FARM' IN
INCLUSION THROUGH SOCIAL FARMING

# 2.1 Mapping of the state of the art of 3 sectors in all participating countries: Normative framework regarding social farming

## WP 2. – Del 2.1

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Version 1

Date of Final Document: 30.4.2025

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achaia chamber's development entity ACHADE company of Chamber of Achaia

Funded by the European Union

European Project funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the Agenzia nazionale Erasmus+ INAPP. Neither the European Union nor INAPP can be held responsible for them."

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Co-funded by the European Union

# Introduction

## 1.1. Objective of the Deliverable

Social farming is an innovative and multifunctional model that combines agricultural practices with social inclusion, therapy, education, and employment support for vulnerable social groups. These include, among others, people with physical or mental disabilities, the elderly, long-term unemployed, youth at risk, migrants, and individuals recovering from addiction. By transforming farms into inclusive, supportive environments, social farming fosters community engagement, empowers marginalized individuals, and strengthens local rural resilience.

The main objective of this deliverable is to map and compare the current state of social farming in three participating countries – Italy, Slovenia, and Greece – across three key sectors:

(A) legislative and normative frameworks,
(B) active stakeholders and cooperation models, and
(C) training and educational opportunities.

The deliverable provides a baseline for identifying country-specific challenges, gaps, and strengths, and enables the development of shared strategies and targeted training programs. This comparative mapping is grounded in both desk research and empirical data gathered through a shared transnational questionnaire, which collected 30 responses from key actors involved in or interested in social farming (6 from Italy, 10 from Slovenia, 14 from Greece). The analysis of these responses highlights existing practices, stakeholder engagement levels, perceived training needs, and views on sustainability and financial viability.

This mapping serves as a foundation for future project actions in the FARM'IN partnership, especially in designing inclusive vocational education and training (VET) models. It also contributes to the broader European discourse on social and green innovation, aligning with EU policies on rural development, social inclusion, and multifunctional agriculture.

## 1.2. Scope and Methodology

This deliverable explores the scope and characteristics of social farming across three participating countries – Italy, Slovenia, and Greece – focusing on three key dimensions:

- **(A) the legislative and policy framework supporting social farming,**
- **(B) the landscape of active stakeholders and their roles,**
- **(C) the availability, content, and accessibility of training programs relevant to social farming.**

Social farming, as a form of multifunctional agriculture, provides a platform to address both social and economic challenges in rural areas. It offers vulnerable individuals not only access to meaningful employment and educational opportunities, but also structured environments for socialization, empowerment, and rehabilitation. The added value lies in its ability to integrate social services with

sustainable agricultural practices, thereby contributing to broader objectives such as rural revitalization, social equity, and environmental sustainability.

**Benefits of Social Farming**

- **Employment and Education:** Farms offer employment and vocational training for individuals who face difficulties accessing the labor market – including people with disabilities, migrants, long-term unemployed individuals, and youth at risk. Participation in structured programs builds transferable skills and improves employability.
- **Social Inclusion and Empowerment:** Agricultural settings create inclusive spaces that foster intergenerational cooperation, strengthen social ties, and promote belonging. Social farming can combat isolation and enhance the social capital of rural communities.
- **Therapeutic and Health Benefits:** Interaction with nature, routine physical activity, and nurturing responsibilities contribute positively to mental and physical health. Social farming has been shown to support people with psychosocial difficulties, trauma, or developmental disorders through therapeutic horticulture and structured daily engagement.
- **Environmental and Community Impact:** Social farms often adopt sustainable and organic practices. They contribute to biodiversity preservation, food sovereignty, and awareness of environmental stewardship, while also reinforcing the cultural and social fabric of rural territories.

**Methodology**

The mapping was conducted using a mixed-methods approach that combines desk research and field-based data collection. A central component of the methodology was the design and distribution of a shared digital questionnaire, developed jointly by the project partners and translated into Slovenian, Greek, and Italian.

The questionnaire was structured around several key themes:

- understanding of social farming concepts and practices;
- identification of vulnerable groups served;
- stakeholder engagement and collaboration models;
- educational/training experiences and needs;
- competencies and skill gaps;
- access to financial resources and sustainability strategies.

A total of **30 validated responses** were collected:

- 14 from **Greece**,
- 10 from **Slovenia**,
- and 6 from **Italy**.
-

Respondents represented a variety of sectors – including social care, agriculture, education, community development, and cooperative management – offering a multi-perspective insight into current practices, aspirations, and constraints.

Data was analyzed both **quantitatively** (aggregated statistics, frequency analysis) and **qualitatively** (narrative responses, open-ended feedback). In parallel, national policy and legislative documents, existing training curricula, and best practice case studies were reviewed to contextualize findings within each country's socio-political and agricultural framework.

This multi-layered approach allows for both country-specific insights and **comparative analysis**, enabling the identification of common trends, regional strengths, and transnational gaps. The outcomes form the evidence base for further development of VET tools and pilot initiatives within the FARM'IN project.

## 1.3. Overview of Participating Countries-Definition of Social Farming

- *Country A-Italy*

Current Status of Social Farming in Italy

Social Farming in Italy arose during the second half of the 1970s thanks to local actions aiming at eliminating the stigma of disability and social exclusion through agriculture meant as a fundamental tool for giving back to the most fragile categories a dignity at work: the spontaneity and most of all the heterogeneity of those local level experiences have in fact made the Italian Social Farming a unique experience in Europe, different from the socio-health imprint characterizing the Dutch, German and French care farming experiences.

While in Europe social farming falls within the framework of the socio-health system and is a practice carried out by accredited structures, in Italy, the inclusive approach has meant that the predominant character of social farming is the one of social and labour inclusion of fragile people, making in the practice the codifying process of this experience a subsidiary path which, starting from the concreteness of the different local experiences in the course of the time has found its legislative framework and recognition of its therapeutic and rehabilitative character. Simplifying much the process, Italian social farming was born as an experience of emancipation, deinstitutionalization and restitution of the fundamental rights of citizenship – work in the first place – and only later its therapeutic and rehabilitative value has been recognised.

The local and spontaneous feature has made the Italian experiences in Social Farming different from each other, and each one has peculiarities that characterize its history. The common denominator still uniting most of the realities operating in this field is the social and labour inclusion of the so-called

disadvantaged people, as defined by the Commission Regulation (EU) No 651/2014[1] and by the Italian Law 381/91[2].

At a conceptual level, Social Farming adds a "function" to agricultural enterprises which, to the traditional production of food goods, add services for the community: the material and immaterial resources of farming become means for the promotion of social and work inclusion paths, co-therapies and, more in general, for offering services to the local communities and to the most vulnerable segments of the population. The National Law on Social Farming, whose process ended in 2015 with the approval of the Parliament, inscribes the social "function" within the broader framework of the multi-functionality of the agricultural businesses, a concept introduced for the first time during the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 and taken up again at a European level during the debate on the reformulation of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).

The concept of Multifunctional Agriculture found its official recognition with the Agenda 2000, a reform programme for the CAP approved in 1999 and addressing the 2000-2006 period. In Italy, the concept of multifunctionality of the farming company was incorporated in the national legislation through the Legislative Decree 228/2001: the farming company becomes a space open to the community thank to the provision of agritourists activities – among which we can mention recreational, cultural and didactical activities, environmental and biodiversity protection, territorial promotion and rural development – integrating the traditional function of food production.

- ***Country B-Slovenia***

Current Status of Social Farming in Slovenia

Slovenia, a small yet remarkably diverse European country, boasts a rich agricultural tradition with rural areas playing a vital role in the nation's social and economic fabric. Although agriculture contributes only 1.4% to the national GDP, its value extends far beyond economic output - shaping cultural heritage, rural life and community cohesion. Around 260,000 people live on 74,425 family farms, managing about a quarter of the country's territory as agricultural land.

[1] **Article 2, paragraphs: 3 - 4 of the EU REG 651/2014 – 3) «worker with disabilities»:** a) any person who is recognised as worker with disabilities under national law; or b) any person who has long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairment(s) which, in interaction with various barriers, may hinder their full and effective participation in a work environment on an equal basis with other workers; **4) «disadvantaged worker»:** any person who meets one of the following conditions: a) has not been in regular paid employment for the previous 6 months; b) aged between 15 and 24 years; c) has not attained an upper secondary educational or vocational qualification (ISCED 3 level) or is within two years after completing full-time education and who has not previously obtained his or her first regular paid employment; d) is over 50 years old; e) lives as a single adult with one or more dependants; f) works in a sector or profession in a Member State where the gender imbalance is at least 25 % higher than the average gender imbalance across all economic sectors in that Member State, and belongs to that underrepresented gender group; g) is a member of an ethnic minority within a Member State and who requires development of his or her linguistic, vocational training or work experience profile to enhance prospects of gaining access to stable employment;

[2] **Article 4 paragraph 1 of the Italian Law 381/91** – In the cooperatives conducting activities mentioned in the Article 1, paragraph 1, letter b), disadvantaged people are considered those with physical, psychic and sensory impairments, the persons under psychiatric treatment, drug addicts, alcoholics, minors of working age in situations of family difficulty, people detained or interned in penitentiary institutions, convicted prisoners and internees admitted to measures alternative to detention and work outside on the basis of the article 21 of Law 354/75, and later modifications. Moreover disadvantaged people are considered those indicated by the Decree of the President of the Council of Ministers, on the proposal of the Minister of Labor and Social Security, in agreement with the Minister of Health, with the Minister of the Interior and with the Minister for Social Affairs, after consulting the Central Commission for the cooperatives established by the article 18 of the aforementioned legislative decree of the provisional Head of State 14 December 1947, n. 1577, and subsequent modifications.

The average farm size is 6.9 hectares, with small, family-run farms dominating the landscape. These farms often engage in multifunctional activities, combining food production with environmental protection and community development. One increasingly prominent form of such diversification is social farming.

Social farming in Slovenia is emerging as a multifunctional practice that blends food production with therapeutic, rehabilitative, educational and inclusive services. It creates supportive environments for vulnerable groups: people with disabilities, the elderly, the long-term unemployed, individuals with mental health challenges, migrants, youth at risk and those recovering from addiction.

Motivations for engaging in social farming vary but often include the desire to contribute to community well-being, foster intergenerational solidarity and create inclusive spaces for healing and personal growth. Most social farms are small and locally focused, prioritizing social and environmental goals over industrial-scale production. These farms help preserve traditional knowledge and rural landscapes while introducing innovative agricultural models.

New forms of collaboration, such as agricultural cooperatives and social enterprises, have emerged, promoting solidarity-based economies and the equitable redistribution of resources. For many farms, diversification through social farming has become not just a choice, but a necessity for survival and resilience.

Social farming aligns with Slovenia's broader goals for sustainable rural development, social inclusion and environmental care. While there is no unified legal framework dedicated solely to social farming, the practice is indirectly supported through the **Social Entrepreneurship Act**, which recognizes social enterprises in rural settings and the **EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)**, which encourages diversification into social and health-related activities.

Key actors include farms, NGOs, cooperatives, social enterprises, academic and research institutions, municipalities, and various government ministries (Agriculture, Labour and Social Affairs, Economy). As Slovenia lacks a single coordinating body for social farming, collaboration between these stakeholders is crucial. Local Action Groups (LAGs) also play an important role in fostering bottom-up initiatives.

Notable examples of social farming in Slovenia include:

- **Korenika**: An organic farm offering employment and therapeutic services for vulnerable groups.
- **Brinjevka**: Focused on mental health inclusion through farming activities.
- **Allium**: Combines sustainable farming with the employment of marginalized individuals.
- **Zrirap**: Integrates organic production with inclusive employment.

**Challenges and Future Development**

Social farming in Slovenia faces several challenges: an aging farming population, lack of awareness, limited access to training, fragmented support structures and difficulties navigating regulations. Participants in national surveys highlight the need for practical training, mentorship, financial support, stakeholder engagement strategies and access to best practices.

Despite these challenges, social farming holds great promise for enhancing local self-sufficiency, fostering social inclusion, preserving cultural traditions and promoting sustainable rural development. Its future success depends on a holistic approach, strong stakeholder collaboration and investment in education, research and awareness-raising initiatives.

- ***Country C-Greece***

Current Status of Social Farming in Greece

In Greece, there is **no single, nationally shared and recognized definition** of Social Farming (also known as Social Agriculture). However, the concept is generally understood within the context of combining **agricultural practices with social services** to promote inclusion, therapy, and employment for marginalized or vulnerable groups, such as people with disabilities, mental health issues, or those facing social exclusion.

The research findings indicate that the concept of social farms and care farms is not particularly widespread in the country, nor in the study area. However, there is interest and awareness alongside a noted lack of a shared developmental vision and training. Social farms have the potential to provide supplementary income to farm owners, enhance local development, and operate within the framework of alternative tourism, upgrading agritourism and linking it to the ecosystem of the Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE).

Social innovations can address specific goals in various fields, such as sustainable production and consumption (e.g., community gardens, local food initiatives, agroecology movements), efficient resource management (e.g., water and waste management, renewable energy, development of communal spaces), environmental conservation (e.g., biodiversity protection, plastic-free initiatives), employment and entrepreneurship (e.g., business incubators, coworking spaces, tourism product development), poverty alleviation and social inclusion (e.g., job opportunities for vulnerable groups, food banks), and broader efforts like migrant integration and gender equality movements.

Exploring the concept of social farms and identifying the factors that could support their development in mountainous and remote areas can foster a deeper understanding and promote the integration of programs that merge agritourism with social initiatives. This approach would stimulate participation in primary production and strengthen the social economy while prioritizing sustainability. However, it is essential that this process be conducted in a well-organized and structured manner, emphasizing education, awareness, and infrastructure. This approach would prevent repeating past mistakes in agritourism development, which relied heavily on poorly guided program implementation[3].

Social farming is growing in Greece, aiming to integrate vulnerable populations into agricultural activities while promoting sustainable practices. Notably, initiatives such as "Social Farming 360" by Νέα Γεωργία Νέα Γενιά play a key role. This program operates in collaboration with correctional facilities and helps train inmates in agricultural skills, focusing on products like olives and aromatic plants. Farms under this initiative are located in Agia (Chania), Tiryns (Argolis), Kassaveteia (Volos), and Kassandra (Halkidik

[3] Partalidou, M. & Iakovidou, O. (2008). Crafting a policy framework of indicators and quality standards for rural tourism management. *International Journal of Tourism Policy, 1*(4). 353-376.

Challenges and Gaps

Despite growing interest, key challenges include:

- Legal Framework: Greece lacks a comprehensive legislative framework supporting social farming initiatives[4].
- Funding: Projects often rely on EU or private funding, indicating a need for more consistent governmental support[5]
- Awareness and Training: Limited awareness among farmers about the benefits and methods of social farming restricts wider adoption

[4] https://www.generationag.org/draseis/social-farming-360-endynamonontas-koinothtes-meso-biosimhs-georgias-kai-koinonikhs-epanentakshs
[5] https://www.agronews.gr/branding/etairika-nea/213984/enarxi-tou-programmatos-social-farming-360-apo-ti-nea-georgia-nea-genia/

# 2. Sector A: Legislative Framework Regarding Social Farming

*Short introduction for the Sector A-integrating info by all countries (a general approach)*

## *2.1. Country cases*

- ***Country A-Italy***

From the legislative point of view, the path towards the recognition of Social Farming has followed a bottom-up approach so that, at first single regional laws stemmed out from local experiences and eventually a national law was created. Not casually, the pioneer region in this sense was Friuli Venezia Giulia that with the Regional Law 18/2004 provided for the disbursement of contributions to municipalities in order to support activities aimed at people in conditions of social hardship and psycho-physical disadvantage. Over time, all the Regions and Autonomous Provinces followed it, trying to regulate social farming activities through specific laws or articles integrated in the agricultural legislation. These regulations arose from a comparison carried out across the territories, through the meeting between politics and the Third Sector, effectively allowing the creation of regulations able to respond to local needs.

