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The socio and working inclusion of disadvantaged people in agriculture: the "model" of Social Farming in Italy

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Social farming



There is no single, precise definition of the concept nor a consensus about the range, differences or intersections with other associated initiatives such as Green Care, Farming for Health, Green Therapies, Animal Assisted Therapies, Horticultural therapy, etc (Hassink and van Dijk, 2006; Hine et al., 2008a; Sempik et al., 2010; Hassink et al., 2012)

Social farming

- ✓ Social farming (SF) practices use agricultural spaces and activities to provide benefits (inclusion, health and well-being) for vulnerable people
- ✓ It includes a wide range of practices and activities supporting a new idea of Welfare System



Social farming

- ✓ The farm context is the core of SF, not only for the wide range of activities, but above all for the relationship established with several actors: farmers, workers, customers, suppliers, etc.
- ✓ An agricultural perspective has been used to analyze SF, that has been considered often like merely 'hobby farming' or conceptualized as a minor economic activity helping to diversify the farm business (Leck et al, 2014).



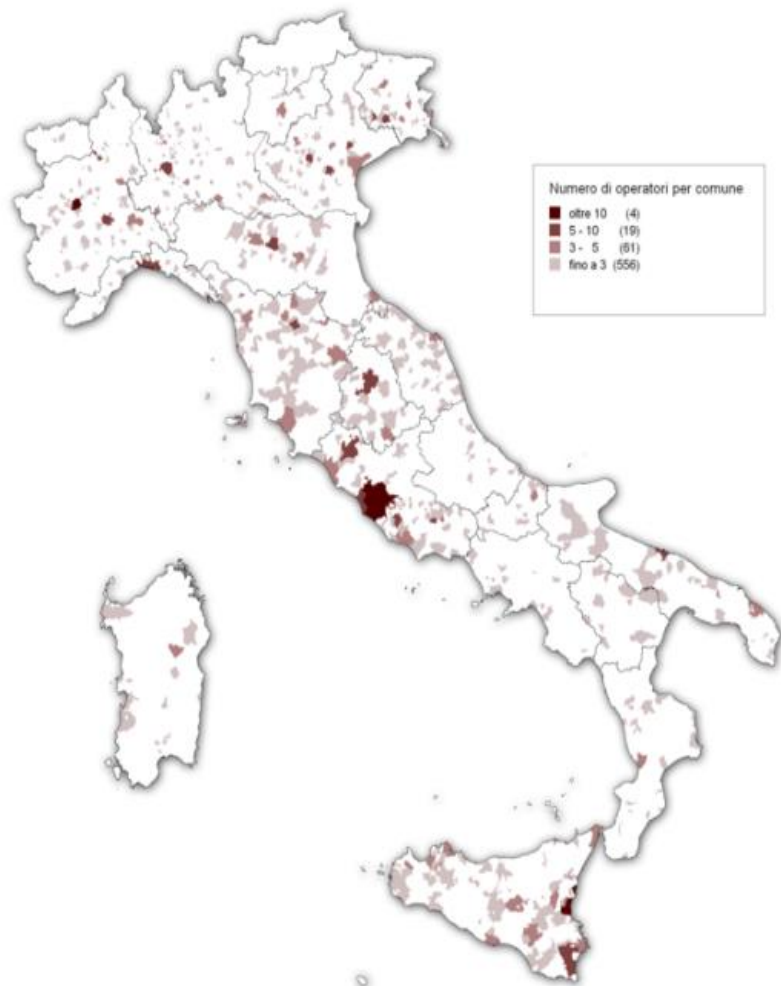
Social farming

Three are the *categories* used to analyze how SF has developed in several context and response to specific needs (Dessein and Bock, 2010):

- multifunctionality of agriculture es. Netherlands, Norway, Flanders (Dessein et al., 2013)
- public health, es. Austria (Wiesinger et al., 2006) and Germany (Neuberger et al., 2006)
- social inclusion, es. Italy (Di Iacovo, ...)

However, social farming refers to a dynamic and developing sector based on farming and social aims. Hence Social Farming must be understood as a new, dynamic and developing sector that consists not only of those actions in which the main objective is the production, processing and / or the commercialization of agricultural food products, but also it concerns the employment of persons at risk of social exclusion and activities with therapeutic aims.

Map of SF in Italy



1.200 operators

- ☐ agricultural enterprises (individual enterprises, agricultural companies, agricultural cooperatives, etc.)
- ☐ social cooperatives (A-type, B-type and A+B type)
- ☐ public bodies (local health authority, hospitals, prisons, schools, universities)
- ☐ other subjects (associations, local action groups (LAG), consortia, rehabilitation centers, communities and religious institutions).

Quali-quantitative approach

- Questionnaire - CAWI to analyze SF characteristics
- 4 case studies to identify any determinants of social and occupational inclusion

Dati generali

- Localizzazione, forma giuridica, anno di costituzione, ecc.
- Addetti, adesione organismi di rappresentanza, ecc.

