

# Focus Group on Social farming and innovations

Discussion starting paper - version 16 January 2023

## 1. Introduction

### 1a. Aims and key tasks of the Focus Group on Social Farming

This [Focus Group](#) is approaching social farming from the point of view of **innovation**, looking at the innovations that social farming can bring to farm enterprises and how it can benefit users and surrounding communities. It will explore how to support a more inclusive agriculture and enhance connectivity and mutual benefit between urban and rural people. For this purpose, this Focus Group will try to identify the factors triggering the implementation of social farming models across the EU and how social farming can contribute to the innovation ecosystem in rural areas.

The key question which this Focus Group will address is: **‘How can social farming contribute to innovation in agriculture while strengthening the multi-functional role of agriculture and connecting people from urban and rural areas?’**

It will carry out the following **main tasks**:

- **Collect and highlight good practices and inspiring success stories in social farming, which have been set up on farms.**
- **Identify challenges and opportunities to develop social farming models, including business models, and ways to strengthen the links between agriculture and social/health care sectors, education and employment sectors and between urban and rural people.**
- **Explore how social farming could bring innovation into farms and how it could benefit users and the surrounding communities.**
- **Identify the factors needed to support social farming and how to build or strengthen innovation through social farming activities.**
- **Propose potential innovative actions and ideas for Operational Groups and other innovative projects**
- **Identify research needs coming from practice and possible gaps in knowledge**

The purpose of this Starting Paper is to establish a common understanding of the scope of the Focus Group and inspire the discussions of the first focus group meeting by exploring social farming as a source of innovations in the EU. In addition to drawing on the growing body of literature on social farming, this Starting Paper also includes responses from the [20 Focus Group members](#) to a survey distributed in November 2022.



## 2. Defining Social Farming and Innovation in the EU context

### 2a. Definition of Social Farming

In simple terms, social farming provides opportunities for people facing a range of challenges in life to spend time and carry out activities on farms and in agricultural settings in ways which will benefit them across many measures of well-being and development. All social farming initiatives differ according to client group, objective and length of the stay, the offer on the farm, financial aspects, qualification of the service provider, certification, institutional support, etc.<sup>1</sup> However, all social farming activities in some way ***rely on an agricultural context and use agricultural resources and the natural environment of the farm for the provision of care activities and social services.***<sup>2</sup>

The term includes all the activities that can be done in a farm setting to promote (or to generate) therapy, rehabilitation, social inclusion, education and social services<sup>2</sup>. Key target groups of social farming include people with mental health challenges, people with intellectual, physical or sensory disabilities, youth-at-risk, elderly, people with substance abuse issues, refugees, etc. but new needs and new target groups emerge all the time. For the purposes of this Focus Group and Starting Paper we use the term 'health/social care/education/unemployment/social inclusion' to encompass the full range of types of services from which participants are typically drawn. By 'education' we are largely referring to people who are educationally disadvantaged accessing social farming, rather than school farms or the phenomenon of kindergartens or schools on farms.

Social farming is also tied in closely with the multi-functional nature of farming and farms and is part and parcel of the concept of sustainable rural development, giving farmers the opportunity to diversify their [sources of income](#) outside of a purely productivist framework and experience a range of other benefits and positive outcomes. Social farming can happen within a variety of agricultural settings and contexts: on farms owned by private operators (and in many cases, their families), on farms/gardens attached to health and social care services, on farm-based work integration social enterprises – as is common in Italy, for example - or within the context of community projects.

#### For inspiration: Meet social farmers across Europe

The project [SoEngage](#) has collected series of videos and podcasts of social farm testimonies from Germany, Ireland, Poland, Romania, Spain and United Kingdom. They range from very small to large farms, private and public and offering a wide range of

<sup>1</sup> Giuliani, C.; Wieliczko, B. Social agriculture as an example of social innovation emerging in rural areas and the role of public policy. *Rural Areas Dev.* 2018, 15, 7–23

<sup>2</sup> Di Iacovo, F. & O'Connor, D. Supporting Policies for Social Farming in Europe: Progressing Multifunctionality in Responsive Rural Areas; ARSIA: Firenze, Italy, 2009.



services from health or green care to education, employment of people in disadvantaged situations, etc.