The legislative process culminated in 2015 when the Parliament approved the Law 141 providing Provisions regarding Social Agriculture. This law defines Social Farming as the whole set of activities performed by agricultural entrepreneurs referred to in article 2135 of the Civil Code, in single or associated form, and by the social cooperatives referred to in Law 381/1991, aimed at creating:

a. Social and working inclusion of workers with disabilities and disadvantaged workers, as defined by the Article 2, paragraphs 3) and 4) of the Commission Regulation (EU) No. 651/2014 of 17 June 2014, of disadvantaged people as defined by the article 4 of the Italian Law n. 381 of 8 November 1991 and subsequent modifications, of migrants and minors of working age included in rehabilitation and social support projects;

b. Social performances and activities and performances and activities serving the local communities through the use of farming material and immaterial resources to promote, accompany and implement actions aiming at the development of abilities and skills, of working and social inclusion, recreation and services useful for daily life;

c. Performances and services accompanying and supporting medical, psychological and rehabilitation therapies aiming at enhancing the health conditions and the social, emotional and cognitive functions of the interested parties also through the help of bred animals and the cultivation of plants;

d. Projects aiming at the environmental and alimentary education, at the safeguard of biodiversity and at the dissemination of knowledge of the territory through the organisation of social and educational farms recognised at a regional level, as initiatives of reception and accommodation of pre-school children and of people in condition of social, physical and psychic difficulty.

The article 3, paragraph 1 of the Law 381/1991 prescribes that the Regions and the Autonomous Provinces of Trento and Bolzano, within the scope of their powers, within 6 months from the date of enforcement of the Law, must adapt, if necessary, their provisions on the matter in order to allow for the recognition of social farming operators by the bodies in charge of the management of services and performances referred to the article 2, paragraph 1, and to make public the names of recognised operators.

As of November 2024, all the Italian regions had legislated on Social Farming. In particular, 14 regions had approved laws on the matter before the entry into force of the Law 141/2015 and 8 of these hadn't modified the regional law after 2015 (Veneto, Liguria, Marche. Abruzzo, Molise, Campania, Calabria and Sardinia) while the remaining 7 had legislated after the after the entry into force of Law 141 (Sicily, Basilicata, Puglia, Lazio, Piemonte, Valle D'Aosta, Trentino Alto-Adige).

The situation about the recognition of operators and the publication of the related regional lists, instead, is quite different as, although all the regions had provided for the establishment of the lists or registers of social farms where the companies carrying out social agriculture activities can be registered, only 12 regions and the 2 autonomous provinces of Trento and Bolzano, in October 2024, had established and published these lists.

| REGIONS | Number of registered operators |
|---|---|
| Abruzzo | 6 |
| Calabria | 18 |
| Campania | 23 |
| Friuli-Venezia Giulia | 66 |
| Liguria | 48 |
| Lombardia | 33 |
| Marche | 84 |
| Piemonte | 2 |
| Puglia | 4 |
| Sardegna | 36 |
| Trento* | 2 |
| Valle D'Aosta | 5 |
| Bolzano* | 27 |
| Veneto | 37 |

* Autonomous Provinces - DECREE OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC 31 August 1972, n. 670

The regulation of the registration in the lists or registers also indicates the subjective and objective requirements needed for obtaining and maintaining the registrations, so that there is no official

recognition of the status of social farm in those Regions that have not yet officially established these lists.

- *Country B-Slovenia*

Social farming in Slovenia is understood as the integration of agricultural practices with therapeutic, educational, rehabilitative and socially inclusive activities, using natural and farm-based resources to support vulnerable groups such as people with disabilities, the elderly, the long-term unemployed and individuals at risk of social exclusion. While Slovenia has made progress in policy support, it currently lacks a dedicated legal framework that clearly defines and regulates social farming. Instead, the practice is supported indirectly through broader legal and policy instruments related to agriculture, rural development, social inclusion and employment.

**Legal and Policy Foundations**

The development of social farming in Slovenia is influenced by a combination of national laws and EU directives. Although no specific legislation explicitly addresses social farming, several key instruments provide indirect support:

- **Social Entrepreneurship Act (2011, revised 2018)**
  This act introduced legal recognition for social enterprises, including those engaged in agricultural activities. It set out eligibility criteria and support measures for social enterprises, promoting social inclusion through economic activity. However, it does not specifically define social farming as a distinct legal category.
- **Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and Rural Development Program (RDP)**
  Slovenia aligns with the EU's CAP which promotes rural diversification and multifunctional agriculture. Social farming has been recognized as a tool for improving socio-economic conditions in rural areas under the 2014–2020 RDP. The 2023–2027 CAP Strategic Plan continues this support, yet without specific provisions directly targeting social farming.
- **National Strategy for Social Entrepreneurship (2013–2016, extended to 2020)**
  This strategy acknowledged social farming as part of the broader social economy and highlighted its potential for job creation, inclusion, and rural development.
- **Labour Market Measures and Support for Vulnerable Groups**
  Programs supporting the employment of people with disabilities and other marginalized groups, implemented by the Employment Service of Slovenia, provide indirect support for social farms by incentivizing inclusive hiring practices.
- **Cooperative and Agricultural Laws**
  Social cooperatives and multifunctional farms operate under Slovenia's Cooperatives Act and agricultural policies, which encourage diversification into social, educational and environmental activities. However, these policies lack specific language or regulations tailored to social farming.

In practice, social farming in Slovenia includes:

- the socio-vocational inclusion of disadvantaged individuals through farming activities;
- therapeutic and educational programs, often connected to organic or sustainable agriculture;
- environmental stewardship and conservation efforts;
- Intergenerational collaboration aimed at preserving traditional knowledge and strengthening community ties.

**Institutional and Organizational Actors**

A wide range of stakeholders are involved in the development of social farming in Slovenia:

- **Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)**
  Play a key role in advocacy, program implementation and promoting sustainable farming models.
- **Social Cooperatives and Enterprises**
  Operate social farms that combine agriculture with services such as education, therapy and job training.
- **Government Ministries**
  The Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food, the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities and the Ministry of the Economy, Tourism and Sport are responsible for funding, policy-making and cross-sectoral support.
- **Research and Educational Institutions**
  Provide vocational training and collaborate on the development of inclusive agricultural practices.
- **Local Action Groups (LAGs)**
  Support bottom-up rural development projects and often serve as platforms for piloting social farming initiatives.

**Gaps and Challenges in the Normative Framework**

Despite these foundations, several key challenges remain:

- **Absence of a Dedicated Legal Framework**
  Unlike countries such as Italy, Slovenia does not have a standalone law that defines and regulates social farming, limiting its visibility and policy coherence.
- **Fragmented Governance**
  Responsibility for social farming is distributed across multiple ministries, creating coordination difficulties.
- **Unstable Funding**
  While EU funding is available, national financial mechanisms are inconsistent and insufficient for long-term sustainability.
- **Low Awareness**

Limited public and institutional understanding hinders the development of new initiatives and the recognition of social farming's potential.

**Opportunities for Policy Development**

To strengthen the normative framework for social farming in Slovenia, several strategic actions are recommended:

1. **Draft a National Social Farming Law** that provides legal definitions, operational guidelines and funding structures.
2. **Expand National and Private Funding** beyond EU grants to ensure long-term financial stability.
3. **Integrate Social Farming into Vocational and Agricultural Education** to build capacity among new generations of farmers.
4. **Increase Public Awareness and Advocacy** to promote recognition and attract broader support.
5. **Foster Cross-Sector Collaboration** among agriculture, social care, health, education and rural development actors.

Social farming in Slovenia operates within a complex and evolving policy environment, drawing support from various sectors but lacking unified legislation. While progress has been made through social entrepreneurship policies and EU rural development measures, further efforts are needed to fully harness the potential of social farming. Establishing clear legal recognition, stable funding mechanisms, integrated education and coordinated stakeholder engagement will be crucial for advancing social farming as a resilient and inclusive model for sustainable rural development.

- *Country C-Greece*

In Greece, the legislative framework for social farming is still evolving, primarily aligned with broader EU policies. Greece has made steps towards recognizing social farming through various programs, especially linked to rural development and social economy initiatives. However, a formal, unified definition in legal or policy terms is still under development.

*1. General Legislative Context*

Social farming initiatives fall under Greek agricultural and social policy regulations, often aligned with EU frameworks such as the "European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development" (EAFRD) and "European Social Fund" (ESF). These support projects that combine agricultural activity with social services, including vocational training for vulnerable groups like people with disabilities or long-term unemployed individuals[6].

*2. National Regulations*

[6] Petropoulou, E. A., & Petousi, V. (2024). Social Capital, Trust, and Cultivation of Bioenergy Crops: Evidence from Germany and Greece. *Agriculture*, *14*(3), 363. https://doi.org/10.3390/agriculture14030363

Greece integrates social farming under its broader rural development policies. Specific provisions may be embedded within agricultural laws and social enterprise regulations. Notably, Law 4019/2011[7] covers social cooperatives, including agricultural cooperatives with social purposes. This law is pivotal for social enterprises, providing a framework for social and economic reintegration.

Law 4019/20211 defines Social Economy as "the sum of economic, entrepreneurial, productive and social activities, undertaken by juridical entities or associations whose statutory goal is the pursue of collective benefit and the service of wider social interests". Aiming to further explain the collective purpose of Social Economy, the same Law, is describing it as the "promotion of collective action and the protection of collective goods through developmental, economic and social initiatives of local, regional or of wider character. Such activities are especially the cultural, environmental, ecological activities, the utilization and promotion of local products, the provision of social services". Determinant for the success of social economy is the integration as the process of social inclusion of people that belong to vulnerable groups of the population, especially through the promotion of employment. In Greece, as "Vulnerable population groups" are considered, generally, the social groups of the population, the participation of which at the social and economic life is being hindered due to social and economic issues or due to physical / mental / intellectual / sensory disabilities or due to unexpected events, affecting the development of the local or the broader regional economy.

For the needs of this law, the vulnerable population groups are divided into two categories: a) Vulnerable population groups, to which belong the groups that their inclusion to the social and economic life is hindered by physical or mental causes or due to unlawful conduct. Individuals that belong to these categories are persons with disabilities (physical, mental, intellectual or sensory ones), drug addicts or former drug addicts, seropositive, prisoners / ex-prisoners, under-age offenders. b) Specific population groups, to which belong those groups that are at a disadvantage regarding their smooth integration into the labour market due to economic, social and cultural causes. These include, indicatively, unemployed young people, unemployed women, people over 50 years old that are unemployed, long-term unemployed, heads of single-parent families, members of multi-child families, women that have been victims of abuse, illiterate people, residents of remote island and mountain regions, people with cultural differences, immigrants and refugees. 5. Social Care is the production and provision of goods and health and social welfare services for specific population groups, such as the elderly, the infants, the children, the disabled and the chronically ill.

*3. Rural Development Policies*:

The framework emphasizes:

**Multi-functionality of Farms:** Encouraging social services, therapy, and education on farms.

**LEADER Initiatives:** Supporting local partnerships and community-led development strategies to foster social entrepreneurship

*4. Institutional Support*

[7] Law 4019/2011 on Social Economy and Social Cooperative Enterprise- The first law which institutionalises the Social Economy in Greece, it indicates what an urban cooperative should be, with social objective and commercial nature.

The Ministry of Rural Development and Food oversees the legal implementation, with regional authorities contributing to the enforcement and development of social farming projects. Legal guidelines promote cooperation between agricultural and social sectors

*5. EU Alignment and Funding*

The legislative environment emphasizes sustainability, inclusivity, and innovation. Greece's social farming legislation aligns with the European Union's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). As an EU member, Greece's social farming sector benefits from initiatives under the EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and Horizon 2020 programs, which support sustainable farming and community-based agricultural projects. Specifically, rural development programs (RDPs) play a significant role, focusing on social inclusion and diversification in rural economies, where social farming initiatives are supported under LEADER programs.

## 2.2 Comparative Analysis of Legislative Frameworks

The legislative and policy frameworks for social farming differ significantly across the three partner countries, reflecting diverse historical trajectories, governance models, and levels of institutional maturity in the sector.

Italy stands out with the most comprehensive and structured legislative approach. Its development followed a bottom-up pathway, beginning with local and regional experimentation in the 1970s and culminating in the adoption of Law 141/2015 on Social Agriculture. This law explicitly defines social farming, identifies eligible actors (agricultural entrepreneurs and social cooperatives), and specifies key objectives such as social and labor inclusion, therapy, education, and local community services. Furthermore, several Italian regions had already established regional laws on social farming even prior to the national legislation. By 2024, all 20 regions and autonomous provinces had adopted specific legal provisions, and 14 had established regional registers of social farms, with varying requirements for accreditation and activity monitoring.

Italy's legal framework not only provides formal recognition of social agriculture but also integrates it within the broader concept of multifunctionality in agriculture, as endorsed by the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). This enables farms to access funding for diversified services (e.g., education, health, rural tourism), enhancing the sustainability and professionalization of social farming.

In contrast, Slovenia lacks a dedicated legal framework for social farming. Instead, the sector operates under a fragmented policy environment, drawing indirect support from laws and strategies related to social entrepreneurship, rural development, employment policy, and the EU's CAP and LEADER programs. Notably, the Social Entrepreneurship Act (2011, revised 2018) provides a legal basis for social enterprises, some of which include agricultural activity, but it does not define or regulate social farming as a distinct practice. While there is growing grassroots interest and several successful initiatives at the local level (e.g., Korenika, Allium, Brinjevka), the absence of clear national definitions, guidelines, or quality standards results in low visibility, inconsistent support, and limited scalability.

