities



The Social Farming

From this point of view, agriculture becomes a tool of unparalleled effectiveness in stimulating social and economic development processes in the areas in which the actions are implemented, both in terms of its contribution to the valorisation and development of rural areas, often at risk of desertification, and in terms of its ability to involve the world of private enterprise, social entrepreneurship and the public sector in the implementation of actions with a social purpose. The world of social entrepreneurship - and of the third sector more generally - plays a role of considerable importance with respect to the planning and implementation of social farming interventions that respond to specific needs of social interest. It is no coincidence that the national legislation (Law 141/2015), which for the first time institutionally recognises this specific sector, includes social cooperatives, social enterprises and many other organisational forms of the Third Sector among the subjects that can carry out social agriculture activities.



The main provisions of Law 141/2015

- Operators must be agricultural entrepreneurs or social cooperatives (type A or B).
- Activities must favour the inclusion of disadvantaged people (disabled, minors, prisoners, people in difficulty, migrants).
- Possibility of agreements with public bodies for social and social-health services.



Who are the social farming operators?

Farm

Third Sector Associations

Social Cooperatives

Public and private organisations





Italy: regional and local legislation

In Italy, regions have specific regulations and may provide for:

- Regional registers for SF operators.
- Calls for funding and incentives.
- Guidelines for the certification and recognition of activities.



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Italy: registered operators (2024)

There are a total of 364 SF operators registered in the lists, an increase compared to 2020 (+75%) and they are mainly located in Marche (84), Friuli-Venezia Giulia (66), Liguria (48), Veneto (37) and Sardinia (36). Only in Abruzzo was there a decrease of 1 registered unit, while in all the other regions the number of registered units increased, in Liguria for example, from 9 to 43 operators, in Sardinia, from 17 to 36, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, from 39 to 66 and Marche, from 50 to 84.

Regioni	Numero di operatori iscritti 2024	Numero di operatori iscritti 2020	Variazione % (2024/2020)
Abruzzo	6	7	-14%
Calabria	18	13	38%
Campania	23	21	10%
Friuli-Venezia Giulia	66	39	69%
Liguria	48	9	433%
Lombardia	33	24	38%
Marche	84	50	68%
Piemonte	2		
Puglia	4		
Sardegna	36	17	112%
Trento	2		
Valle d'Aosta	5		
Veneto	37	28	32%
Bolzano	27		
Totale	364	208	75%

Fonte: Elaborazioni CREA PB



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The functions of operators in SF



Multifunctional role: The operators carry out agricultural activities and, at the same time, offer social, educational and therapeutic services

Collaboration: They work in synergy with public bodies, social cooperatives, schools and families to create support and integration networks





The functions and activities of operators in SF

Workers in social farm perform a variety of functions combining agricultural activities with social, therapeutic and educational interventions.

1. Socio-labour inclusion

Operators create employment pathways for disadvantaged people, such as the disabled, ex-convicts or people with mental health problems. These pathways aim to foster social inclusion and reintegration into the world of work





The functions and activities of operators in SF

2. Therapeutic Activities

They use animal-assisted therapies (pet therapy, hippotherapy) and horticultural therapy to improve the participants' psycho-physical well-being. These activities help to reduce stress, improve motor skills and promote emotional well-being.

3. Education and Training

Operators offer educational programmes for schools and local communities, promoting environmental sustainability and biodiversity. These programmes may include practical farming lessons, cooking workshops with local products and environmental awareness activities.



The functions and activities of operators in SF

4. Community Services

They offer services to the local population, such as selling agricultural products, running community gardens and organising social events. These services help strengthen the link between the farm and the community.

Collaboration and Networking

They work in synergy with public authorities, social cooperatives, schools and families to create networks of support and interaction. Collaboration between different actors fosters co-creation of knowledge and stimulates innovation in the welfare system.