## 2b. Social Farming as an Innovative Response

We can identify a number of ways in which social farming can be described as **innovative** (i.e. provides a service or meets needs in new or better ways):

- It **brings together two usually unconnected concepts**: services in areas such as health/social care/education/employment and multi-functional farming, with significant benefits for all participating stakeholders.
- It can help **meet the needs of people in disadvantaged situations** in ways which existing models, governance arrangements and public services are often **unable to adequately address through conventional paths**. Social farming has a role to play in overcoming some of the gaps and challenges from both the farm/rural development perspective (for example in providing a source of additional farm income) *and* the health/social care perspective (for example, by providing social care facilities in rural areas)
- Social farming **takes the latent, often underused assets and resources** of people, place, environment and community **which already exist on many farms** and uses them in **new, creative and environmentally beneficial ways**.<sup>3</sup>
- It represents a genuinely **multi-actor and multidisciplinary approach to different socio-economic problems** in EU territories and can contribute to the definition and implementation of **new pathways of change and new connections**.

## 2c. Development and Current Status of Social Farming across Europe

Social farming is **both a new and a traditional concept**. Its roots lie in traditional rural self-help networks which existed before the modernisation of agriculture and the rise of the public welfare system, but also in religious or charitable provision of residential care for people with disabilities or mental health issues in self-sufficient communities with their own farms and gardens as was common in the past. The concept has grown, evolved and continues to evolve since at least the 1960s in a very heterogeneous way that defies easy classification but that is also a reflection of its (appropriate) rootedness in different sets of conditions, cultures, legal and organisational frameworks etc.

The **overall picture is still fragmented both at EU level and within countries** and a clear picture of the sector difficult to establish.<sup>4</sup> In engaging involvement from 13 EU countries, this Focus Group represents one of the best opportunities to gain a wide and deep insight into the

<sup>3</sup> Giuliani and Wieliczko

<sup>4</sup> Briers, S., Burlando, C., Doimo, I., O'Connor, D. and Elings, M. (2021). Social agriculture Market Outlook. Erasmus+ Green4C project Deliverable 3.4: EU Market outlooks.



state of the art at this moment in time. It is however apparent from the literature, and from the results of a range of EU-funded projects, that **national context remains hugely important** and that a wide range of overlapping factors influence both the relative strength but also the specific nature/model of social farming in different countries and regions. Knowledge of these factors is key to any discussion of how the sector can be grown and developed at both the level of individual farms and at a broader level across the European Union. These are summarised in Table 2.1 below.

**Table 2.1 Key factors influencing the specific nature/model of social farming in different countries.**<sup>5</sup>

| Agriculture and Farming Context                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Policy & Practice within services for vulnerable groups                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | Other factors                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>The dominant farming systems and models (e.g. intensive large scale vs. small family farms).</p> <p>Levels of diversification in general on farms and attitudes towards multifunctionality).</p> <p>Levels of support within broader farming community.</p> <p>Broader societal attitudes towards farming, agriculture, rural way of life, etc.</p> | <p>Model of state provision of/involvement in health, social care, education and employment supports.</p> <p>Level of aspiration and commitment in policy and practice to supporting vulnerable groups to lead more activated, fulfilling, 'ordinary' lives.</p> <p>Funding mechanisms and availability</p> | <p>Legal and regulatory frameworks</p> <p>The presence and influence of social farming support organisations</p> <p>Level of interest in or championing of social farming within academia, media, etc.</p> <p>Levels of political engagement/support</p> |

**This Focus Group will discuss social farming across the EU in the agricultural and farming context.**

### 3. Social Farming as an Innovation in Agriculture & Rural Development

Social farming attracts increased interest and support at an EU level – as evidenced by the formation of this Focus Group – as an innovation which is **both in tune with and helps meet a range of broad EU agriculture, rural development and environmental goals**. In other words, social farming contributes to the social, environmental and economic sustainability. Table 3.1 both outlines the **key features and benefits of social farming** from these perspectives, and the specific EU policies and strategies to which they are aligned.

<sup>5</sup> Briers et al.