Greece, similar to Slovenia, does not yet have a dedicated national law on social farming. However, its regulatory environment is increasingly aligned with European policy frameworks supporting rural development and social economy. The Law 4019/2011 on Social Economy and Social Entrepreneurship

provides a basis for establishing Social Cooperative Enterprises (KOINSEP), which can operate in agriculture with social objectives. Social farming activities are often implemented through EU-funded programs (e.g., EAFRD, ESF+) or integrated into alternative tourism, rehabilitation, and employment schemes. While national legislation does not formally define "social farming," there is a growing ecosystem of practice, supported by pilot projects such as *Social Farming 360°* and community-led initiatives. However, the lack of standardized definitions and institutional coordination remains a barrier to scaling up and formal recognition.

| Aspect | Italy | Slovenia | Greece |
|---|---|---|---|
| **National Law on Social Farming** | ✓ Law 141/2015 | ✗ No specific law | ✗ No specific law |
| **Regional Legislation** | ✓ All regions | ✗ Not applicable | ✗ Not applicable |
| **Official Registers of Social Farms** | ✓ 14 regions/provinces | ✗ Not in place | ✗ Not in place |
| **Legal Recognition of Social Enterprises in Agriculture** | ✓ (Law 381/91) | ✓ (Social Entrepreneurship Act) | ✓ (Law 4019/2011) |
| **Alignment with EU CAP and RDP** | ✓ Fully integrated | ✓ Partially integrated | ✓ Actively evolving |
| **Key Gaps** | Regional inconsistencies | No legal definition, fragmented governance | Conceptual vagueness, lack of national coordination |

Italy demonstrates a mature, institutionalized model of social farming with robust legal and administrative mechanisms, facilitating visibility, funding, and policy integration. Slovenia and Greece, while rich in local initiatives and stakeholder engagement, face structural limitations due to the lack of formal legislative frameworks, leading to unclear roles, low policy coherence, and barriers to systemic support. Strengthening legal recognition in Slovenia and Greece would enhance the legitimacy, sustainability, and replicability of social farming practices, and better align national policies with the EU's objectives for inclusive and multifunctional rural development.

## 2.3 Best Practices and Challenges

Across Italy, Slovenia, and Greece, social farming is practiced in diverse and innovative ways, often adapted to local contexts, vulnerable groups, and regional priorities. While institutional maturity varies, all three countries present compelling examples of best practices and face a distinct set of operational, legal, and financial challenges. This section highlights illustrative cases and systemic barriers in each country, offering a comparative lens to inform future policy and practice.

**Italy – Structured Ecosystems and Policy-Linked Innovation**

**Best Practices:**

Italy offers some of the most structured examples of social farming in Europe, enabled by a strong legal framework (Law 141/2015) and regionally coordinated systems of accreditation. Best practices typically integrate agricultural work with certified therapeutic, educational, and reintegration services.

- **Cooperativa Sociale "Cefal" (Emilia-Romagna):** A type B social cooperative offering job placement programs for people with disabilities and former inmates, integrating organic agriculture with formal reintegration contracts.
- **Social Farms in Marche and Liguria:** Operate within formalized regional registers, with clear links to social services and educational institutions. Many participate in structured EU-funded programs and regional pilot schemes.

**Challenges:**

- **Regional disparity** in regulation and implementation, with some regions lacking updated frameworks post-2015.
- **Bureaucratic burdens** related to recognition, reporting, and compliance.
- **Economic pressure** to balance commercial viability with social mission, especially for small farms.

**<u>Slovenia – Grassroots Innovation Amid Legal Ambiguity</u>**

**Best Practices:**

Despite lacking a dedicated legal framework, Slovenia is home to strong grassroots initiatives that demonstrate creativity and impact in inclusive agriculture.

- **Korenika Social Farm (Šalovci):** A leading example combining certified organic farming with sheltered employment and community services. Recognized for its multigenerational center and emphasis on local empowerment.
- **Brinjevka and Allium Farms:** Engage people with mental health challenges and people with disabilities through therapeutic horticulture and local food production. These farms also promote seed preservation and sustainable techniques.

**Challenges:**

- **Absence of legal definition and national recognition** of social farming, which limits access to funding and visibility.
- **Fragmented governance**, with overlapping responsibilities across ministries and no central coordination body.
- **Lack of structured training pathways**, with 100% of survey respondents reporting no access to formal social farming educationFARMIN_Slovenia Statist….

**<u>Greece – Emerging Models Rooted in Social Economy</u>**

**Best Practices:**

In Greece, social farming is still developing, but notable models have emerged within the social and solidarity economy, often connected to rehabilitation, youth empowerment, and alternative tourism.

- **Social Farming 360° (Νέα Γεωργία Νέα Γενιά):** A rehabilitation initiative operating within correctional facilities. It offers agricultural training for inmates, focusing on aromatic plants and olives, and connects surplus production to charitable distribution.
- **Community Social Gardens (Athens, Thessaloniki):** Municipality-supported plots offering cultivation space for unemployed or marginalized groups, contributing to food security and social integration.

**Challenges:**

- **Lack of a unified legal framework**, leading to confusion around terms and eligibility for support.
- **Limited awareness and conceptual clarity**, even among practitioners.
- **Insufficient training**, with over 85% of survey respondents reporting no access to relevant education programsFARMIN_Greek Statistics….
- **Dependence on EU funds**, with underutilization of national or local instruments.

**Comparative Observations and Synthesis**

| Dimension | Italy | Slovenia | Greece |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Legal Framework** | Strong national & regional laws | No dedicated law | No dedicated law |
| **Training Access** | Universities, regional programs | Severely lacking | Very limited |
| **Stakeholder Engagement** | Structured and multi-sectoral | NGO- and grassroots-led | Reliant on municipalities, social economy |
| **Focus Areas** | Inclusive employment, education, therapy | Organic farming, social activation | Rehabilitation, community resilience |

All three countries demonstrate **valuable lessons**:

- **Italy** shows how structured legal recognition can enhance scale, quality, and funding access.
- **Slovenia** exemplifies how bottom-up initiatives can thrive despite policy gaps but require urgent support in training and recognition.
- **Greece** illustrates the potential of **social farming as a tool for reintegration and social innovation**, especially when linked to alternative social economy models.

To support cross-country learning, future efforts should focus on:

- Developing **legal recognition and accreditation systems** in Slovenia and Greece;
- Investing in **training and mentorship infrastructure**, especially using Italy's advanced models as reference;
- Supporting **peer exchange and EU-wide networks** to connect emerging farms with experienced operators.

# 3. Sector B: Actors Operative in Social Farming Activities

*Short introduction for the Sector B-integrating info by all countries (a general approach)*

*3.1. Country cases*

## ➢ Country A-Italy

As per October 2024, whereas all the 20 Italian Regions had legislated on the topic of social farming, only 14 of them had instituted the Regional list for the enrolment of operators.

Most of these Regions are from the Northern area of the Country: indeed, all the Northern Regions and Autonomous Provinces have instituted the lists, except for the Emilia-Romagna.

Only one region – Marche – out of the 4 Central Regions had the list, yet it is to be noted that it is the region with the higher number of registered social farms all over Italy (84).

Five out of 8 Southern Regions (Abruzzo, Calabria, Campania, Puglia and Sardinia) had instituted their lists.

From these lists, a total number of 364 of social farming operators resulted.

Half of them are concentrated in 3 Regions: Marche (23%), Friuli (18%) and Liguria (13%). The share reaches ¾ (7 on 10) of the total number of social farms, if we take into consideration the five regions with more social farms (adding Veneto and Sardinia)

We have information about 131 of the registered farms in relation to their areas of intervention.

80 of them (i.e. 61%) were involved, exclusively or not, in job placement of people with various kinds of disadvantage.

Among the enterprises providing their intervention areas, 12 were educational farms (they represented almost the total of the social farms in Liguria, 5 on 6, as well as in Calabria, 5 on 6 again, where - differently from the Liguria case – they are not the only intervention area of the farms). Other 38 farms provided generic educational activities. So the total of providing various kinds of educational activities is 50 (38% of the total number). Only in 8 cases, there was an explicit mention of rehabilitative actions or paths.

54 of the registered farms indicated social assistance services among their activities to which we can add 25 farm declaring their involvement in assistance initiatives (yet in a voice including also educational and training initiatives). So, the total number of farms involved in assistance activities is 79 (around 60%).

Other fields of intervention seem to be residual, yet it is to note that the Regional basis for the management of the lists doesn't help the standardisation of data pertaining the activities carried out by the social farms, as they are differently categorized in the different regional systems.

These Regional differences also relate to the subjective requirements for the registration in the regional lists for social agriculture operator in the 21 between regions and autonomous provinces.

In fact, with the exception of the fundamental criterion defined at national level by Law 41/2015 (Art. 2), according to which the subjects entitled to carry out social agriculture activities are agricultural entrepreneurs as defined in Article 2135 of the Civil Code and social cooperatives as per Law 8 November 1991, n. 381, whose turnover deriving from the exercise of agricultural activities is prevalent and specifying that in case that the aforementioned turnover is greater than 30% of the overall turnover, the same social cooperatives should considered social agriculture operators, each Regional or Provincial systems adopted its own specific criteria.

The most common requirement, requested in 16 of the 21 regional systems, pertains the article 2135 of the Civil Code, i.e. they have to be agricultural enterprises.

It is to be noted that only one region (Molise) of the 4 where this requirement is not applied specifies a different requirement whereas the other three regions simply don't specify any requirement.

The second most widespread requirement (in almost half of systems, 10) pertains carrying out at least one farm activity. The third most common requirement is related to the qualifications requested: in 9 cases, in fact, operators had to be trained through specific training courses.

Also the objective requirements for the inclusion in the lists show a similar situation: 13 out of the 21 systems require the enterprises to be compliant with legal, structural, health and hygiene, urban planning, environmental and safety requirements.

Eleven request for Conventions with public bodies and private entities whereas in 10 cases farms are required to have adequate facilities and equipment for carrying out social farming activities.

Finally, 9 out of the 21 systems require for the full availability of use of the structures and areas to be designated to social farming.

A slightly less differentiated picture pertains the documentation required for the registration in the lists with 16 systems requiring the presentation of Activity reports, Project sheets, Activity or Business plan.

Also in this case, it is to be noted that of the 5 region or provinces that don't apply this requirement only two (Bolzano Province and, again, Molise) provide for different requirements to be met whereas the remaining 3 (Basilicata, Lazio and Umbria) don't indicate any requirement.

### ➢ Country B-Slovenia

In Slovenia, social farming refers to the use of agricultural resources for therapeutic, rehabilitative, educational and socially inclusive purposes. It combines food production with social services to create meaningful opportunities for vulnerable groups such as people with disabilities, the elderly and individuals at risk of social exclusion.

A wide range of stakeholders are involved in the development and implementation of social farming activities. These include non-governmental organizations (NGOs), family farms, cooperatives, social enterprises and various associations, which often collaborate with public institutions and operate within frameworks that promote rural development, social inclusion and sustainable agriculture.

Key institutional supporters include the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food, the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities and the Ministry of Economy, Tourism and Sport. These ministries provide funding opportunities, strategic direction, and policy development. However, their work remains uncoordinated, and Slovenia still lacks a central body dedicated specifically to social farming.

Associations such as the Slovenian Rural Development Network, Local Action Groups (LAGs) and other NGOs are critical for advocacy, networking and the implementation of local initiatives. They help integrate agricultural and social practices and emphasize the importance of local, organic and sustainable food systems.

The academic and research sectors, including universities and research centers, contribute through pilot projects, studies and knowledge-sharing, although structured collaboration between researchers and practitioners is still limited. Greater integration of social farming into formal education and training, including agricultural, social and entrepreneurial studies, is essential for strengthening the sector. Training should also include skills in inclusive community engagement, organic production, employment rehabilitation and social enterprise management. Such training must be made available not only to farmers and social entrepreneurs but also to public officials and NGO representatives.

From an economic standpoint, social farming is financed through a mix of EU funds (e.g., CAP, EAFRD, LEADER/CLLD), national subsidies, private investment and charitable foundations. However, funding is often short-term and insufficient for long-term sustainability. Many social farms rely on project-based support or crowdfunding. While cooperatives and private farms have started playing a greater role, incentives for private sector engagement are still lacking.

Despite these challenges, social farming in Slovenia has clear strengths:

- it promotes multifunctional agriculture,
- supports community resilience,
- enables employment and training for marginalized populations and
- reflects the growing public interest in sustainable, inclusive, and locally grounded food systems.

To fully realize its potential, Slovenia must:

- adopt a national law on social farming with clear definitions and guidelines,
- ensure long-term funding beyond EU grants,
- provide incentives for private sector engagement, and
- strengthen cross-sector collaboration between agriculture, social care, research and education.

In conclusion, the development of social farming in Slovenia is being driven by diverse and committed actors. However, without stronger legal recognition, coordinated support and sustainable financing, their impact remains limited. Strengthening these foundations offers a major opportunity to position social farming as a core element of rural development and social inclusion in Slovenia.

## ➢ Country C-Greece

Various non-governmental organizations (NGOs), cooperatives, and research institutions contribute to shaping the understanding and practices of social farming in Greece. They often emphasize the social integration aspect and the therapeutic value of agricultural activities.

In Greece, **specific funding opportunities** for Social Farming primarily come from broader initiatives aimed at rural development, social inclusion, and the promotion of the social economy. While there isn't a standalone national fund dedicated exclusively to Social Farming, several funding streams at both European and national levels support these initiatives.

*National Funding Initiatives*

At the national level, the Greek government offers funding primarily through programs supporting the **social economy** and **rural innovation**. **Social Cooperative Enterprises (KOINSEP)**, a legal framework in Greece, often serve as vehicles for social farming initiatives. These cooperatives can access grants and subsidies aimed at fostering employment and social integration, especially for vulnerable groups. The **Ministry of Rural Development and Food** occasionally issues calls for innovative agricultural projects with a social impact component. These calls may include financial support for social farming activities that contribute to rural sustainability and community development.

*Private Sector and NGO Contributions*

Beyond public funding, some **private foundations** and **non-governmental organizations (NGOs)** in Greece offer grants for social enterprises, including those involved in social farming. These organizations typically focus on social innovation, community development, and supporting vulnerable populations. Partnerships with NGOs or private entities can also open doors to additional funding, training, and networking opportunities, enhancing the sustainability and reach of social farming initiatives.

These contributions often come in the form of **grants**, **training**, **networking opportunities**, or **collaborative projects**. Here are some notable examples:

*NGOs Contributions*

A. ***"Praksis Network"***[8]**: Praksis** is an NGO focused on social inclusion and support for vulnerable populations, including refugees and the unemployed. They run programs that integrate participants into **community-based agricultural projects** as a means of social and economic inclusion.

   - **Example**: Projects offering agricultural training and employment opportunities for refugees and asylum seekers.

[8] PRAKSIS (PROGRAMS OF DEVELOPMENT, SOCIAL SUPPORT AND MEDICAL COOPERATION) is an independent Civil Society Organisation (Non Profitable Association). PRAKSIS main goal is the planning and implementation of projects of development, humanitarian and medical nature. Available at https://praksis.gr/en-about/ , Accessed online at 04.12.2024

B. ***"Melissa Network"***[9]**:** This network primarily focuses on empowering migrant and refugee women. They have collaborated on urban agriculture and community gardening projects to foster **social integration** and **economic independence**.

- **Example**: Creating community gardens in Athens that provide food and therapeutic benefits while offering a sense of belonging.

C. ***"The Southern Lights"***[10]**:** This non-profit organization promotes eco-agriculture and agroecology through educational projects and farm networks. Based in the South of Peloponnese in Greece in a beautiful agroforestry farm, their initiatives, such as the Regenerative Farming Support Program, transform farms into biodiverse agroforestry systems, fostering community resilience and environmental sustainability.

**Private sector contributions**

A. ***"Stavros Niarchos Foundation"*** **(SNF)**[11]**:** The **SNF** is one of the largest private philanthropic organizations in Greece, supporting various social, educational, and cultural projects. They fund initiatives that promote **social inclusion** and **sustainable development**, which often include social farming projects aimed at integrating marginalized populations.