Subjective and objective requirements for the recognition of SF operators

With regard to the subjective requirements, in the documents relating to the recognition of the qualification of social agriculture operator, among the subjects that can apply for registration in the lists are agricultural enterprises, social enterprises, co-managers of individualised therapeutic rehabilitation plans (PTRI) supported by the health budget, and specific professional figures.



Subjective requirements for the recognition of SF operators

Regione	Impresa agricola				Conduzione dell'impresa agricola				Impresa sociale	Cogestori dei PTRI, sostenuti con budget di salute	Figure professionali specifiche	Possesso di qualifica attinente alle attività da svolgere	
	IAP o coltivatore diretto	Requisiti di cui all'art. 2135 c.c.	Fascicolo aziendale SIAN	Iscrizione alla CCIAA	Iscrizione all'albo delle Fattorie didattiche o imprese agrituristiche	Esercizio di una o più attività agricole	da almeno 2 anni	secondo criteri di sostenibilità ambientale				Corsi di formazione	Qualifica di operatore agrisociale
Abruzzo	X	X				X					X		
Basilicata													
Bolzano		X							X			X	
Calabria		X	X	X								X	X
Campania		X		X		X		X	X	X			
Emilia Romagna	X	X	X	X		X			X		X	X	
Friuli-Venezia Giulia		X			X					X		X	
Lazio		X	X										
Liguria	X	X			X	X				X			
Lombardia		X		X	X	X						X	
Marche		X	X	X						X			X
Molise	X				X						X		
Piemonte	X	X	X			X					X	X	X
Puglia		X		X		X	X				X		
Sardegna		X	X	X			X				X	X	
Sicilia		X	X	X		X					X		
Toscana													
Trento	X	X			X	X			X				
Umbria													
Valle d'Aosta		X		X								X	X
Veneto		X				X			X	X		X	

Fonte: Elaborazioni CREA PB



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Subjective requirements for the recognition of SF operators

The framework of subjective requirements is completed by the commitment to attend (Bolzano, Calabria, Emilia Romagna, Friuli Venezia Giulia, Lombardy, Piedmont, Sardinia, Valle d'Aosta, Veneto) or, more often, the participation of the entrepreneur or the contact person for SF activities (family helper, partner, employee) in a training course organised by public bodies or training organisations accredited and approved by the Regions (regional departments responsible for the subject matter or regional agencies for rural development). The training courses, whose duration varies from 40 to 150 hours depending on the Region of reference, may include, in addition to theoretical and practical lessons, group work, laboratory exercises, e-learning, project work, study visits or internships. The courses, which are often organised in modules, have contents that vary from Region to Region and may cover, in addition to farm safety regulations and first aid elements, the characteristics of social agriculture, reference legislation, administrative, accounting and tax aspects, financing instruments and in-depth thematic studies relating to the individual types of activities into which SF is divided.





Objective requirements for the recognition of SF operators

The requirements of an objective nature can be classified into requirements relating to the business structure, requirements of an administrative nature and requirements relating to the performance of social activities.

The fulfilment of the requirements for registration in the regional lists of social farms must be proved and verified on the basis of the documentation required for registration, which, depending on the reference region, has a very different level of detail and thoroughness.