Dati aziendali

- Superficie, orientamento produttivo e attività connesse
- Rete di relazioni e accordi con altri soggetti
- Reddito

Caratteristiche

- Soggetti destinatari
- Attività, servizi e finalità e modalità di coinvolgimento
- Continuità, competenze, del personale, formazione

Sostenibilità

- Commercializzazione, modalità erogazione servizi
- Investimenti e innovazione
- Finanziamenti e supporto pubblico

Disabilità

- Tipologia disabilità, età, sesso
- Attività, servizi e finalità
- Aspetti dell'AS che favoriscono il benessere delle persone con disabilità
- Attività di AS funzionali a specifiche disabilità

Valutazione

- Opinione su tipologie di attività agricola/connessa per tipologia destinatario (beneficio, efficacia)
- Contributo dell'AS a creazione impresa, sviluppo locale, formazione competenze, inclusione sociale, ecc.
- Aspetti critici

Questionnaire

- **411** questionnaires completed
- **34** respondents stated that they are no more involved in SF activities.
- **63** did not complete the questionnaire
- **367** are the full questionnaires useful for the survey , with a response rate of 31.8%.

Despite the limits of a CAWI research and without any supporting statistical sampling, the Italian Survey involves the most significant group of subjects in terms of number, geographical distribution, activity and legal form.

Results – social inclusion

The survey showed that among the activities performed by enterprises the most frequent are:

- social and work inclusion for vulnerable people, mainly people with disabilities (PWDs);
- interventions and social services for local communities.

260 companies (over 70% out of the total) implement social and working inclusion of persons belonging to disadvantaged groups; 150 implement social services and 122 do both of them. **Data confirm the inclusive approach of Italian social agriculture.**

Results

- ✓ According the survey SF is mainly based on small- to medium scale farms, characterized also by high employment and a variety of new opportunities and tasks for people in need of support, opposite to conventional farms whose overall aim is to reduce labour and to industrialize the farm to become more efficient.
- ✓ The average turnover is less than 25,000 euros/year in 35% of the cases; revenue from SF is less than 1,000 Euros for more than 30% of the sample. Agro-social enterprises have activated social farming process supported by external funding in 30% of cases and more than 60% stated they have invested over the last 5 years to start implementing SF activities.

Results

The Farm structure is very different in terms of extension of cultivated land: the cultivated land goes from little gardens to large farms with more than 100 ha. The average social farm has got an area of about 40 hectares, which is double compared to the average size of Italian organic farms. Many of them grow vegetable gardens and keep animals, 70% deal with horticulture, 40% grow annual vegetables and fruits. Bees (21%) and poultry (19%) are kept very often, some few keep cattle (9%) and pigs (8%). Direct selling, educational farms, on-farm processing activities and nature and landscape management are the most important multifunctional activities in agro-social farming.

Results – environment and labour

More than 60% out of the total of social farms produces organically and in contrast to conventional farms the overall aim is not to reduce human labour and to industrialize the farm to become more efficient, but rather to find different spaces and tasks for people in need of support and working activities that make sense, such as processing the products originating in the normal farming activities



Results - services

- ✓ 79% of the total sample deliver social services, 63% traineeship and 61% orientation for disadvantaged people and people at risk of exclusion.
- ✓ 79% of respondents implementing services for social and working inclusion have different beneficiaries.
- ✓ Survey data show how people with disabilities are the main target group of working and social inclusion activities.



Results - Network agreement

In the inclusive approach there is involvement from both the agricultural and social care/health sectors. Particularly there are network agreements between social/care sector on one hand and private farms on the other one. These actors belong to two different worlds (i.e. different backgrounds, institutions, policies) that however are merged to a certain extent and/or are likely to enhance their interaction progressively, in the perspective of development of social farming. Collaboration between different actors is also witnessed by the dense network of relationships emerging from the analysis of the formal and non-formal agreements that the SF actors have activated for the realization of the activities: more than 1,700 agreements have been announced, most of them with social cooperatives (192), associations (182), schools (175), agricultural enterprises (169), social services (164) and ASL (154).

Results – Determinants of inclusion

Figure 1: Determinants of social and working inclusion Typlogy of Farm	Activities	Involvement	Context
Multifunctionality	Guidance	Mixed target	Positive working relationship
Mixed production targets	Training	Integration of different vulnerable target group in the same inclusion process	Knowledge about whole work process
Broadening activities	Internship	Work contract	Knowledge its own role in the process
Short chain	Accompaniment	Member of cooperative worker	Knowledge about the results of the activities
	Activities with increasing complexity and responsibilities		Communication SF

Conclusion: Connective agricultural

«Care farming helps farmers to connect with people and people to connect with agriculture... 'Agriculture' is perceived as encompassing a wider range of social, economic and cultural sets of practices than 'farming' (Pretty, 2002; Morris and Evans, 2004), and connections lie at the very heart of care farming related outcomes» (Leck et al, 2014).

SF links different sectors and different actors, as it is well underlined from the research; it may, consequently, generate benefits affecting all sectors and all actors involved, in terms of well-being, economic development and inclusion. The results, in a specific area, is the development of the whole local system.