- **Example**: SNF has supported community agricultural programs that provide training and employment opportunities for vulnerable groups.

B. ***"John S. Latsis Public Benefit Foundation"***[12]*:* This foundation funds initiatives in education, social welfare, and community development. They support small and medium-sized social enterprises, including those focused on agriculture and social integration.

- **Example**: Funding for agricultural cooperatives that employ and train individuals from socially excluded backgrounds.

C. ***"Social Farming 360°"***[13]**:** This project, funded by the Citi Foundation, aims to improve food security while reintegrating incarcerated individuals into society. The program provides agricultural training in correctional facilities, focusing on crops like olives and aromatic plants. It also distributes surplus produce to local communities through charitable partnerships, enhancing both social and economic inclusion in rural areas

D. ***"New Agriculture New Generation" (NANG)***[14]: Supported by the Stavros Niarchos Foundation, NANG offers training programs to young farmers and entrepreneurs, promoting sustainable agriculture and socio-economic empowerment in rural Greece.

➢ **Community and Social Initiatives**

1. **Community Social Farms (Κοινωνικοί Λαχανόκηποι):**

[9] Melissa Network (NGO), Available at: https://melissanetwork.org/, Accessed online 04.12.2024
[10] The Southern Lights Non-Profit Organisation, Available at: https://thesouthernlights.org/ , Accessed online on 04.12.2024
[11] Stavros Niarchos Foundation(SNF), Available at: https://www.snf.org/en/, Accessed online on 04.12.2024
[12] John S. Latsis public benefit foundation https://www.latsis-foundation.org/eng , Accessed online on 03.12.2024
[13] *Social Farming 360: Empowering Communities through Sustainable Agriculture and Social Reintegration*, Available at: https://www.generationag.org/en/our-action/social-farming-360
[14] New Agriculture New Generation (NANG), Available at https://www.generationag.org/en , Accessed online on 03.12.2024

- Municipalities support local social farming through community gardens. These provide plots to low-income or unemployed individuals, contributing to food security while fostering social cohesion

  a. **Locations:** Various municipal and privately sponsored gardens across Greece.

  b. **Function:** Provide plots for unemployed individuals and low-income families to cultivate vegetables for personal use and community aid programs.

  c. **Notable Examples:**

    i. **Athens Municipality:** Several social gardens allocated to families in need.

    ii. **Thessaloniki:** Initiatives promoting urban agriculture

2. **European Influence:** The Greek interpretation of social farming aligns broadly with European Union definitions and guidelines, which describe it as the use of farming activities to promote social inclusion, health, and educational services. EU-supported projects and networks have been influential in promoting the concept within Greece.
3. **Practical Understanding**: In practice, social farming in Greece involves initiatives such as:

   - Therapeutic gardens and farms for mental health patients.
   - Training and employment programs for people with disabilities.
   - Community-supported agriculture projects that foster social cohesion.

➢ **Regional and Local Support**

Additionally, **regional development agencies** and **local authorities** play a crucial role in supporting social farming. They often provide small grants or co-funding opportunities tailored to local needs. These initiatives aim to tackle regional social challenges and promote community resilience. Local support can be particularly beneficial for small-scale social farms or pilot projects that require initial investment to demonstrate their impact.

➢ **European Union Funding**

Much of the financial support for Social Farming in Greece is sourced from **EU programs**, reflecting the European Union's commitment to fostering sustainable rural development and social integration. A key funding mechanism is the **European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD)**. Through Greece's **Rural Development Program (RDP)**, EAFRD provides financial assistance for projects that promote social innovation, rural diversification, and the inclusion of vulnerable groups in the agricultural sector. Social farming initiatives can benefit from measures such as **LEADER/CLLD** (Community-Led Local Development), which encourage grassroots, community-driven projects that address local needs and challenges.

Another critical source of support is the **European Social Fund Plus (ESF+)**, designed to enhance social cohesion and reduce inequalities. This fund targets employment, education, and social inclusion, making it an ideal resource for social farming projects focused on integrating marginalized populations, such as individuals with disabilities, refugees, or long-term unemployed persons. By aligning social

farming projects with ESF+ priorities, stakeholders can access funding for training programs, social enterprises, and initiatives that combine agricultural production with therapeutic or educational services.

## 3.2 Comparative Analysis of Actor Roles and Contributions

Social farming initiatives in Italy, Slovenia, and Greece show notable differences in the roles, contributions, and interaction patterns among key stakeholders. These variations reflect the degree of legislative support, funding availability, institutional coordination, and maturity of social farming ecosystems.

**Italy – Structured Actor Ecosystem and Institutional Coordination**

In Italy, social farming actors operate within a well-defined legal and institutional context. Two main categories of actors are formally recognized: agricultural entrepreneurs (as defined in Article 2135 of the Civil Code) and type A and B social cooperatives (Law 381/1991). These actors are eligible to register in regional social farming lists, which serve as instruments for transparency, coordination, and access to funding.

Key contributions include:

- **Social cooperatives** implement structured employment and training programs for people with disabilities, ex-prisoners, and youth at risk.
- **Regional governments** play a leading role in recognizing and monitoring social farms and in offering vocational training through accredited bodies.
- **Universities and research centers** provide advanced training (e.g. master's degrees in Social Agriculture) and contribute to policy development and impact assessment.
- **Networks such as Rete Fattorie Sociali** and thematic consortia facilitate knowledge sharing, public engagement, and joint project development.

Italy's model is marked by multi-level coordination, clear division of responsibilities, and growing integration between social and agricultural sectors.

**Slovenia – Grassroots Leadership and Multi-Actor Innovation**

In Slovenia, actors in social farming emerge primarily from civil society and community-based organizations. Without a formal legal definition or coordinating authority, stakeholders act independently or through flexible networks.

Key contributions include:

- **NGOs and social enterprises** (e.g., ZRIRAP, Korenika) serve as central hubs for employment, therapy, and training of vulnerable groups, especially people with disabilities and the long-term unemployed.

- **Family farms** and cooperatives combine food production with educational and therapeutic programs, often supported by Local Action Groups (LAGs).
- **Government ministries** (Agriculture, Labour, Economy) provide funding through general measures (e.g. CAP, social entrepreneurship), but coordination is weak.
- **Universities and vocational institutions** have limited involvement, with no systematic integration of social farming into curricula.

Stakeholder engagement in Slovenia is bottom-up and experimental, but hindered by the absence of centralized governance, training pathways, and formal recognition mechanisms.

**Greece – Social Economy Orientation and Emerging Public-Private Models**

In Greece, social farming actors operate within the framework of the social and solidarity economy, often linked to informal networks or pilot projects rather than structured national policies.

Key contributions include:

- **Social Cooperative Enterprises (KOINSEP)** act as multifunctional entities that combine farming with social inclusion goals.
- **Municipalities and regional authorities** support initiatives like **urban community gardens** or employment programs for marginalized groups, though involvement varies by region.
- **NGOs and private foundations** (e.g., Stavros Niarchos Foundation, Melissa Network) offer funding, training, and logistical support, often in the absence of public mechanisms.
- **Educational institutions** (e.g. Agricultural University of Athens, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki) have begun integrating sustainability and social innovation topics into their programs, but dedicated social farming curricula remain rare.

Greece's actor ecosystem is fragmented but dynamic, with strong interest from civil society and growing involvement from the public sector. However, the lack of legislative clarity and national coordination hampers long-term planning and sustainability.

| Dimension | Italy | Slovenia | Greece |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Legal recognition of actors** | ✓ Formalized (farmers + coops) | ✗ None | ✗ None |
| **Government coordination** | ✓ Multi-level (national & regional) | ✗ Fragmented | ⚠ Limited, localized |
| **NGO/civil society leadership** | ⚠ Complementary | ✓ Central role | ✓ Key initiators |
| **Academic involvement** | ✓ Advanced (masters, research) | ⚠ Limited | ⚠ Emerging |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Stakeholder networks** | ✓ Institutionalized | ⚠ Informal/project-based | ⚠ Project-specific |

Italy provides a model of institutional maturity, where roles and responsibilities are clearly defined and supported through regulation and infrastructure. Slovenia illustrates a grassroots-driven system, rich in innovation but constrained by a lack of systemic coordination. Greece demonstrates the potential of social farming within the social economy, with flexible actor models that require stronger legislative and administrative support.

A cross-national learning strategy could leverage:

- **Italy's formal recognition and coordination mechanisms**;
- **Slovenia's strong local initiatives and community integration**;
- **Greece's ability to mobilize civil society and align with alternative economic models**.

Such exchange would strengthen actor ecosystems across all partner countries and improve the sustainability of social farming as a multifunctional tool for rural and social development.

## 3.3 Collaboration Models and Partnerships

Effective collaboration among stakeholders is a cornerstone of successful social farming. Partnerships between farms, social service providers, public authorities, educational institutions, and civil society organizations can significantly enhance the social, economic, and environmental impact of social farming initiatives. However, the structure, formality, and sustainability of these collaborations vary widely across the three partner countries.

**Italy – Institutionalized Partnerships and Multi-Level Integration**

In Italy, collaboration in social farming is often governed by formal agreements, supported by regional legislation and funding mechanisms. Registered social farms are encouraged—or even required—to establish partnerships with public bodies, such as municipalities, health authorities, and social services, particularly when providing accredited therapeutic or educational programs.
Partnership models include:

- **Public–private agreements** between social cooperatives and municipalities for managing inclusive employment programs or therapeutic services.
- **Territorial networks**, such as *Rete delle Fattorie Sociali*, which connect social farms, NGOs, schools, and public administrations to facilitate knowledge exchange, co-design of services, and joint advocacy.
- **Co-programming and co-design processes**, where social farming actors are involved in the planning of regional development strategies and social inclusion policies.

This level of institutional collaboration enables consistency in service delivery, easier access to funding, and a higher degree of public trust in social farming as a legitimate welfare and development actor.

**Slovenia – Local-Level Partnerships and Informal Networks**

In Slovenia, collaboration models are less formalized but often deeply rooted in local contexts. Social farms typically engage in place-based partnerships, driven by necessity, trust, and shared values rather than regulatory requirements.

Typical partnership arrangements include:

- **Local Action Groups (LAGs)** as platforms for cooperation, project development, and rural community building.
- **Project-based collaboration** with NGOs, municipalities, and social centers to deliver targeted support for vulnerable groups.
- **Knowledge-sharing alliances** between farms, civil society actors, and informal seed-saving or permaculture networks.

Despite their creativity and responsiveness, these partnerships often rely on short-term funding and personal relationships, which limits their scalability and institutional sustainability. Furthermore, educational and health sectors are underrepresented in such collaborations, even though their involvement could significantly strengthen the therapeutic and integrative functions of social farming.

**Greece – Emerging Cross-Sector Synergies within the Social Economy**

In Greece, collaboration in social farming is evolving within the broader framework of the social and solidarity economy. While not yet systematically embedded in policy, several promising cross-sector models are emerging, often driven by NGOs or social cooperatives.

Key collaborative patterns include:

- **Partnerships between social cooperatives (KOINSEP)** and municipalities to manage urban farming initiatives, such as community gardens for low-income families or migrants.
- **Triangular collaborations** involving NGOs, correctional institutions, and agricultural experts, such as in the *Social Farming 360°* program, which trains inmates and reintegrates them through structured farming activity.
- **University-led pilot projects**, which partner with farms and local communities to test educational models in agroecology and social entrepreneurship.

However, the lack of a unifying legal or strategic framework means that these collaborations remain fragmented, inconsistent, and dependent on external funding. Furthermore, there is limited evidence of long-term, institutional partnerships with public health or vocational education sectors—an area with significant potential for growth.

| Country | Dominant Collaboration Type | Level of Formalization | Main Strength | Main Gap |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Italy** | Institutional public-private partnerships | High | Policy alignment, scale | Regional disparity |
| **Slovenia** | Community-driven, informal networks | Low–moderate | Local responsiveness | Weak institutional support |
| **Greece** | NGO-led, cross-sector pilot models | Low | Innovation within social economy | Fragmentation, short-termism |


Co-funded by the European Union

While Italy demonstrates the most structured and policy-backed models of collaboration, Slovenia and Greece highlight the importance of flexibility, innovation, and community ownership. However, both countries would benefit from stronger institutional support to ensure the continuity and strategic alignment of their partnerships.

To strengthen collaboration models across the three countries, the following actions are recommended:

- **Develop cross-sectoral coordination bodies** to connect agriculture, health, education, and social inclusion actors at regional or national level.
- **Create legal and financial incentives** for long-term public-private partnerships in social farming.
- **Establish regional hubs or demonstration farms** that can serve as shared spaces for co-creation, training, and experimentation.
- **Encourage EU-funded transnational partnerships**, enabling knowledge transfer between mature (e.g., Italian) and emerging (e.g., Greek, Slovenian) models.

By investing in collaborative capacity and long-term alliances, social farming can evolve from isolated good practices into a resilient, systemic response to rural development and social inclusion challenges.

# 4. Sector C: Training Courses Active in Social Farming

***Short introduction for the Sector C***

## 4.1. Country Cases

- *Country A-Italy*

As we have seen, Social farming arose and developed as a hybrid creature between the world of entrepreneurship and production within the primary sector, on the one hand, and a sector more closely related to the care of people with various kinds of difficulties on the other hand: a platypus, as often said by the people working in social farming, combining the agricultural production with a wider concept of community welfare.

Being social farming the result of an on field experience, any hypothesized training path could not and cannot ignore the dimension of practice, of internships and coaching, central aspects recognized as such by the EU itself, which in the Regulation 1305/2013 on rural development indicates that the transfer of knowledge, included that indicated in the article 35 of the Regulation itself and related to the "diversification of farming activities into activities concerning health care, social integration, community-supported agriculture and education about the environment and food", should take place also through the implementation of workshops, coaching, demonstrative and information activities as well as through exchange programmes or intercompany visits.

The Law 141 of 2015 mandated a specific National Observatory on Social Agriculture for the definition of guidelines for the public bodies activities on the matter of social farming, with particular reference to homogenous criteria for the recognition of the companies and the monitoring and the evaluation of social farming activities, to the simplification of administrative procedures, to the preparation of technical assistance, training and support tools for the companies, to the **definition of recognised training paths**, to the assessment of effective models, to the development of standard contracts between businesses and public administration (article 7).

This Observatory, established in 2017 and chaired by the Minister of Agricultural, Food and Forestry Policies, as now has not developed the guidelines required by the Law, so that every Region has identified its own interlocutors for the planning and the implementation of these training actions.

Practically speaking, to date, training in Social Agriculture is provided by Universities, which have dedicated specific curricula to it within degree courses and First or Second Level masters courses, and by Regions financing vocational trainings.

The Regions, indeed, in response to the article 3 of the national Law and, therefore, facing the need to formalize the recognition of social farming operators through the registration in specific registers/lists, have structured and financed trainings having the aim of providing the operators with the necessary recognition for their registration in the official lists. This is the case, for example, of Veneto Region that, even before of the approval of Law 141, in 2014 had established the Social Farms Register and included the participation to a basic training course among the access requirements; to this requirement is added the attendance at refresher courses every two years to maintain the registration. Obviously,

these courses are addressed to the subjects already indicated by the law as possible social farming operators, i.e. social cooperatives and agricultural entrepreneurs.