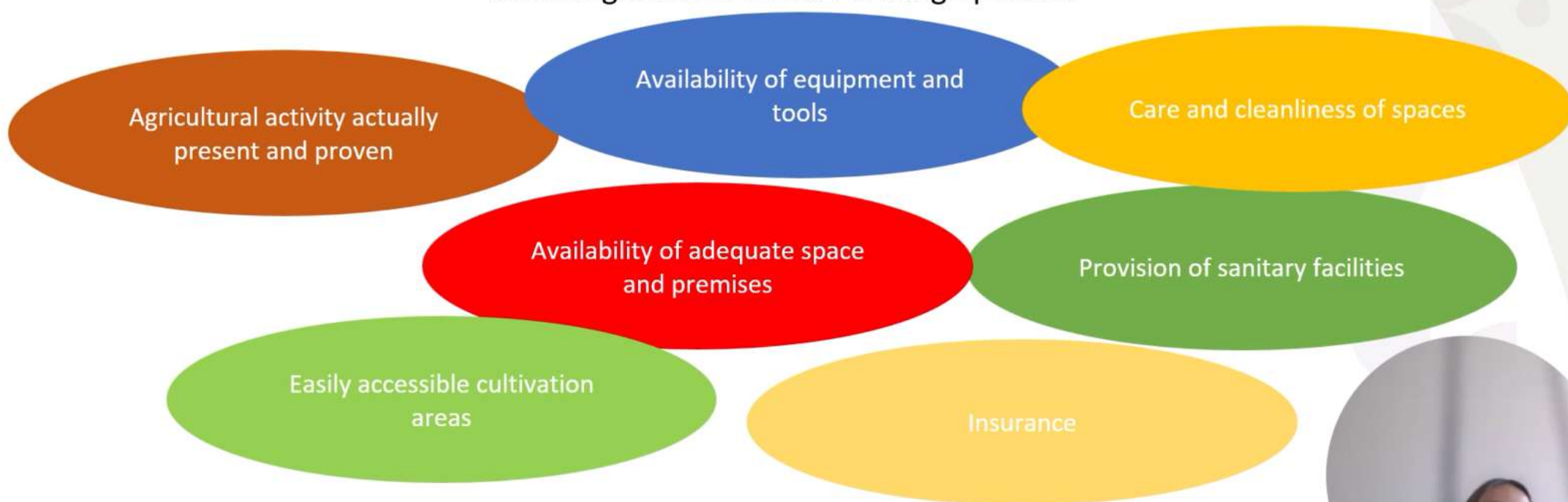
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The requirements for the recognition of SF operators in the Region of Sicily

The Region of Sicily with an Assessorial Decree no. 36 of 12/07/2021 approved the 'Provisions for the recognition of Social Farming operator



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The requirements for the recognition of SF operators

Ministerial Decree 12550 'Definition of minimum requirements and modalities for social farming activities', issued to harmonise regional regulations with Law 141/2015, guaranteeing uniform and adequate access to essential services for individuals, families and local communities, reiterates that the activities allowed for social farming must be carried out by agricultural entrepreneurs as per Article 2135 of the Civil Code, in individual or associated form, and by social cooperatives as per Article 8 of Law 391/1991. The activity may also be of a seasonal nature, subject to continuity also in the years following those in which the authorisations are granted. Where required by the regulations of each individual sector, the activities will be carried out in collaboration with the social and health services and the competent territorial authorities through special agreements or other contractual forms recognised by the regulations in force.





The requirements for the recognition of SF operators

Activities involving social and community service activities must be carried out predominantly on the farm. Therefore, they may also be carried out outside the company's land holdings, provided that they are activities functional to the enhancement of the territory. Services that accompany and support medical, psychological and rehabilitative therapies must be conducted predominantly on the farm. When the knowledge or enjoyment of the flora, fauna and products requires going outside the farm structure this will be possible, but not prevalently, and may also take place for the performance of activities aimed at enhancing the territory, culture and traditions.



The requirements for the recognition of SF operators

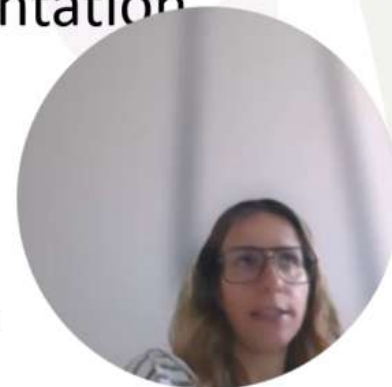
Activities aimed at environmental and food education, the protection of biodiversity and the dissemination of local knowledge must be implemented through projects targeting pre-school children and people with social, physical and mental difficulties, also in cooperation with schools of all levels.





