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**Green care in Agriculture:
Health effects,
Economics and Policies**

Proceedings

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**"GREEN CARE IN AGRICULTURE:
HEALTH EFFECTS, ECONOMICS AND POLICIES"**
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**SOCIAL FARMING IN GERMANY: OUTCOMES OF THE
NATIONAL EXPERTS MEETING ORGANISED WITHIN
THE EUROPEAN SOFAR PROJECT**

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Abstract

In May 2007 the FiBL Germany (Research Institute of Organic Farming,) invited 22 experts and stakeholders who were concerned with the various approaches to social farming to meet in Kassel. The aim of the meeting was to exchange ideas and experiences of social farming in Germany and discuss possible approaches to common strategic action within a national and European perspective. The agenda followed a three-phase approach dedicated to: the diagnosis of social farming in Germany; the visionary phase and the strategic action plan. The outcomes were then analysed (SWOT) and presented in the SoFar newsletter and on the project website. The main discussion involved the concept of social farming and the common ground shared by the different social farming approaches. There is a demand for transparency and secure financing. Support is needed to foster the appreciation and perception of social farming in society, administration and policies. Strategic actions should therefore aim at developing and promoting social farming (by finding common goals, researching benefits and raising public awareness), enhancing transparency on all levels and connecting existing networks and associations. The national meeting in Kassel is embedded in the European SoFar project in its dedication to research and dissemination, the exchange of experiences in social farming and the composition of

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a platform to enable communication among stakeholders that would improve the political framework of social farming. The meeting will be followed by a second national meeting in Witzenhausen and the European meeting in Brussels.

SoFar - social services in multifunctional farms

The project “SoFar” is a multi-country specific support action for research policy, funded by the European Commission (Sixth Framework Programme VI for research, innovation and technological development). The project has a duration of 30 months (starting date: 25-6-2006) and aims to support the building of a new institutional environment for social farming, providing linkage of research to practitioners and rural players, and bringing diverse European experiences closer in order to compare, exchange and coordinate experiences and efforts. The different phases include fact-finding, the development of ‘platforms’ at regional and European scale and dissemination activities (more details: www.sofar-d.de and <http://sofar.unipi.it>). Currently the SoFar project is in the second phase performing platforms on national and European level.

What is social farming?

Throughout Europe farming contributes to social activities in rural areas. But social farming means more: The classical economic sectors of a commercial farm, garden or landscape maintenance enterprise are broadened by providing space for recreation, education, therapy or employment for disadvantaged people. Among others these integrated “clients” might be people recovering from drug addiction, psychiatric, mental or physical diseases or handicaps, the long term unemployed, people with depression or burnout, the homeless, former prisoners, old people suffering dementia or currently active contributors to farm life as well as disadvantaged young people such as truants, urchins and young people with eating disorders. Included are not only those farms offering help or therapy for groups of disadvantaged people in need but also farms that provide education on farming and food culture, farms that aim to let clients experience the rhythms of nature such as sheltered workshops for disabled people (WfbM), and school or kindergarten farms. Social farming means a perspective of multifunctional agriculture and an alternative to the further reduction of expensive human labour in farming systems.

The national platform in Germany

On the 11th of May 2007, the German project partner of the European SoFar-Project (Research Institute of Organic Farming, FiBL Germany) invited 22

experts and stakeholders being concerned with the topic of social farming to meet in Kassel. The aim of the workshop was to enable communication and exchange of ideas among stakeholders with different professions and backgrounds in order to develop an innovative strategy of social farming in Germany (“national level”).

The participants of the workshop

The participants of the workshop were chosen carefully. Stakeholders were chosen, not only from the diverse sectors of social farming (different client groups: people with handicaps (4), drug addicts (2), school farms (3), minors (2)), but also from different levels (such as practitioners (10), rural players (2), researchers (3), representatives from policy (1) and administration (1) as well as representatives from networks and associations (4)).

If possible, all these stakeholders should represent the distribution of social farming activities in Germany; however, innovative, less common or unusual entrepreneurs should be given the opportunity to present their ideas in order to allow greater diversity, different approaches and new ideas to enter the discussion. It should be possible to form homogenous groups to enable discussions on special topics in the working group sessions.