Diversely, instead, the University path is differently elaborated by the single academic bodies. Specifically, there are 3 masters in Social Agriculture, provided by Università degli Studi della Tuscia, Università di Roma Tor Vergata and Uniiversità del Sannio, and a Curriculum "Social Agriculture" of the degree in Scienze Agrarie e del Territorio (Agricultural and Territorial Sciences) of Università Politecnica delle Marche. Below is a brief summary of these paths.

**Master in social and ethical farming of Università degli Studi della Tuscia**

A first level master's degree which in fact constituted an avant-garde of its kind in Italy, since it was carried out in a single edition in the 2005-2006 academic year, when the expression Social Agriculture had not yet been consolidated in Italy. The master, directed by Professor Saverio Senni, had the purpose of providing its students with the basic tools to implement projects and paths of social and working inclusion of disadvantaged people in the agricultural sector. The training modules, even addressing psycho an socio-health issues, realised through the collaboration of teachers from the Faculty of Psychology of Università di Roma La Sapienza, were mainly oriented towards technical subjects of the agricultural sciences and the management aspects of a farming company oriented to offer services to the community and particularly to the most fragile categories. Not a case, the training course was planned within the Department of Agroforestry Economics and Rural Environment. The participants of this edition were 16 and the total hours of course were 1500 (providing a total of 60 university training credit), where there were training workshops, meetings with social farming operators, direct experiences in farms of different Italian regions and training internship in companies carrying out social farming projects.

The Master had only one edition both due to organisational challenges and because, probably, it was too ahead of times, compared to the much wider diffusion that the debate on social agriculture would have had starting from the following decade. The elaboration of the contents of the course was another challenge, as the subject required multidisciplinary reflection at multiple levels which in some way follows the knowledge, but above all the skills, that a social agricultural operator must possess

**Social Agriculture Master of Università di Roma Tor Vergata**

The Master of Univesità of Roma Tor Vergata was issued in 2016, following the approval of the Law 141. To realise the course, the University availed itself of the support of the social cooperative Kairos, of the Rete della Fattorie Sociali (Network of Social Farms) and of the association Oasi.

The Master is meant to be addressed also to workers, with a minimum part of attendance in presence (4% of the total hours): according to the official presentation of the course, it is addressed to agricultural entrepreneurs, educators, social professionals and operators who want to acquire knowledge and skills in order to be recognised as experts of Social Agriculture and even to those who want to plan entrepreneurial paths and networks of social agriculture. It can be accessed by people who have already obtained a first or second level degree in the degree courses of the Faculties of Economics, Letters and Philosophy, Communication Sciences, Law, Political Sciences, Mathematical, Physical and Natural Sciences, Statistical Sciences, Engineering and Architecture, while the suitability

of other specialist degrees (Agriculture, Medicine, Psychology, Educational Sciences, Professional Education, Social Service) is assessed by the College of the Master's teachers.

From the contents point of view, the Master aims to enable its students to acquire the skills necessary to create social farms, create territorial networks and plan social interventions closely linked to agricultural and food production. Even in this case, the course provides for credits to be acquired through apprenticeships in social farming realities.

**Master in Manager of agro-social enterprises and of territorial networks of Univesità del Sannio**

This master was released in only one edition during the academic year 2014-15 and was born within the Department of Law, Economics, Management and Quantitative Methods. No specific qualification was among the access criteria and the training modules were based on Economics and business management, Social Economics and Ethics, Social Farming, Welfare models and value creation (included new consumption models), Law and Governance and Network for Community Welfare.

**Curriculum "Social Agriculture" of the degree in in Scienze Agrarie e del Territorio (Agricultural and Territorial Sciences) of Università Politecnica delle Marche**

This curriculum was included in the academic year 2015-2016 in the degree course in Agricultural and Territorial Sciences. The curriculum wanted to train an innovative professional figure able to manage sustainable agricultural and zootechnical systems and to relate to interlocutors with different skills, in multifunctional companies that offer socio-work, socio-educational and socio-health services to categories of vulnerable subjects. This academic training is implemented coherently with the active policy of the Marche Region on the matter of Social Agriculture, ruled by the Regional Law 21/2011, particularly on the issue of the agri-nursery. This curriculum is part of a fairly "classic" path of a master's degree in agriculture and is made up of four fundamental subjects for a total of 27 university credits in which agricultural disciplines are integrated with sociology and psychology: Social Horticulture, floriculture and fruit growing, Social Zootechnics, Well-being and development in social agriculture, Mental distress and prospects for social integration.

Also in this case, internships played a central role in the training path and above all were connected to political action thanks to the Social Agriculture Service created by the Marche Region.

- *Country B-Slovenia*

Training and education are key to the development of social farming, as they provide future practitioners with the knowledge and skills to successfully integrate agriculture with social care, therapeutic services and community engagement. In Slovenia, training opportunities related to social farming are gradually increasing, yet remain underdeveloped compared to more advanced models in some EU countries, such as Italy.

Currently, social farming training in Slovenia is primarily incorporated into broader programs in agriculture, social entrepreneurship and vocational education. While some educational institutions

have introduced relevant modules, dedicated and structured courses focused specifically on social farming are still rare. According to recent data, 61% of respondents in Slovenia reported never encountering formal training programs directly addressing social farming, highlighting a critical gap in the educational system.

**Training Pathways and Opportunities**

1. **Informal Training and Mentorship**
   Many social farms, such as Korenika Social Farm and Eco Garden Beltinci, serve as informal learning hubs. They offer on-the-job training, mentorship and experiential learning in areas such as organic farming, food processing and managing inclusive work environments. These programs are especially valuable for volunteers and individuals entering the sector without formal qualifications.

2. **Vocational Education and Training (VET)**
   The Slovenian vocational education system includes modules on sustainable agriculture, social entrepreneurship and working with vulnerable groups. While these are not exclusive to social farming, they provide a solid foundation for future practitioners and are an important entry point into the field.

3. **University and NGO Collaboration**
   Collaborative programs between universities, NGOs and social farming initiatives have led to the creation of workshops, pilot projects and thematic courses. These often emphasize community development, therapeutic applications of agriculture and environmental sustainability, though their reach and availability remain limited.

4. **EU-Funded Training Initiatives**
   Through instruments such as the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and Erasmus+, Slovenia accesses EU funding for professional training programs. These initiatives promote best practices, facilitate cross-border learning and support the upskilling of farm operators and staff working with vulnerable groups.

5. **Local Action Groups (LAGs)**
   LAGs play a key role at the community level by organizing knowledge-sharing events, thematic workshops, and capacity-building activities tailored to local needs. These often serve as important first contacts with social farming for local stakeholders.

**Challenges and Opportunities**

Despite positive developments, several challenges remain:

- **lack of dedicated university and vocational study programs** focused entirely on social farming;
- **limited public awareness and institutional support** for integrating social farming into national curricula;

- **insufficient training in financial planning and business model development** specific to the needs of social farms;
- **fragmented coordination** between educational institutions and active social farms.

To strengthen training and education in social farming Slovenia should:

1. develop **structured, accredited programs** at vocational and university levels, combining theory with practical application;
2. expand **collaboration between educational institutions and social farms** to create immersive learning environments;
3. integrate **business and financial skills** into training for better farm sustainability;
4. promote **networking and exchange opportunities** through EU and NGO-led initiatives;
5. increase **governmental support and funding** for training in social farming as part of rural development and social inclusion strategies.

Social farming in Slovenia is steadily gaining recognition, but its long-term success depends on a strong and accessible educational foundation. Investing in comprehensive, interdisciplinary training will be essential to prepare the next generation of social farmers and ensure the sector's growth and impact.

➢ *Country C-Greece*

***Existing Vocational and Educational Programs***

Programs aimed at promoting social farming skills in Greece include:

1. *Training in Prisons:* As part of the "Social Farming 360" program, inmates receive hands-on training, aiming for post-release employment[15],[16]

- ***Social Farming 360 Program:***
  i. **Aim:** Integrates inmates into agricultural activities for rehabilitation and skill development.
  ii. **Locations:**
  d. **Agia, Chania (Crete):** Focus on olive cultivation.
  e. **Tiryns, Argolis (Peloponnese):** Aromatic and medicinal plant production.
  f. **Kassaveteia, Volos (Thessaly):** Sustainable farming techniques
  g. **Kassandra, Halkidiki (Macedonia):** Mixed agricultural activities

[15] https://socialactivism.gr/csa/ , Accessed online at 3.12.2024
[16] https://www.generationag.org/draseis/social-farming-360-endynamonontas-koinothtes-meso-biosimhs-georgias-kai-koinonikhs-epanentakshs , Accessed online at 3.12.2024

2. *University Programs:* Some universities, such as the Agricultural University of Athens or Aristoteleion University of Thessaloniki (AUTH), incorporate courses on sustainable agriculture and social impact. However, dedicated degrees in social farming are limited[17].

***Educational Programs at University Level***

While comprehensive university-level programs specifically focused on social farming are limited, broader agricultural education is available through Greek institutions. Some universities have begun integrating social entrepreneurship and sustainability into their curricula, which can support social farming initiatives indirectly[18]. There are ongoing efforts to expand agricultural vocational programs and connect them with real-world farming practices, including socially oriented enterprises[19].Such examples are:

- The *Agricultural Economics Department*[20] (Faculty of Agriculture) of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, located in the City of Thessaloniki in North Greece. More specifically, the Laboratory of Agricultural Applications and Rural Sociology (Rural-lab) , founded in 1965 is offering courses in two levels:
  1. Undergraduate: Agricultural Sociology, Rural Community Development, Agricultural Tourism, Agricultural Education, Agricultural Applications,Special Forms of Tourism, Entrepreneurship in Rural Areas, Sociology, Social Demography, Sociological Research Methodology

  2. Postgraduate: Special Courses in Agricultural, Sociology, Agricultural Applications, Agricultural Education and Sociology of Education, Population and Food.

In summary, Greece is enhancing its VET framework and work-based learning to bridge skills gaps in sectors like social farming. However, more targeted educational programs directly addressing social farming are needed to fully support this growing field.

## 4.2 Comparative Assessment of Training Programs

The availability, quality, and structure of training programs in social farming vary considerably across the three partner countries. These differences reflect the broader legislative and institutional maturity

[17] https://www.efsyn.gr/arheio/gia-kalo/105680_i-koinoniki-georgia-se-ena-diktyo , Accessed online at 3.12.2024

[18] https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/news/greece-new-milestone-law-vocational-education-and-training-system

[19] Cedefop, & National Organisation for the Certification of Qualifications and Vocational Guidance (EOPPEP). (2023). Vocational education and training in Europe – Greece: system description. In Cedefop, & ReferNet. (2024). *Vocational education and training in Europe: VET in Europe database – detailed VET system descriptions* [Database]. https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/vet-in-europe/systems/greece-u3

[20] Official Website : http://aer.agro.auth.gr/ , Accessed online at 17/12/2024

of the social farming sector in each national context. While Italy demonstrates a well-established and multi-tiered training system, Slovenia and Greece are still in the early stages of developing structured, accessible, and practice-oriented educational pathways.

**Italy – Integrated and Institutionalized Education Pathways**

Italy offers the most comprehensive and formalized training ecosystem among the three countries. Training in social farming is integrated at multiple levels:

- **University programs and master's degrees**, such as those at the Università degli Studi della Tuscia, Tor Vergata, and Politecnica delle Marche, provide interdisciplinary academic education that combines agricultural sciences, social work, psychology, and policy analysis.
- **Regional vocational training**, funded by local authorities, aligns with Law 141/2015 and is often required for registration in regional social farm lists. These programs focus on practical skills and include internships, on-farm training, and continuing education modules.
- **Professional networks and observatories**, such as the National Observatory on Social Agriculture and regional coordination platforms, contribute to curriculum development and quality assurance.

Training is geared toward diverse profiles—agricultural entrepreneurs, educators, social workers, and cooperative managers—reflecting the multifunctional nature of the field. Despite regional disparities in implementation, Italy provides a replicable model of multi-level, certified, and stakeholder-linked training provision.

**Slovenia – Emerging Practices with Critical Gaps**

In Slovenia, training in social farming is **informal, fragmented, and underdeveloped**, despite a strong presence of innovative local initiatives.

- While some **vocational education and training (VET)** programs include modules on sustainable agriculture or social entrepreneurship, **there are no dedicated curricula or certification tracks** focused explicitly on social farming.
- **NGO-led initiatives and individual social farms** (e.g., Korenika) provide hands-on learning opportunities, mentorship, and on-the-job training, often in the absence of formal structures.
- Survey results show that **100% of Slovenian respondents have never encountered formal training in social farming**, and 90% report a lack of practical experience in designing inclusive programsFARMIN_Slovenia Statist….

The dominant learning formats preferred by practitioners include job-shadowing, hands-on workshops, and mentoring, indicating a strong demand for experiential and peer-based learning. However, the lack of integration into formal education systems hinders broader access, career development, and the scalability of social farming practices.

**Greece – High Motivation, Low Systematization**

Greece shows strong interest but low institutional development in the field of social farming education.

- Some **universities and vocational centers**, such as the Agricultural University of Athens and Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, offer courses related to sustainable agriculture, agroecology, or social entrepreneurship, but these are rarely framed within the context of social farming.
- Programs such as **"Social Farming 360°"**, operating in correctional institutions, demonstrate the potential for **context-specific, skill-building programs** that integrate social rehabilitation with agricultural education.
- According to survey data, **85.7% of Greek respondents had not encountered any relevant training programs**, while **100% expressed interest in mentorship or job-shadowing** opportunitiesFARMIN_Greek Statistics….

There is a marked gap between the theoretical knowledge available through universities and the practical competencies needed on social farms. Training preferences mirror those in Slovenia, with a strong desire for immersive, real-life learning formats and clearer professional pathways.

| Dimension | Italy | Slovenia | Greece |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Formal training availability** | ✓ Multiple levels (academic + vocational) | ✗ Largely absent | ⚠ Limited, unsystematic |
| **Recognition and certification** | ✓ Integrated into legal framework | ✗ Not recognized | ✗ Not formalized |
| **Preferred learning formats** | Internships, university degrees, refresher courses | Mentoring, job-shadowing, workshops | Job-shadowing, hands-on projects |
| **Inclusion in national curricula** | ✓ Social farming-specific | ✗ Absent | ⚠ Indirect or emerging |
| **Key challenge** | Regional disparities | Lack of structure and access | Conceptual and institutional fragmentation |

Italy has established a comprehensive framework for training in social farming, combining academic rigor, legal alignment, and practical application. Slovenia and Greece, while rich in grassroots engagement and motivation, lack structured educational pathways, national recognition, and curricular integration. Both countries face significant barriers to capacity-building, including limited institutional support, a lack of trainers with field experience, and fragmented program development.

To address these gaps, future efforts should focus on:

- Developing **modular, transnational training programs** that blend online learning with on-farm experiences.
- Creating **certification pathways** for practitioners based on learning outcomes, regardless of formal education.
- Establishing **national reference frameworks** that define the competencies and roles required in social farming.
- Promoting **knowledge transfer** from countries with mature training systems, such as Italy, through EU-funded cooperation and staff exchange.