**Table 3.1: Key Features/benefits of social farming and EU policies/strategies supported**

| Benefits of social farming     | Key EU policies and strategies aligned                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| ✓ Farm Income & sustainability | <a href="#">CAP 2023-2027</a> , namely Objectives relating to ‘Ensuring Viable Farm Income’, ‘Jobs, Growth and Equality in Rural Areas’, ‘Increasing Competitiveness’, ‘Improving Farmers’ Position in the Food Chain’, ‘Generational Renewal’.                                                                                                             |
| ✓ Innovation & Diversification | <a href="#">Long-term Vision for Rural Areas</a> , in particular the focus on creating ‘Prosperous Rural Communities through diversification and adding value to agriculture’.                                                                                                                                                                              |
| ✓ Generational Renewal         | The <a href="#">European Green Deal</a> which in the realm of agriculture, is designed to ‘boost the economy, improve people’s health and quality of life, and care for nature.’                                                                                                                                                                            |
| ✓ Environment & Climate        | The <a href="#">European Care Strategy</a> which calls for the investments to improve the accessibility of care services in rural and remote areas.                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| ✓ Vibrant Rural Communities    | The <a href="#">Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030 which</a> points out the insufficient provision of appropriate community-based services and to the limited availability of support for families and of personal assistance, including in the area of mental health which is particularly alarming in rural and remote areas. |
| ✓ Social Equality & Inclusion  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |

There has been the growing interest in social farming at the both the level of different ministries and actors within public administration in individual member states and at EU level. For example, in both Poland and Ireland, Agriculture Ministries are playing a key role in developing social farming through piloting of social farming, funding of networks, etc. Social farming is clearly a cross-EU phenomenon. Some important ‘moments’ in the recognition of and support for social farming at EU level to date include:

- The development of the Farming for Health Community of Practice between 2004 and 2010 was a pivotal moment in the recognition of social farming.
- At EU level, a number of diverse spin-offs arose from it including the [SoFar Project](#) (2006-2009) and [the Cost Action 866 on Green Care](#) (2007-2009).
- These clearly informed the European Economic and Social Committee ([EESC](#)) [2012 Opinion](#) which stated the need for a definition and quality criteria and the belief that EU institutions and various regional and national authorities should support social farming, putting in place appropriate regulatory frameworks.
- A large number of projects (Erasmus Plus, Operational Groups, Horizon 2020 Thematic Network and Research Groups, INTERREG, etc.) either focused on or highly relevant to social farming have emerged and been funded at EU level since 2012. **Annex 1** contains an indicative list of projects which should be further enlarged by the Focus Group members.

## 4. Social Farming and Innovation at Farm Level

### 4a. Benefits of social farming to farmers

Although less examined than the benefits to participants, studies suggest a range of benefits to farmers and farm families, farm workers and other actors who engage directly with it (e.g. staff and directors of social enterprises, institutional social farms, etc.). These include: <sup>6 7</sup>

- An **additional source of income** to the farm household. Assembling a range of diverse income streams is increasingly necessary to ensure less intensive farms in particular remain viable.
- Farmers derive a strong sense of **personal satisfaction** and meaning from supporting other people and from making a difference in people's lives.
- It is a **diversification opportunity** which allows farmers to stay working and producing on the farms they love, retaining their core identity as farmers.
- It can encourage farmers to pursue other, linked diversification opportunities, largely centred on the kind of activities which involve an 'opening up' of the farm to the wider public or particular groups (e.g. school groups, environmental education visits.)
- **Decreased feelings of loneliness and isolation** which can be common on increasingly mechanised farms. Social farmers can also become part of new networks and new sources of learning and friendship with like-minded farmers.
- An **opportunity to make improvements** to the farm and farm-landscape in terms of health and safety, amenities, aesthetic appearance, etc.
- Farmers have the opportunity to **build new networks and circuits** that can help promote their farm and their products, particularly to ethically minded consumers.

It is notable that Focus Group expert members placed **particular emphasis on the more social and non-monetary benefits/outcomes of participation in social farming**. Ten of the twenty respondents cited '*sense of personal satisfaction and reward from supporting others*' as the most important benefit to farmers and their farm enterprise while a further five cited '*encourages social connection and inclusion*' as the most important. Only two cited '*additional income*' as the most important benefit. The case studies of social farms presented by Focus Group members – including, for example [Agricoltura Capodarco Società Cooperativa Sociale](#) in Italy, [Bio&Co.](#) in Romania and [Care Farm De Horst](#) in the Netherlands – exemplify this focus on meeting social needs. Awareness of the relatively high importance attached to the social or non-monetary benefits of social farming is also key to understanding motivation to engage in this particular diversification opportunity, as discussed below.

#### Discussion Point:

- *What are the key benefits of social farming to farmers in the agricultural/ farming context in which you are operating?*

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<sup>6</sup> Di Iacovo and O'Connor

<sup>7</sup> Briers et al.