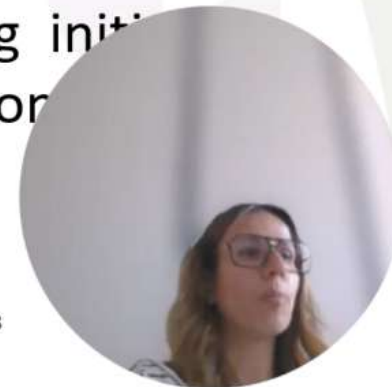
The requirements for the recognition of SF operators

- Be a recognised agricultural entrepreneur or social cooperative.
- Have agricultural and social skills (possibly certified by courses or experience) .
- Adhere to health and safety regulations.
- Collaborate with public and private entities for project implementation



In Europe: SF operators

- At the European level, there is no specific legislation defining social farming operators. However, the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) produced an own-initiative opinion on 'Social farming: green therapies and social and health policies' in 2012, which underlines the importance of social farming as a tool for wellbeing and social inclusion, and proposes the need for a common definition and regulatory framework at European level.
- The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) also promotes social, environmental and economic sustainability objectives that can include social farming initiatives through support for rural development, social inclusion and innovation.



The skills of SF operators

Social farming practitioners must possess a set of interdisciplinary skills that combine agricultural knowledge with social and therapeutic skills

- **Agricultural skills:** Sustainable management of agricultural activities, Knowledge of cultivation and breeding techniques, Use of eco-friendly methods. Social and
- **Therapeutic Skills:** Ability to design and manage socio-occupational integration initiatives, Ability to provide educational and therapeutic support, Knowledge of group dynamics and social inclusion techniques.
- **Management skills:** Ability to design and manage social farms, Ability to create territorial support networks, Management of social enterprise initiatives.
- **Communication skills:** Ability to communicate effectively with beneficiaries and local communities, Promotion of activities through appropriate communication tools.



Towards the certification of SF operators

Training: Aspiring operators must complete specific training courses related to the necessary agricultural, social and therapeutic skills. These courses are often offered by accredited bodies and can include both theoretical and practical training.

Regulatory Requirements: It is important to meet the requirements set out in Law 141/2015 and Ministerial Decree 12250/2018. These requirements may include the demonstration of specific competencies and adherence to operational guidelines.

Enrolment in Regional Lists: Operators must enrol in the regional lists of social farms, where subjective and objective requirements for official recognition are assessed. The documentation required for enrolment may vary from region to region.

Certification: Once training courses have been completed and regulatory requirements have been met, operators can apply for official certification. This certification attests to their suitability to carry out social farming activities.

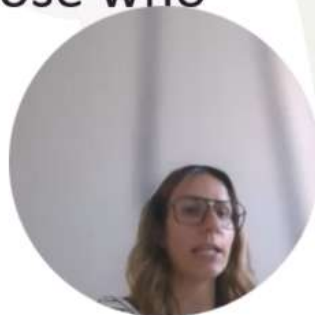




Examples of accredited training courses

Some accredited training courses to become a social farming operator in Italy:

- ❑ Confagricoltura Lombardia - Course for Social Farm Operator: This course, organised by EAPRAL, covers the skills needed to manage a social farm, including regulatory, pedagogical, psychological and first aid aspects.
- ❑ University of Bologna - Advanced Training Course in Social Farming: This three-month course aims to develop interdisciplinary theoretical and practical skills. It is aimed at operators in the agri-food and social sectors, with a focus on the multifunctionality of farms.
- ❑ Agriculture is Life - Masters and Specialised Courses: This academy offers various training courses, including specialised masters, managerial skills consolidation courses and start-up support. Courses are designed for those who wish to become entrepreneurs in agriculture



Conclusion

In conclusion, social farming operators play a key role in promoting social inclusion, well-being and sustainability in local communities. Through a combination of agricultural, social and therapeutic skills, these operators provide opportunities for socio-occupational inclusion, therapeutic and educational activities and community services. Their activities not only improve the quality of life of the people involved, but also contribute to the enhancement of the area and the promotion of sustainable agricultural practices.

Certification and training of operators are essential to ensure the quality and effectiveness of social farming initiatives.