A harmonized, inclusive, and practice-oriented approach to training will be essential for scaling social farming across Europe and ensuring its long-term sustainability.

## 4.3. Gaps and Opportunities in Training Initiatives

Despite growing interest in social farming and the increasing recognition of its multifunctional role in rural development, significant gaps persist in the availability, structure, and accessibility of training programs across Italy, Slovenia, and Greece. These gaps impact not only the capacity of practitioners to implement inclusive and sustainable practices but also the broader professionalization and scalability of the sector.

**Identified Gaps Across Countries**

**1. Lack of Formalized Training Structures (Slovenia and Greece)**

In both Slovenia and Greece, there are no nationally recognized training programs dedicated specifically to social farming. Existing agricultural or social care education programs rarely address the interdisciplinary nature of social farming or its practical implementation. Survey results highlight this gap starkly:

- **100% of Slovenian respondents** and **85.7% of Greek respondents** reported **never having encountered relevant training**, despite widespread involvement in related activities.
- In both countries, there is also limited collaboration between educational institutions and active social farms, which results in a disconnect between academic knowledge and field-based practice.

**2. Weak Integration into National Curricula**

Even in Italy, where several universities and regional authorities offer accredited courses and certifications, social farming is **not yet mainstreamed** into national vocational education frameworks. In Slovenia and Greece, social farming remains **invisible in formal curricula**, making it difficult to attract new entrants or secure professional recognition for practitioners.

**3. Low Access to Experiential Learning**

Respondents across all countries expressed a strong preference for practical, immersive learning—such as job-shadowing, mentoring, and workshops—but such opportunities are rare or unstructured, especially outside Italy. In Greece, initiatives such as *Social Farming 360°* provide promising models, but they are isolated and project-based, lacking systemic support.

**4. Absence of Training for Multi-Actor Engagement**

One of the key competencies in social farming is the ability to engage with diverse stakeholders—from vulnerable groups and social workers to funders, municipalities, and consumers. However, training on stakeholder management, communication, and collaborative planning is notably absent in most existing programs. This undermines the ability of social farmers to build sustainable partnerships.

**5. Limited Coverage of Entrepreneurial and Management Skills**

Respondents in all three countries highlighted the need for training in financial planning, grant writing, marketing, and impact assessment. These skills are essential for sustaining social farming enterprises but are rarely included in traditional agricultural or social work education. In Greece and Slovenia, practitioners often lack knowledge of available funding or how to develop viable business models.

**Opportunities for Development**

Despite these gaps, there are substantial opportunities to enhance training systems and build a more coherent and accessible learning ecosystem for social farming:

**1. Transnational Learning and Knowledge Transfer**

Italy's experience with regional training systems and university-based programs provides a strong model for replication. Through transnational cooperation and Erasmus+ mobility, Slovenian and Greek stakeholders could gain exposure to well-functioning examples, accelerating capacity building.

**2. Development of Modular, Flexible Training Programs**

There is a clear need for interdisciplinary, modular training, which can be adapted to the backgrounds of various learners—farmers, educators, social workers, and administrators. These programs should include both theoretical foundations and practical fieldwork, including placements on social farms.

**3. Recognition of Informal Learning and Peer Mentorship**

Given the strong demand for mentoring and job-shadowing, new training initiatives should formalize and certify informal learning experiences, allowing experienced social farmers to serve as mentors and educators. This would build local training capacity and create career pathways for new entrants.

**4. Digital Training and Rural Access**

In more remote areas or among marginalized groups, digital tools could play a key role in providing access to high-quality, tailored learning content. Short online courses, case studies, and toolkits can complement in-person experiences and widen participation.

**5. Integration into Rural Development and Employment Strategies**

By embedding social farming training into existing national strategies for employment, rural development, and social entrepreneurship, countries can unlock EU and national funding, formalize recognition of new professions, and promote cross-sectoral collaboration.

The current training landscape in social farming is marked by disparity: Italy has laid important institutional groundwork, while Slovenia and Greece are navigating fragmented systems, informal learning, and a lack of systemic support. Yet, across all three countries, the enthusiasm and engagement of practitioners signal high potential for rapid advancement, if supported by coherent strategies and cross-border collaboration.

To bridge the gaps and realize the opportunities, it is essential to:

- Promote **interdisciplinary, practice-based, and certified training pathways**;
- Recognize and support **peer-to-peer knowledge transfer and mentoring**;
- Integrate training into broader policies for **rural inclusion, social innovation, and employment**;
- Develop **shared competence frameworks** at the EU level, enabling standardization and mobility.

Strategically designed training systems are not only a prerequisite for the growth of social farming, but also a vehicle for realizing its full potential in transforming rural areas into inclusive, sustainable, and socially innovative spaces.

# 5. Cross-Sectoral Analysis

## 5.1. Short introduction for the Cross-Sectoral Analysis

This section offers an integrated perspective on the current state of social farming in Italy, Slovenia, and Greece, by examining how the three key sectors—legislative frameworks, stakeholder ecosystems, and training systems—interact and influence each other. Rather than analyzing these domains in isolation, the cross-sectoral analysis aims to identify interdependencies, misalignments, and opportunities for synergy.

The analysis is grounded in both desk research and empirical data, especially the comparative survey conducted among social farming practitioners in the three partner countries. Their responses provide valuable insight into how national policies are perceived on the ground, how different actors collaborate (or not), and how accessible and relevant current training initiatives are.

By focusing on practitioner perspectives, this section sheds light on:

- how policy frameworks support or constrain real-life implementation,
- where gaps exist between strategic objectives and operational capacity,
- and what enabling factors are necessary for sustainable cross-sectoral collaboration.

This integrated view will support the development of coherent, inclusive, and future-oriented recommendations for strengthening social farming as a holistic model for rural and social innovation across Europe.

## 5.2. Synergies and Overlaps between Sectors

The development of social farming depends not only on strong individual pillars—such as legislation, stakeholder engagement, and training—but also on the **degree of synergy and cross-sectoral alignment** between them. In this section, we explore how these sectors interact in each partner country and identify areas of functional overlap, mutual reinforcement, and potential disconnection.

**Italy – High Sectoral Alignment through Legal Anchoring**

Italy provides the clearest example of structural synergy among the three sectors. The legal framework (Law 141/2015) explicitly defines the scope and actors of social farming, creating a formal link between policy, practice, and training.

- **Training programs**—both at university and regional level—are aligned with legal definitions and are often required for official recognition or registration of social farms.
- **Stakeholders**, such as social cooperatives, municipalities, and regional authorities, collaborate through institutionalized networks and public–private partnerships.

- Survey data confirms that Italian respondents are **well-informed, confident, and engaged** across all three areas: legal compliance, stakeholder coordination, and program implementationFARMIN_Italian_ Statist…Comparative Analysis of….

This legal and institutional coherence creates strong feedback loops. Policy informs practice; practice feeds into training needs; and training reinforces policy implementation. Italy thus shows how clear legal recognition can function as a structuring mechanism for sectoral integration.

**Slovenia – Strong Grassroots Linkages, Weak Institutional Integration**

In Slovenia, synergy exists primarily at the grassroots level, where practitioners navigate between social support, agriculture, and community development.

- Local actors often build **ad hoc alliances** that merge elements of inclusion, therapeutic farming, and sustainable agriculture (e.g., Korenika combines farming with counseling and multigenerational work).
- However, these synergies are **not mirrored at the policy level**: social farming lacks formal legal recognition, and training systems are disconnected from national strategies.
- Survey results show a disconnect between **perceived competence gaps and the absence of training programs**: although 90% of respondents feel unprepared to design inclusive programs, no training is currently availableFARMIN_Slovenia Statist….

This creates a situation where functional synergies exist on the ground, but are not supported by institutional or regulatory overlap. There is no formal link between agricultural policy, social services, and vocational education—despite their thematic proximity.

**Greece – Fragmented Systems with Emerging Cross-Sectoral Potential**

Greece presents a hybrid model: while legal and institutional integration is weak, practitioners actively build bridges between sectors, often within the framework of the social and solidarity economy.

- Social cooperatives (KOINSEP) often operate at the **intersection of employment, care, and production**, offering integrated services in urban agriculture, migrant support, and rehabilitation.
- Pilot projects such as *Social Farming 360°* show how **justice, education, and agriculture** can intersect in meaningful and transformative ways.
- Survey responses confirm this orientation: respondents see value in multi-sectoral collaboration but often **lack training, coordination, or clarity** about roles and policy supportFARMIN_Greek Statistics…Comparative Analysis of….

The result is a bottom-up ecosystem of overlap, where synergies are possible but remain largely informal, unstructured, and vulnerable to funding cycles.

| Country | Legal–Stakeholder Synergy | Legal–Training Synergy | Stakeholder–Training Synergy |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Italy** | ✓ Strong – enabled by legislation | ✓ Strong – certified programs linked to law | ✓ Coordinated through networks |
| **Slovenia** | ✗ Weak – no formal framework | ✗ Absent – no curricular alignment | ⚠ Partial – informal mentorships |
| **Greece** | ⚠ Emerging – social economy focus | ✗ Weak – fragmented access | ⚠ Growing – project-based |

Synergies between sectors are essential for the coherent growth of social farming. Italy illustrates how legislation can serve as a bridge between actors and systems, while Slovenia and Greece highlight the resilience of practitioners in building overlaps from the ground up.

To foster stronger cross-sectoral integration, the following strategies are recommended:

- **Codify social farming in national legislation**, linking legal definitions with eligible stakeholders and training requirements.
- **Develop inter-ministerial coordination bodies**, connecting agriculture, social affairs, and education ministries.
- **Design modular training programs** co-developed by universities, social farms, and public agencies to ensure relevance and recognition.
- **Support demonstration projects** that model effective multi-sector collaboration, especially in Slovenia and Greece.

Ultimately, the most sustainable forms of social farming emerge where legal clarity, institutional support, and experiential learning reinforce each other—turning overlap into synergy and practice into policy.

## 5.3. National vs. International Trends

Social farming has gained increasing recognition at the European level as a model that integrates environmental sustainability, rural development, and social inclusion. The European Union promotes multifunctional agriculture and social innovation through instruments such as the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+), and the LEADER approach. Within this context, social farming is not only an agricultural innovation but a policy-relevant tool for cohesion, employment, and health.

This section examines how the approaches in Italy, Slovenia, and Greece align with or diverge from international trends, particularly within the EU, and how national-level developments reflect broader strategic priorities.

**Alignment with EU Priorities: Convergence and Gaps**

**Italy** is the most closely aligned with EU-level trends. Its legal recognition of social agriculture (Law 141/2015) explicitly addresses social inclusion, employment of vulnerable groups, therapeutic services, and community development—all key pillars in EU strategies for inclusive growth. Italy integrates social farming into rural development programs and supports it through regional CAP funding, national training systems, and active stakeholder networks.

Italy's model also reflects European values of participatory governance, with mechanisms for co-programming and co-design at the local level. Through established consortia and national networks, Italian social farms contribute to policy learning and transnational exchange, serving as reference points for emerging systems in other EU countries.

**Slovenia**, by contrast, shows strong bottom-up innovation but remains legally and institutionally misaligned with broader European frameworks. While Slovenian social farms engage in activities consistent with EU social farming objectives—such as inclusion of people with disabilities, organic production, and community health—they operate without legal recognition, formal accreditation, or policy integration.

This results in a paradox: Slovenia is functionally aligned with international priorities but structurally disconnected from mechanisms that would support scaling, sustainability, and formal recognition. The absence of dedicated training programs and strategic funding further widens this gap.

**Greece** reflects another variant of partial alignment. Greek initiatives resonate with social economy principles, which the EU has increasingly promoted through its Social Economy Action Plan (2021). Social cooperatives (KOINSEP) and pilot initiatives in correctional institutions or migrant integration mirror European themes of justice reform, inclusion, and green transition.

However, Greece lacks a national strategy or unified vision for social farming. While practitioners often work within EU-funded projects (e.g. EAFRD, LEADER), the absence of legal clarity and strategic governance inhibits deeper convergence with EU-level standards. As in Slovenia, promising practices remain isolated and project-dependent.

**Transnational Learning and System Maturity**

The comparative analysis reveals distinct stages of system development:

| Country | Stage | EU Alignment | Transnational Potential |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Italy** | Mature system with full legal and institutional integration | High – embedded in CAP, ESF+, education | Model provider for peer learning and policy transfer |
| **Slovenia** | Emerging system with grassroots innovation | Medium – practice aligned, policy lagging | High – needs capacity-building and recognition |
| **Greece** | Transitional system with social economy orientation | Medium – partial policy coherence | Medium–high – needs coordination and strategic investment |

Italy is well-positioned to act as a mentor country in EU cooperation programs, while Slovenia and Greece represent contexts of high potential but require systemic consolidation. All three countries share common ground in prioritizing vulnerable groups, sustainability, and community engagement—yet differ in how structurally embedded these goals are within national systems.

**Opportunities for Strategic Convergence**

To move closer to EU best practices and fully leverage available instruments, partner countries should consider the following actions:

- **Codify social farming in national legal frameworks**, ensuring compatibility with EU CAP and ESF+ definitions.
- **Embed training and certification in formal education systems**, using Italy's vocational and university models as templates.
- **Create national social farming strategies**, aligned with EU rural and social innovation policies.
- **Expand participation in transnational initiatives**, such as Erasmus+, Interreg, or Horizon Europe, to stimulate innovation and exchange.
- **Build monitoring and impact assessment systems**, reflecting EU emphasis on evidence-based policy and measurable outcomes.

While national approaches to social farming vary widely, they all intersect with international trends in different ways. Italy exemplifies structural maturity and institutional coherence. Slovenia represents grassroots energy with untapped policy potential. Greece shows how the social and solidarity economy can be a platform for integrated action—if matched by legal and strategic frameworks.

The FARM'IN project serves as a vital vehicle for bridging national–international gaps, promoting cross-country learning, and supporting the evolution of social farming systems toward resilient, inclusive, and European-aligned models of rural development.

## 5.4. Policy Recommendations

The cross-sectoral analysis of social farming in Italy, Slovenia, and Greece reveals significant disparities in legal recognition, institutional coordination, stakeholder engagement, and training systems. To bridge these gaps and unlock the full multifunctional potential of social farming, a coherent policy approach is needed—one that supports integration across sectors, formal recognition, and transnational learning.

Below are structured policy recommendations aimed at national authorities, regional governments, education providers, and EU-level institutions.

**1. Establish or Strengthen Legal Frameworks for Social Farming**

- **Slovenia and Greece** should prioritize the creation of **dedicated legal definitions** and recognition mechanisms for social farming, in line with EU CAP and social economy strategies.
- Frameworks should clearly define eligible actors, types of activities, and minimum quality standards.
- Italy should ensure the **harmonization of regional legislation**, reducing disparities in implementation and access to support.

**2. Promote Interministerial Coordination and Institutional Synergy**

- Create **cross-sectoral task forces** or coordination bodies at national or regional levels that bring together representatives from agriculture, social affairs, education, and health ministries.
- Embed social farming into **national strategies for rural development, employment, health promotion, and social inclusion**.