Farmers and practitioners of social farming participated with interest, enjoyed the new contacts and engaged in lively discussions. For some client groups (emigrants, convicts and the elderly) no representatives could be found. The response of the political and administrative side (national politicians, (social) administrators, medicinal researchers) was relatively poor. Table 1 shows professional background, the number of the persons invited and the participants who attended the workshop.

The structure of the workshop

The National meeting (here called “Strategieforum”) on the 11th of May 2007 started with a brief look at the state of the art and the aims of the SoFar project as well as an introduction of each participant and his or her expectations of the workshop. Then three phases (Figure 1) “diagnosis”, “vision” and “strategic action” followed, each starting with participative group work alternating with plenary sessions in which the outcomes of the group work were presented. This structure was intended to enable all participants to join and actively contribute to the discussion. Figure 1 shows the structure of the workshop.

The first part of the workshop was dedicated to the **diagnostic phase**. A SoFar project report that compiled information on social farming from research, farm

Table 1. Background and number of the participants of the national meeting in Kassel

Client Group	Organisation of the participant	Number of participants	Number of persons invited
People with handicaps	Sheltered workshops	2	6
	Network green sectors of Sheltered workshops	1	1
	Network Sheltered workshops (BAGWfbM)	(1)	(open invitation)
	Independent farms with handicapped people	1	1
	Reasearcher	1	1
	Psycho- social rehabilitation on farm	1	1
	Farm with mixed clients (handicapped and long term unemployed)	2	3
Children and young people	School farms (Network BAGLOB)	2	4
	Therapeutic farm school	1	1
	Individual youth aid on farms (minors)	2	2
Drug addicted	Researcher	2	3 (1 Practitioner)
Elderly		0	1
Eduction	Protestant academy for training courses on social work	1	1
Unspecific therapy	Network gardening and therapy	1	1
Politics	Hessian parliament	1	3
	German parliament		2 (open invitation)
Administration and advice	Agricultural Department (economic advise)	1	2
Finance and banks		0	5
Other networks social and therapeutic work		0	9 (open invitation)
Other research		0	4
Organisation and moderation, SoFar project	FiBL Germany e.V.	3	3
	Total	22	About 54

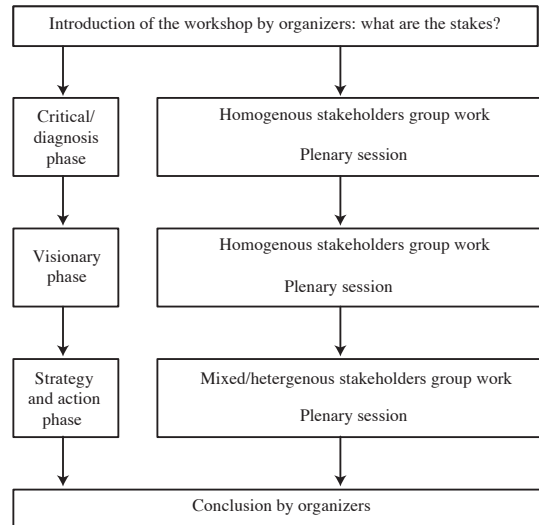


Figure 1. Structure of the workshop.

visits, interviews with stakeholders, as well as investigation of web and scientific literature was given to the participants beforehand. We also provided them with questions to support and stimulate the discussion:

Where do different experts identify special problems and advantages in social farming? Which current tendencies of development and difficulties exist (i.e. economic pressure, judicial framework, structural and supporting situations)? Is there any use in a common strategy and in networking such different social farming activities as school farms and sheltered workshops for people with handicaps? What are the deficiencies in the apprenticeship and training of staff of social farms? Do professionalisation and institutionalisation (i.e. training and quality standards) foster the development? What factors hinder the synergies of social farming from being used for the development of nature and the landscape? How might social farming be acknowledged as a perspective of multifunctional land use?

