



European Manifesto on the Added Value of Social Farming

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

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

European demands

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

Health care (both in terms of prevention and cure) is another challenge facing all of Europe. The inclusion and participation of people with disabilities, migration and demographic changes are further challenges that Europe has to face. There is growing awareness of the need to take into account the social aspects of disability, rather than regarding it only as a 'medical' or 'biological' dysfunction. There is also increasing recognition of the importance of the contextual/environmental factors within which an individual's functioning and disability occurs ¹.

Both the future of agriculture and farming and the future of health care require a paradigm shift. This coincides with the Global and Sub-Global IAASTD² Reports. The IAASTD development and sustainability goals were endorsed at the first Intergovernmental Plenary and are consistent with a subset of the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs): the reduction of hunger and poverty, the improvement of rural livelihoods and human health, and facilitating equitable, socially, environmentally and economically sustainable development. Successfully meeting development and sustainability goals and responding to new priorities and changing circumstances requires a fundamental shift in agricultural knowledge, including science, technology, policies, institutions, capacity development and investment. Such a shift would recognize and give increased importance to the multifunctionality of agriculture, accounting for the complexity of agricultural systems within diverse social and ecological contexts. To offer external benefits like human rights, welfare and inclusion of people with special needs are challenges for farming within societies of the future.

¹ See www.who.int/classifications/icf/en

² International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development, www.agassessment.org

Social Farming as a contribution to Europe of the future

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

Social Farming adopts a multifunctional view of agriculture and produces some collective goods. The main products, in addition to saleable produce, are health and employment, education or therapy, a better environment and a care for biodiversity. Agriculture offers opportunities for people to participate in the varied rhythms of the day and the year, be it in growing food or working with domestic animals. Social farming includes agricultural enterprises and market gardens which integrate people with physical, mental or emotional disabilities; farms which offer openings for the socially disadvantaged, for young offenders or those with learning difficulties, people with drug dependencies, the long-term unemployed, active senior citizens; school and kindergarten farms and many more. Prevention of illness, inclusion and a better quality of life are features of social agriculture. It can offer good living conditions for those who are strongly dependent on long-term care.

Throughout Europe social farming initiatives are springing up. Farming enterprises are increasingly becoming the focus of developments in rural areas, creating work and employment for the socially and physically disadvantaged and providing care for the elderly. They are taking on an educational role and developing new sources of income through enhanced reputation associated with their production and the provision of social services. Social farming needs political and financial support.

Requirements and priorities

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

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

Social farming enterprises already provide society with added value at several levels within multifunctional agriculture. The measures for supporting social farming detailed in this position paper call upon politicians, ministers, scientists, consumers and the wider public to be aware of, recognise, maintain and promote these services. Social farming opens up the social, cultural, educational and therapeutic potential of managing the land. For people with special needs it can offer good living conditions and places where their individual abilities are valued and enhanced. So for them social farming is a step towards inclusion into society.

We do not want to see social farming as merely another specialist option for agricultural enterprises, but also as a possible building block for a more socially-minded future. Social agricultural enterprises within transparent systems offer opportunities for the personal development of those in need of help; a sustainable approach to managing nature and the revitalisation of rural areas. When many individuals act in concert and develop social values, small-scale alternatives to advancing rationalisation, greater competition and price wars can begin to emerge. The added value of social farming opens up prospects for a potential paradigm shift and transition pathways for agriculture and social work. The approach of social farming coincides with initiatives like networks for fair trade, solidarity, human salutogenesis and many actors see themselves as part of a movement and process of transition that improves societal demands not only in rural areas.

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