**3. Develop Comprehensive and Inclusive Training Pathways**

- Design **modular, interdisciplinary training programs** that integrate practical experience, social care principles, and sustainable agriculture.
- Formalize **mentorship and job-shadowing** as recognized components of learning.
- Establish **national certification systems** or align with European competence frameworks (e.g., EQF, ECVET) to improve mobility and recognition.
- Encourage **universities and vocational schools** to co-create curricula with active social farms and cooperatives.

**4. Support Multi-Stakeholder and Cross-Sector Partnerships**

- Provide incentives (e.g., grants, public tenders, priority scoring) for **projects that involve actors from at least two sectors** (e.g., farm + social services; school + cooperative).
- Promote the establishment of **territorial networks or regional hubs** that coordinate service provision, training, and knowledge exchange.
- Facilitate the participation of **end users and vulnerable groups** in the co-design of services.

**5. Improve Access to Funding and Strategic Investment**

- Raise awareness of **existing EU funding opportunities** (e.g., CAP, ESF+, Erasmus+, LEADER) and simplify access procedures for social farming actors.

- Develop **dedicated funding instruments** for social farming under rural development or social economy national programs.
- Encourage **public–private partnerships** and the use of **community-supported funding models** (e.g., social impact bonds, CSA schemes).

**6. Promote Research, Impact Evaluation, and Knowledge Sharing**

- Fund applied research on the **social, economic, and environmental impacts** of social farming.
- Encourage the **creation of national observatories or registries** for data collection, monitoring, and quality control.
- Build open-access **online knowledge platforms** with case studies, toolkits, and training resources, translated into multiple languages.

**7. Enable Transnational Collaboration and System Learning**

- Strengthen **peer learning mechanisms** across countries—e.g., staff exchanges, study visits, mentoring pairs.
- Use Italy's mature model as a **training and mentoring reference** for emerging systems in Slovenia and Greece.
- Encourage joint participation in **EU-funded pilot projects** to test and scale inclusive and integrated approaches.

Effective policy in social farming must operate across multiple levels and sectors, breaking down silos between agriculture, social care, education, and employment. The FARM'IN project demonstrates that while legislative and institutional maturity varies, the motivation, creativity, and commitment of practitioners is a common strength across all countries.

Policy frameworks that build on this potential—through recognition, investment, and cross-sectoral collaboration—can transform social farming from isolated innovation into a recognized pillar of inclusive and sustainable rural development in Europe.

# 6. Comparative Analysis of Social Farming in Italy, Slovenia and Greece

## Section 1: GENERAL INFORMATION

| Question | Slovenia | Italy | Greece |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Professional Background** | Social care, community support, work with vulnerable groups. | Social cooperatives, project planning, policy work. | Primarily agricultural background (57.1%). |
| | ➤ Strong *social orientation*. | ➤ Experienced in *governance and systems*. | ➤ Limited social sector expertise. |
| **Primary Interest in Social Farming** | Inclusion & community building (66%). | Balanced focus on inclusion & environmental sustainability. | Focus on environmental sustainability and agricultural development (71.5%). |
| | ➤ *People-centric* approach. | ➤ Recognizes *multifunctionality*. | ➤ Emphasis on *production/ecology*, less on inclusion. |

Table presents a comparative analysis of responses from partner countries, Slovenia, Italy, and Greece, based on the first two questions from the FARMIN project survey (Section 1: General Information).

The goal is to identify similarities and differences in the professional profiles of respondents and their main motivations for engaging in social farming. By examining these aspects, we can better understand the perspectives and capacities of each country's stakeholders and define opportunities for cross-national learning, targeted support and strategic development.

Key insights:

- Diverse entry points into social farming: social care (Slovenia), governance (Italy), and production (Greece).
- Varying levels of emphasis on inclusion, sustainability and agriculture as primary motivations.
- Recommendations are provided to strengthen interdisciplinary collaboration and training, aiming to reinforce the multifunctional potential of social farming across all regions.

Co-funded by the European Union

## Section 2: Vulnerable Groups & Inclusive Programming

| Question | Slovenia | Italy | Greece |
|---|---|---|---|
| Which vulnerable groups can benefit from social farming? | Most frequently mentioned: people with disabilities (17%), elderly (17%), children & families (17%).<br>Other groups: youth at risk (11%), people with addictions (11%), migrants (7%), Roma families, single parents, homeless (4%). | 100% recognition for: people with disabilities, mental health challenges, youth at risk, migrants & refugees.<br>Also high mention of elderly and people with addictions. | Top groups: youth at risk (85.7%), mental health challenges (71.4%), children & families (71.4%).<br>Lower for elderly (42.9%), physical disabilities (35.7%). |
| | ➤ *Broad but socially focused understanding with attention to families and marginalized groups.* | ➤ *Highly inclusive approach, recognizing wide spectrum of vulnerable groups.* | ➤ *Focus on youth and psychosocial issues, less awareness of physical and aging-related vulnerability.* |
| Do you know how to design activities that include these groups? | 50% need training; 40% have theoretical knowledge only; 10% have practical experience. | All respondents reported having experience or confidence in planning inclusive activities. | 69.2% need training; 23.1% have theoretical knowledge; 7.7% have practical experience. |
| | ➤ *Limited capacity, strong need for support and mentoring.* | ➤ *Strong institutional and experiential knowledge base.* | ➤ *Critical skill gap in practical implementation.* |
| Which types of social programs are most beneficial to develop? | Most mentioned: therapeutic for elderly (29%), employment for people with disabilities (25%), educational for children (21%). | Most valued: educational workshops, skill-building for youth, rehab for people with addictions (equal votes). | Top choices: educational for children (71.4%), skill development for youth (71.4%), rehab for addictions (64.3%).<br>Lower emphasis on elderly (42.9%) and disabilities (35.7%). |
| | ➤ *Preference for structured, long-term support programs.* | ➤ *Focus on inclusion and re-integration of multiple vulnerable groups.* | ➤ *Strong youth-centered approach with limited scope on intergenerational or physical inclusion.* |

In table above we present a comparative analysis of how each partner country perceives and implements social farming for vulnerable groups. We focused on three key questions.

The first question asked which groups are seen as most likely to benefit from social farming. In Italy, the responses were the most inclusive, covering a wide range from people with disabilities and mental health challenges to youth at risk and migrants. Slovenia emphasized more traditional care groups — the elderly, children, and families — but also mentioned marginalized populations such as Roma and

the homeless. Greece showed a strong focus on youth, mental health, and families, but significantly less attention was given to the elderly and people with physical disabilities.

The second question looked at whether respondents feel capable of designing inclusive activities for these groups. Italian respondents demonstrated a high level of confidence and practical experience. In contrast, Slovenia showed mostly theoretical knowledge, with half of the respondents needing training. Greece showed the most critical skills gap, with nearly 70% indicating they need training in this area.

The third question addressed which types of social programs are considered most beneficial. Italy highlighted a well-balanced approach — educational, rehabilitative, and skill-building programs. Slovenia focused more on therapeutic and employment-related programs. Greece emphasized youth development and addiction recovery but placed much less importance on intergenerational or disability-inclusive programs.

Overall, Italy demonstrates the most advanced and balanced model, backed by experience. Slovenia shows strong awareness but needs support in implementation. Greece is highly motivated, with a clear focus on youth, but requires significant capacity-building and a broader vision of inclusion.

## Section 3: Practical Skill Development

| Question | Slovenia | Italy | Greece |
|---|---|---|---|
| **What practical activities would help you acquire the skills needed for social farming?** | Most preferred: training in program design (28%), hands-on workshops (24%), job shadowing (17%), pilot programs (17%). | Most indicated: training in program implementation and networking with experienced practitioners. | Most preferred: job shadowing (78.6%), pilot programs (64.3%), workshops (57.1%). |
| | ➤ *Structured training preferred; moderate emphasis on direct immersion.* | ➤ *Emphasis on peer-based learning and real-world knowledge exchange.* | ➤ *Strong preference for immersive, field-based learning formats.* |
| **Would you be interested in job-shadowing or mentoring?** | 100% Yes. | Almost all respondents expressed interest. | 100% Yes. |
| | ➤ *Strong interest in mentoring and observational learning.* | ➤ *Peer learning welcomed by experienced professionals.* | ➤ *Clear motivation for guided, experiential learning opportunities.* |
| **Are there specific hands-on skills you wish to develop?** | Top skills: inclusive activity design (33%), sustainable farming (19%), communication with vulnerable groups (26%). | Focus on inclusive planning and stakeholder engagement. | Top skills: inclusive activity design (71.4%), networking (71.4%), sustainability (64.3%), communication (50%). |
| | ➤ *Need for practical and interpersonal competencies.* | ➤ *Strategic skills aligned with inclusive farming models.* | ➤ *Balanced demand for technical, social, and collaborative skills.* |
| **Have you encountered any relevant training or education programs for social farming?** | 100% No. | Some respondents had previous training experience. | 85.7% No, 14.3% Yes (incl. trainer experience). |
| | ➤ *Total absence of access to formal training resources.* | ➤ *Better exposure to organized educational offers.* | ➤ *Training gap persists despite isolated expertise.* |
| **Which organizations would you approach for more information?** | Most trust in: EU programs (28%), NGOs (26%), government bodies (22%). | Preference for informal and professional networks (peers, co-ops). | Most trust in: EU programs (78.6%), universities, cooperatives & gov. bodies (50%). |
| | ➤ *Lower recognition of local cooperatives and universities.* | ➤ *Well-embedded in the practitioner ecosystem.* | ➤ *Institutional orientation; lower role of national associations.* |

Section 3 explores how social farmers across the three countries develop their skills. The strongest message comes from Greece, where respondents show an exceptional interest in hands-on learning – especially job shadowing, pilot programs, and mentoring. Slovenia also values structured training but reveals a major gap in access, with 100% of respondents stating they've never encountered relevant programs. Italy stands out again with strong peer learning networks and a higher level of practical experience.

In terms of the skills farmers want to build, all three countries align on the need to develop inclusive farming design, sustainability, and communication with vulnerable groups. The data strongly supports the need for experiential training models, transnational mentoring, and improved educational access – especially in Slovenia and Greece.

## SECTION 4: Staskeholder Engagement

| Question | Slovenia | Italy | Greece |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Who do you think are the key stakeholders for developing social farming in your region?** | Most mentioned: NGOs (26%), educational institutions (26%), local government (19%), vulnerable group reps (19%), funding bodies (16%). | Local government and policymakers, funding bodies (most mentioned). Healthcare and social care providers noted slightly. | Top: local government (78.6%), funding bodies (64.3%), education (57.1%), vulnerable groups (50%). Lower: healthcare (21.4%). |
| | ➤ *Preference for civil society and education sector, public support moderately recognized.* | ➤ *Focus on policy and financing mechanisms.* | ➤ *Strong institutional focus with moderate attention to inclusion.* |
| **Which stakeholders would you like to involve in your social farming initiatives?** | Mix of local actors: farmers, municipalities, NGOs, investors, cooperatives, education. | Stakeholders from social services, youth-focused projects, NGOs, and agricultural unions. | Frequent mentions: social enterprises (e.g., KOINSEP), municipalities, funders, education, NGOs, local businesses. |
| | ➤ *Clear desire for multi-level collaboration across public, private and community actors.* | ➤ *Strategic and inclusive approach to rural and social regeneration.* | ➤ *Strong call for integrated multi-stakeholder models.* |
| **Do you know how to approach these stakeholders and offer them value?** | 60% need guidance, 20% are confident. | Some familiarity implied through narrative answers, no precise % given. | 42.9% need guidance, 35.7% need training, 21.4% recognize importance. |
| | ➤ *Majority feel underprepared; training needed.* | ➤ *Confidence depends on experience level.* | ➤ *Low confidence; majority lack practical engagement skills.* |
| **What methods do you think are most effective for connecting stakeholders and building networks?** | Top: networking events (35%), joint projects (23%), mutual benefits (19%), digital tools (23%). | Preferred: joint projects and farm visits (83%). | Top: networking events (92.9%), joint projects (71.4%), shared benefits (57.1%), digital (35.7%). |
| | ➤ *Preference for in-person and cooperative action.* | ➤ *Hands-on collaboration and site-based experience most valued.* | ➤ *Overwhelming support for physical networking and collaboration.* |

In Section 4, we looked at how well social farming stakeholders are recognized, engaged, and supported across the three countries.

In Slovenia, the emphasis is placed on NGOs and educational institutions, with somewhat lower recognition of local government and funders. This indicates a grassroots, civil society-oriented perspective, but also reveals a need to strengthen institutional partnerships.

In contrast, Greece places strong trust in public authorities and EU funding bodies. There's clear support for face-to-face networking and multi-stakeholder collaboration, but a lack of confidence when it comes to stakeholder engagement skills. Most respondents reported needing either training or practical guidance.

Italy once again stands out with a strategic and inclusive view. Respondents are familiar with working across sectors and emphasize both policy engagement and financing structures.

All three countries agree on one thing – networking events and joint projects are the most effective methods for connecting stakeholders. However, digital tools are still underused, particularly in Slovenia and Greece.

To move forward, we recommend developing targeted training on stakeholder engagement, encouraging joint initiatives at the local level, and fostering international mentorship – especially from Italy to the other partners.

## SECTION 5: Financial Resources and Sustainability

| Question | Slovenia | Italy | Greece |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Do you have experience accessing financial resources for your farm, such as grants or subsidies?** | 0% have applied; 50% explored options but need more knowledge; 50% unfamiliar with funding. | Mixed results: 3 with previous experience, 2 with little experience and need for training, 1 unfamiliar. | 30.8% have received funding; 30.8% need more knowledge; 38.5% unfamiliar. |
| | ➤ High uncertainty; none have successfully accessed funding. | ➤ Slightly higher awareness with some successful attempts. | ➤ Some success, but majority still lack experience and knowledge. |
| **Which sources of funding do you think are most relevant for social farming?** | Top: EU programs (40%), local government grants (30%), crowdfunding (15%). | 100% identified EU programs and local grants as most relevant. 2/3 also value private investors/foundations. | 100% EU programs, 57.1% local government, 42.9% private investors, 28.6% community-supported. |
| | ➤ Focused on institutional funding; minimal recognition of private or CSA models. | ➤ Strong preference for traditional public sources, but openness to private support exists. | ➤ Heavy reliance on EU/local funds, but higher interest in diverse sources than Slovenia. |
| **Would you like training in the following areas to improve financial sustainability?** | Business and financial planning (27%), grant writing (24%), marketing (24%), budgeting (24%). | Business/marketing/budgeting appreciated by 50% of respondents. | Grant writing (91.7%) is top priority; marketing and budgeting (58.3%); business planning (41.7%). |
| | ➤ Balanced interest in practical training areas. | ➤ Practical focus on operational sustainability. | ➤ Clear demand for hands-on skills; low emphasis on long-term strategy. |

This section explored how prepared stakeholders are to financially sustain social farming initiatives and what training they need to improve. The findings reveal significant disparities between the three countries.

Slovenia shows the lowest level of experience, with *no respondent successfully accessing grants or subsidies*. Half are unfamiliar with funding options, and the other half lack sufficient knowledge. This reflects a critical need for basic financial literacy and system navigation. Moreover, their view of funding is heavily institutional, with minimal mention of private or community-based models.