The second part of the workshop was allocated to the **visionary phase**. Three groups were formed, each focusing on one of the three topics: "People with handicaps", "School farms" and "Other client groups".

following questions were to serve the discussion:

In respect of multiple client groups and their different needs, how can a common goal for social farming (that can fulfil the European demand for a multifunctional agriculture) be developed? Can potentials for additional client

groups be identified (i.e. persons seeking asylum, people without shelter, immigrants)? Can the social orientation also be beneficial for other tasks such as the development of cultural landscapes and its variety of species or the viability of rural areas? How might innovative examples and cases be created or supported to show how social farming contributes to landscape care activities? How do changing frameworks increase or inhibit flexibility? How might special German frameworks that inhibit developments happening in other European countries be eliminated? How can the SoFar-project support the development? Where do stakeholders see a demand for research and development?

In the third phase of the workshop it was intended that a **strategy and action plan** would be developed. The aspects that arose during the visionary phase would be checked concerning their use and the possibilities of their implementation would be evaluated. The action steps that could be generated from the previous phases would then be elaborated. Again three groups were formed to enable all participants to contribute.

The following questions were prepared to serve the discussion:

Where could the work start? Who should be included? Should the workshop be continued in order to form a comprehensive network to support social farming? Which topics and issues should be brought into the following European platform? How must frameworks be changed to foster the development of social farming? What are the next concrete steps at different levels (practice, research, administration, policies)? What might the different actors and stakeholders contribute to the discussed visions? Which strategies could be implemented by the participating experts in the following five years?

Outcomes of the workshop

Reflections on the process of discussion

A “non thematic” outcome concerns the experience of organising a workshop for stakeholders with different professional backgrounds and on a topic that is just entering societal consciousness and not yet widely accepted.

All participants were enthusiastic about the meeting, especially about the experience of making contact with other social farming entrepreneurs and learning about other approaches, initiatives and ways of thinking. There were stimulating discussions about social farming and innovative concepts. There was insufficient time to answer all the questions mentioned above and to develop a common strategy. Many topics could only be touched upon briefly and it was difficult to clearly separate the three phases. We were unsuccessful in inviting representatives of some client groups (emigrants, convicts, the elderly) and at

some levels (national politics, (social) administration, (medicinal) research, financing, banks). Such corporations are difficult to address.

Diagnostic phase

During the first phase of the workshop, the following topics arose:

- Social farming is mostly seen as an answer to several questions that (German) society faces at present (crises of education, adiposity, ablation from natural resources, violence, drug addiction etc.).
- Social farming is quite diverse. This diversity not only concerns client groups and integration goals (therapy, employment, education, housing, learning responsibility) but also different measurement durations (short term, long term, some hours) and different client capabilities (disability severity, low ability to concentrate etc)
- Depending on the different frameworks, a wide spectrum of measurements are applied, each with its own sources of finance and administration.
- The bodies concerned with financing and administration do not communicate with one another.
- Many projects are pilots that originated with the personal involvement of individuals (pioneers). Some initiatives are networking effectively, but others are isolated from one another. Often the individuals involved in a project do not feel the need for the project to be visible to society.
- Many social farms operate under considerable economic stress. Some finance their social service through low co-worker salaries (social dumping) or through donations.
- There is a demand for secure financing. Many farms have to refuse requests by people and institutions for social services because of structural, bureaucratic and financial limitations.
- There is a need for transparency, appreciation and recognition in the structure of social services, networks, federal countries and associations. There should be a contact person for advice and information.
- Stakeholders' ability to network and exchange are limited because of their huge workload.

Visionary phase

General items

The main discussion was about the general concept of the appearance of social farming: the role of the farmer (no hobby farm), common ground of the

different social farming approaches, inclusion of holistic parameters; effects, values and benefits of therapeutic or educational approaches on farm level, suitable terminology and the possibilities of common strategic action. In the short time given to this phase it was hard to develop a common vision of what social farming is or should be. The stakeholders expressed some important points in the discussion:

It is necessary to improve or maintain support, financing and quality, and to enhance public relations and communication among stakeholders. They also see the need for holistic research.

In addition the following general items were discussed:

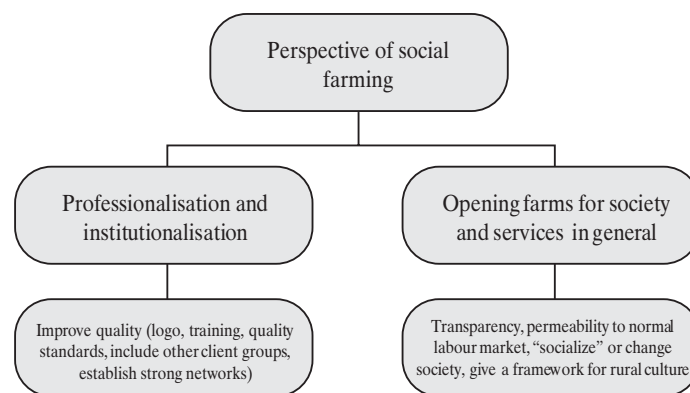
- Social farms should be productive. The farmer's job should not be to concentrate on social, mental care or organisational issues (not farming as a hobby) but to act naturally and competently in his primary profession. On the other hand the fear existed that the farmer might not benefit from being a social farmer when social workers were involved ("farmer, stay at your potatoes").
- Quality could be increased and secured by support for education, supervision and coaching for social farm staff and their co-workers.
- Quality must be secured and/or maintained. This includes educational and cultural aspects. The abuse of clients must be prevented.
- Diversity (focussing not only on economic aspects, but also on holistic thinking, biodiversity and the protection of the natural environment) as well as a mix of clients should be possible.
- Integration sites should be suitable for and modified to the clients' needs and capabilities (probably involving a special design of places of work).
- The German State or the European Union should provide financial support for the employment of less capable persons so as to enhance integration on farms.
- The German State or the European Union should support training and education on (social) farms to foster the "reproductive activity of the farming profession" (apprenticeship and training on the job).

Vision for social farming: quality assurance

The concepts are diverse and dynamic. The first vision aims at widening the scope of social farming: enabling more farms to perform institutionalised social integration, as well as improving services and quality (through education and training etc.). Some participants called for a definition and exact criteria, resulting in quality management and security through standards. They also

required a common logo that might be used for advertising and marketing.

Other stakeholders do not want social farming to be exclusive and institutionalised but strive for an opening up of farms through extended social services. Farming and the whole labour market should become “more social” in general. It would be appropriate for less capable people to be integrated and for the farmer to be compensated for expenses. The opportunity for not only less capable people but also for children, old people and others to join work (and society) should be permeable and transparent. Social farming could provide a framework for rural culture and could be used to change society and create a change of paradigms. Figure 2 shows both visions.



Transparency, exchange and communication

- Support is needed to foster the appreciation and recognition of social farming in society, administration and the social sector. Policies that flow from judicial frameworks (and thus the legal form of the enterprise) might be changed to facilitate social farming activities.
- Social services on farms must be adequately rewarded and financed.
- There should be an exchange, communication and harnessing of expertise. The Sofar- project should have a practical use for social farms. There is a strong interest in European exchange. The stakeholders believe that German social farming activities could learn from practices in other countries and adopt some new approaches (such as the mixing of different client-groups and the establishment of a national support centre similar to those existing in the Netherlands). To effect these changes there has to be

transparency and exchange: i.e. an inventory or catalogue of the different approaches and research; which conditions enable these projects to be run; and which work serves best and why?

- Transparency must be increased at all levels and contact persons and advisory services must be developed.