Italy presents a more diverse and mature funding awareness. While not all respondents have accessed funding, many have tried and some succeeded. Importantly, there's growing openness to private funding sources, such as foundations and investors, complementing the traditional reliance on EU and local grants. Their training needs lean towards operational competencies like budgeting and marketing – indicating a business-oriented mindset.

Greece stands out with a higher rate of successful funding access (30.8%) compared to Slovenia and a remarkably strong demand for grant writing training (91.7%). Greek respondents also show greater interest in alternative funding models, such as community-supported agriculture and private investment – signaling a willingness to diversify income streams but still needing structured training and strategic development support.

These insights directly support FARM'IN's goal of strengthening inclusive, innovative VET models for social farming by building not only technical but also financial competence—crucial for long-term viability and rural resilience.

## SECTION 6: Additional Feedback

| Question | Slovenia | Italy | Greece |
|---|---|---|---|
| **What motivates you to consider or pursue social farming?** | Motivation stems primarily from personal values (e.g. helping others, sustainability, lifestyle) and professional experience. | Motivation is shaped by social contribution, ethical views, and a passion for integrating vulnerable people into agriculture. | A mix of ethical, systemic, and personal motivations: job creation, sustainable development, and agriculture sector transformation. |
| | ➤ Focused on **personal interest and values-based engagement**. | ➤ Strong **social inclusion orientation**, linked with vocational mission. | ➤ Reflects a **holistic and multi-dimensional vision** of social farming. |
| **Are there specific challenges you face in starting or running a social farm?** | Challenges include administrative burden, lack of staff, institutional support, and market access. | Main obstacles are related to bureaucracy, sustainability, and knowledge transfer. | Divided responses: some report no major barriers, others mention lack of info, collaboration, planning, and inclusion. |
| | ➤ Need for **policy-level support, funding, and recognition**. | ➤ Highlights **legal/institutional complexity** and **lack of continuity**. | ➤ **Awareness gaps and systemic fragmentation**. |
| **Any suggestions regarding training, support, or resources?** | Strong interest in networking, mentoring, legal clarity, and training in regulations, funding access, and planning. | Request for quality vocational programs, continuous learning, peer-exchange, and political support. | Clear need for ongoing education, funding mechanisms, and capacity-building on sustainability, collaboration, and terminology. |
| | ➤ **Pragmatic needs** for upskilling and support structures. | ➤ Emphasis on **professionalization of training** and **policy advocacy**. | ➤ Call for **lifelong learning and flexible funding**. |

Stakeholders from all three countries—Slovenia, Italy, and Greece—offered valuable qualitative reflections on their motivations, challenges, and support needs in social farming. Their responses reveal a strong commitment to inclusive and sustainable practices, but also underscore critical systemic and operational gaps.

Slovenia expresses a strong grassroots commitment to social farming but faces considerable structural and administrative challenges. The desire for legal clarity, training, and recognition reflects a need for systemic integration and visibility.

Italy highlights the importance of long-term sustainability and institutional alignment. While motivation is high and socially oriented, operational continuity and policy frameworks remain key barriers.

Greece reflects diverse perspectives, from visionary to uncertain. While some respondents express mature insights on sustainability and strategy, others reveal basic informational and planning needs, indicating a dual development curve.

These findings confirm the relevance of the FARM'IN project's mission: to professionalize social farming through inclusive, practical, and future-oriented VET tools. Addressing the gaps identified in this section will be essential to unlock the full social, economic, and environmental potential of social farming across Europe.

**SECTION 7: Competences**

| Competence Area | Slovenia | Italy | Greece |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Top-rated competences** | Creating value through storytelling and media (rated highest), impact measurement, and team leadership. | Mobilising resources (avg. 4.25), stakeholder networking, and impact measurement. | Leadership, mobilisation, stakeholder networking, and sustainability. |
| | ➤ Strong focus on **communication and visibility**. | ➤ Emphasis on **funding, partnerships, and measurement**. | ➤ Focus on **collaboration and system transformation**. |
| **Lower-priority areas** | Designing inclusive environments and adapting business models rated lowest. | Inclusive environments, storytelling and media rated lowest. | Conversion of farm resources, inclusive design, and business modelling. |
| | ➤ Less emphasis on **operational and design aspects**. | ➤ Prioritises **structural over narrative skills**. | ➤ These are seen as **important, but secondary**. |
| **Cross-cutting trends** | Storytelling and visibility are top priorities; strong need for skills that **demonstrate and promote value**. | Italy emphasizes **funding and networking capacity**, reflecting more mature system needs. | Greece shows a **balanced profile**, with awareness of environmental, leadership and community-building needs. |

Slovenia prioritizes *communication, outreach, and storytelling*—highlighting a need for greater public recognition and engagement with social farming. However, technical competences such as inclusive design and business development are rated as less important, revealing a potential skill gap in operational planning.

Italy emphasizes *resource mobilisation and structured partnerships*, suggesting a more advanced stage of development where success depends on effective scaling, sustainability, and cross-sector collaboration.

Greece presents a balanced view, with importance placed on both *strategic leadership* and *collaborative infrastructure*. Respondents recognize the value of impact measurement, stakeholder partnerships, and agro-compatible diversification.

## 6.1 FARMIN Survey – Final Conclusions and Strategic Directions

The comparative analysis of all seven survey sections across Slovenia, Italy and Greece reveals important trends that directly inform the FARM'IN project's future focus. While each country brings unique perspectives and strengths, the results also highlight critical disparities in practical skills, strategic capacity, and institutional support.

**Italy** emerges as the most mature and well-rounded partner. Its respondents combine strategic insight, practical experience, and institutional confidence. Social farming in Italy is understood and practiced as a multifunctional and inclusive model, with strong emphasis on funding strategies, cross-sector collaboration, and program implementation.

**Slovenia**, by contrast, demonstrates a strong social orientation and personal commitment to inclusion—but lacks operational structure. Respondents are motivated by communication, values, and visibility, but express limited confidence in funding access, stakeholder engagement, and inclusive program design. This points to high potential that could be unlocked through targeted training and support.

**Greece** offers an inspiring degree of motivation, particularly around sustainability, youth empowerment, and leadership. However, responses also reflect fragmentation in skills, conceptual understanding, and strategic planning. This indicates the need for foundational tools, awareness-raising, and gradual system building.

## Strategic Directions for the FARM'IN Partnership

**1. Design Tiered VET Training Programs**

- For Slovenia: entry-level training on project design, legal navigation, and grant writing.
- For Italy: advanced modules in social innovation, impact measurement, and systemic scaling.
- For Greece: a blended approach combining awareness-raising with toolkits for collaboration and sustainability.

**2. Build Mentorship and Peer Learning Networks**

- Italy should lead transnational peer exchanges through job-shadowing, study visits, and mentoring initiatives.
- Slovenia and Greece will benefit from hands-on exposure to established models of inclusive farming and institutional collaboration.

**3. Integrate Financial and Strategic Skills into Training**

- Equip participants with practical competences in funding, impact assessment, and storytelling as a strategic engagement tool.

**4. Advocate for Policy and Institutional Recognition**

- Strengthen national and regional frameworks to formally recognize social farming as a profession and pillar of rural innovation.

**5. Promote EU-Wide Dissemination and Awareness**

- Under the FARM'IN brand, launch a campaign promoting the triple value of social farming: **economic viability**, **social inclusion**, and **environmental sustainability**.

- Share success stories, build an open-access knowledge base, and connect practitioners through digital platforms.

This integrated approach will enable the FARM'IN project to activate its full potential: connecting people, empowering communities, and building a resilient social farming movement across Europe.

# 7. Conclusion and Future Perspectives

## 7.1. Summary of Key Findings

The comparative mapping of social farming across Italy, Slovenia, and Greece reveals both shared ambitions and divergent stages of development. All three countries demonstrate strong interest in using agriculture as a tool for social inclusion, rural development, and environmental sustainability, yet the degree of institutional support, legal clarity, and educational infrastructure varies significantly.

**Italy**

Italy stands out as the most advanced country in terms of legal, institutional, and educational frameworks. Law 141/2015 provides a solid foundation for recognizing social agriculture as a multifunctional activity. This legislative clarity allows for the development of regional registers, accredited training programs, and formal stakeholder networks, including cooperatives, municipalities, and universities. Italian respondents show high confidence in inclusion design and stakeholder engagement, and benefit from access to vocational and higher education programs specifically tailored to social farming. While regional disparities and bureaucratic procedures remain challenges, Italy serves as a model of integration between sectors.

**Slovenia**

Social farming in Slovenia has strong potential for rural development, social inclusion, and economic sustainability, but faces structural barriers that limit its reach and visibility. The absence of a dedicated legal framework results in fragmented policy support and administrative burdens for social farms. Although EU and national funding (CAP, LEADER/CLLD) provide temporary support, long-term financial sustainability is uncertain, and private sector involvement is underdeveloped.

Training and education remain insufficient: 61% of respondents had never encountered relevant training, and most reported a lack of practical skills in inclusion design. Collaborative efforts exist at the local level—especially among NGOs and community farms—but are undermined by weak stakeholder coordination and policy misalignment.

**Key Opportunities for Slovenia** include:

- Establishing a national law on social farming with **clear definitions and funding provisions**.
- Expanding **formal training programs** in both vocational and higher education.
- Enhancing financial sustainability by engaging **private and cooperative funding models**.
- Improving **cross-sector collaboration** among agriculture, social affairs, and education stakeholders.
- Raising public and institutional awareness through **outreach campaigns and knowledge-sharing platforms**.

By addressing these challenges, Slovenia can unlock the full potential of social farming and contribute to a more inclusive and resilient rural economy.

**Greece**

Social agriculture in Greece shows strong interest and emerging grassroots practice, but requires significant support in terms of research, policy, and capacity-building. The country lacks a formal legal definition of social farming, and relevant activities are primarily conducted within the framework of social and solidarity economy (e.g., KOINSEP) or through isolated EU-funded projects.

Stakeholder collaboration is fragmented and heavily reliant on local actors and NGOs. While there is growing recognition of the social and therapeutic benefits of agricultural engagement, Greece still lags behind Italy and Slovenia in legislative clarity, institutional coordination, and training access. According to the survey, nearly 70% of respondents reported needing training to design inclusive programs, and over 85% had never encountered any structured training.

Nonetheless, there is strong motivation among Greek practitioners, particularly in connection with rehabilitation, youth development, and community resilience. The country's engagement with EU-funded initiatives and demand for practical learning formats (job-shadowing, mentoring) highlight opportunities for strategic growth.

In summary, social agriculture in Greece:

- Can support **sustainability, territorial cohesion, and reduced inequality**.
- Should be recognized as an **agricultural activity at both national and EU levels**.
- Represents a clear example of **social and economic innovation** with the potential to reshape rural areas.

Strengthening educational frameworks, improving inter-sectoral collaboration, and formalizing the legal status of social farming will be key to realizing this potential.

## 7.2 Future Perspectives

The cross-sectoral and cross-national analysis conducted within the FARM'IN project highlights a sector at a critical turning point: social farming is no longer a marginal or experimental activity, but a strategic tool for addressing complex rural and social challenges—from social exclusion and youth unemployment to mental health and sustainable food systems. However, unlocking its full potential will require coordinated investment in structures, skills, and systems.

The FARM'IN project plays a catalytic role in this transition. By producing a comparative mapping of legislative frameworks, stakeholder dynamics, and training capacities, it does more than describe the current state—it provides the foundation for building tailored VET (Vocational Education and Training) models that respond directly to the needs of practitioners in each country.

These VET models, aimed at both trainers and social farming operators, represent a forward-looking investment: they will equip professionals not only with technical skills, but also with the social, pedagogical, and entrepreneurial competences needed to lead inclusive, multifunctional rural initiatives across Europe.

**From Practice to Policy: Institutionalizing Social Farming**

One of the clearest conclusions of this project is that legal recognition and policy alignment are prerequisites for sectoral consolidation. While Italy benefits from a dedicated law and regional

coordination, Slovenia and Greece remain without formal frameworks—resulting in fragmentation, invisibility, and lost funding opportunities.

The FARM'IN findings can directly support advocacy and policy development by:

- Informing the drafting of national laws on social farming in Slovenia and Greece;
- Demonstrating how legal clarity enhances access to training, partnerships, and funding;
- Positioning social farming as a key component of integrated rural development strategies at national and EU levels.

**Building a European Learning Ecosystem**

A major gap identified in all three countries—though most acute in Slovenia and Greece—is the absence of formalized, accessible, and practice-oriented training pathways. Practitioners often rely on informal learning, while those entering the field face unclear expectations and no recognized certifications.

FARM'IN addresses this by laying the groundwork for:

- **Competence-based, modular VET models**, co-designed with practitioners, trainers, and institutions;
- Training frameworks that are **adaptable to national contexts** but anchored in shared European standards (EQF, ECVET);
- Mechanisms for **peer learning, mentoring, and knowledge exchange**, especially leveraging Italy's mature ecosystem;
- Tools for recognizing **informal and non-formal learning**, expanding access and promoting equity.

These outputs will be instrumental in **professionalizing the sector**, strengthening its workforce, and embedding social farming in formal education systems.

**Empowering Collaboration and Collective Impact**

Effective social farming is inherently collaborative, requiring engagement from farmers, social workers, educators, policy-makers, and service users. Yet in many regions, particularly in Slovenia and Greece, collaboration is ad hoc, short-term, and under-resourced.

The FARM'IN project helps address this by:

- Mapping **existing networks and gaps** in stakeholder engagement;
- Identifying models of **territorial cooperation** and public–private partnerships;
- Proposing **participatory governance models**, where users co-design and evaluate services;
- Encouraging the creation of **national and transnational hubs** for capacity-building and joint innovation.

Such collaboration is not just beneficial—it is essential for the **resilience and sustainability** of social farming as a long-term intervention.

**Towards Sustainable and Scalable Models**

Financial fragility remains a key threat to social farming, especially for smaller initiatives. Many rely on grants, with limited capacity to build sustainable business models or attract investment. This undermines the continuity of services and the livelihoods of those involved.

FARM'IN findings show that future strategies must:

- Embed **financial training** into VET models, including grant writing, budgeting, and revenue diversification;
- Promote **blended financing**—public subsidies, social finance, cooperatives, community-supported models;
- Develop **impact measurement tools**, allowing farms to demonstrate their value and attract sustained support;
- Advocate for social farming to be **mainstreamed in EU and national funding programs**, including CAP, ESF+, and health budgets.

**Final Reflection: The Legacy of FARM'IN**

FARM'IN is more than a research project—it is an enabling platform for change. Its comprehensive, evidence-based approach provides the tools to:

- Shape national policy;
- Inform EU rural development agendas;
- Train a new generation of socially-engaged rural professionals;
- Create resilient cross-sectoral alliances.

In doing so, FARM'IN contributes to a future where social farming is not an exception, but an integrated, recognized, and supported pillar of rural life across Europe. A future where people in vulnerable situations are not only supported, but actively included in building thriving, sustainable rural communities.

The real challenge now lies not in recognizing the potential of social farming—but in making it systemic, scalable, and permanent. FARM'IN has laid the groundwork. The next step is collective action.

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## 8.1 Italy


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