Ideas for support and financing

- Social aspects could be integrated into (European) agricultural or regional development programmes (ELER) or social farming aspects into (European) social programmes (ESF). This is to say that rural programmes could include parameters for social inclusion (such as employment for people with handicaps and the development of school farms).
- Actual costs could be paid by society, that is, school farms would finance their services from donations or other social sources.
- Individual measurements for people in need of support could be financed from regional funds.
- Strategic alliances with other rural players could be developed. These could include activities involving other (non-farming) social functions, farming, nature conservation or rural development. New measurements and services (i.e. nature conservation) could be used to diversify incomes. The connection of nature conservation, social work and the regional creation of value could be synergistic.
- There should be an advisory service at the agricultural department or at least an organic association providing regional or national support similar to centres in the Netherlands. Alternatively advisors and multipliers could be trained.
- The participants expressed a need for national support and a research programme on social farming similar to the German organic farming research programme in 2001 (“Bundesprogramm Ökolandbau”). This would have the following suggested components:
 - o The training of multipliers;
 - o School farms: research on how to improve teachers’ motivation and didactics, implementation of the topic “culture of food production on farms” (i.e. topic adiposity of children);
 - o Networking among ministries, authorities and federal structures;
 - o The development of training for “social work on farms”.

Public relations and internal communication

- An advisory service and/or training of advisors as mentioned above as well as information materials would provide information to interested people (e.g. clients and apprentices).
- Strategic alliances with other rural players, other social, farming, nature conservation or rural development activities should be developed and promoted (using joint offers and advertising).
- Lobbying on political levels (to inform political stakeholders by, for example, inviting them to farm visits and open days using special offers for authorities).
- Transparency should be enhanced at all levels (for example, by providing a register of initiatives and their services, documentation of services provided and press releases).
- There should be a common statement by social farms regarding their mission, vision and goals. Further, there should be cooperation between networks and a common logo.
- Conferences should be organised and the proceedings of the conferences should be published..

Strategic action plan

It was intended that the third part of the workshop would involve the development of a strategy and an action plan. The topics derived from the visionary phase were to be evaluated in terms of the probability of their being applied or implemented and the succeeding actions were to be elaborated.

As previously mentioned, time for the above was insufficient and we did not succeed in elaborating the succeeding concrete action steps, nor in allocating owners and deadlines to the initiatives. Opinions and visions of the stakeholders were manifold and diverse. Although the participants agreed that social farming needs support and had many ideas for improvements they regretted their lack of capacity to work on the topic. It was apparent that a huge amount of work was required to bring ideas from the visionary phase down to earth - too large an amount of work to be accomplished collaterally with day-to-day tasks and on a non-professional basis. For this reason only certain ideas from the previous phases were developed in the third phase.

Some stakeholders who were already engaged in supportive actions, reported on those activities. There are diverse national and regional meetings of networks, the SoFar project and the COST action 866. These activities, organized by the youth academy in Altenkirchen, the FiBL e.V. Germany and

the European Union, were to be tackled independently of the meeting in Kassel. Strategic actions should generally aim at developing and promoting social farming (involving research on the benefits and the raising of public awareness), enhancing transparency at all levels and connecting already existing networks and associations.

The goals of “transparency” and “support” can be achieved at many levels by means of long term or short-term efforts.

1. Every stakeholder might advertise social farming in his personal environment. Local representatives (politicians, administrative bodies, social workers, the press etc.) could be invited to join farm visits or open farm days. The use of brochures, the press and advertisements do not seem to suffice, the “right” people have to experience the work done on farms.
2. Furthermore strategic alliances and cooperation must be developed.
3. Beyond that, stakeholders see a need to implant the topic “social services on farms” into European agricultural or social programmes (period from 2013; ELER, rural development). Until now there does not seem to be any strategic plan or lobbying that could achieve this goal.

Most participants showed interest in participating in a second meeting on social farming. Such a meeting could provide an opportunity to work in more detail on the general concept and actual supportive actions. In October 2007 the FiBL will organize a second meeting “The surplus value of social farming” in Witzenhausen. The European SoFar platform will also take place and the outcomes of the national meetings in seven partner countries will be discussed.

Beyond that, the FiBL Germany and the SoFar project will participate in meetings and conferences of the different networks and produce materials to support social farming in the broad sense and enhance public recognition of social farming (via websites, newsletters, press releases, articles, video etc.).

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Picture 1. Participants discussing social farming in the break.



Picture 2. Participants in plenary.



Picture 3. Participants getting to know each other.



Picture 4. Thomas van Elsen from FiBL Germany e.V. Sofar project moderating the debates