**For inspiration: Some projects focusing on farm diversification through social farming**

- [Added value of social farming for agricultural production](#)
- [Organic vegetables: Enabling regional cultivation, creating jobs for people with disabilities, shaping processing, developing sales.](#)
- [Social farming as an instrument for the diversification of agricultural enterprises in Bavaria - Development of innovative model projects](#)
- [Comeragh Uplands and Communities EIP Project](#)
- [BIOSOCIAL -Small farm organic vegetable production as integrated model between production and local social impact](#)
- [MULTINET - social and organizational innovation for developing multifunctionality in farms: models, co-production, inclusion](#)

#### 4b. Entrants to social farming – backgrounds and motivations

The question of what motivates and encourages farmers to become social farmers is an important one for this Focus Group. The literature on farm decision-making, and on diversification in general, suggests that a complex web of motivations and perspectives, only some of which are concerned with economic logic, inform decision-making.<sup>8</sup> One [study conducted in Northern Italy](#) found that social farming services have largely developed thanks to the **strong motivation of the farmers involved and their conviction in the potential benefits they can offer not only to their users but also to the whole society**. Meanwhile a study amongst Norwegian social farmers<sup>9</sup> found that for 53% of farmers, their motivation was economic, while for 47% it was idealistic with 82% overall reporting that social farming had improved their quality of life. As the study notes, care farming in Norway has very much developed within the discourse of multifunctional agriculture with a strong emphasis on maintaining ordinary agricultural production. Yet even here, non-economic motivations are very strong. Drawing from their extensive experience of working with a very large cohort of social farmers in the country with the largest social farming sector, the Dutch Federation of Care Farmers have produced a [Handbook of Agriculture and Care](#) (2022) which provides insight into the qualities, characteristics and motivations of social farmers. While they do reference economic motivations, these are somewhat secondary to other deeper motivational elements which they highlight including:

- **Lifestyle or the way of life:** Social farming is seen as a multifaceted, adventurous way of life that combines intensive contact with nature and animals with plenty of contact with people.

<sup>8</sup> Vik, J., & McElwee, G. (2011). Diversification and the entrepreneurial motivations of farmers in Norway. *Journal of Small Business Management*, 49(3), 390–410.

<sup>9</sup> Ihlebæk C, Ellingsen-Dalskau LH, Berget B. Motivations, experiences and challenges of being a care farmer -results of a survey of Norwegian care farmers. *Work*. 2015;53(1):113-21.



- **Challenge such as entrepreneurship and self-development:** These values are to do with entrepreneurship, self-development and quality, about running a profitable business and being financially secure.
- **The other and the environment.** Having a sense of engagement and responsibility for other people and for nature, the land, the animals and the place. Key values underpinning this include equality and respect, openness to society and a sense of forming a community.
- **Essence, such as meaning, philosophy of life and faith.** This summarises deeper motivations which have to do with the essence of life, being part of a great whole. Key values underpinning this include stewardship, gratitude, seeking coherence and 'wholeness', and having a sense of vocation or personal mission.

The results from the Survey of Focus Group members are very much in line with this weighting towards idealistic and non-monetary values. Their descriptions of the 'typical' backgrounds and characteristics of farmers and farms likely to engage with social farming focused on traits and characteristics such as having: a deep interest in environmental and ecological issues; a strong set of social values and sense of altruism; an educational or professional background within health/social care/social inclusion work; personal or familial experience of a particular disability or challenge; a deep interest in and passion for the countryside, farming and/or the rural way of life; and a history of involvement in the community and in volunteerism.

**Discussion Point:**

- *Using this information and what we know about social farming in practice, how do we best encourage and support new entrants to social farming from both within and without the current farming community?*

#### 4c. Social Farming and Innovation on Farms

Social farming has been described as a **breeding ground for social innovation**<sup>10</sup>, with the capacity to offer alternative answers and solutions to unsatisfied needs. Discussion of the innovations which social farming can bring to the farm will be key to the work of this Focus Group but early analysis of the Focus Group member survey suggests that these may include: an increased capacity to see the farm with 'fresh eyes' and a shift in mindset and ambition; increased ability to pursue potential linked innovations which are compatible with social farming or which could be stimulated by it; the development of new connections and partnerships with actors in health/social care/education/employment/social inclusion and with the wider local community; the development of new business models; increased responsiveness to emerging opportunities both within and outside social farming; ability to use the label of 'social farm' as a point of differentiation in the sale of products; and enhancement of the farmers skills across a range of new areas.

<sup>10</sup> Galardi, M.; Filugelli, L.; Moruzzo, R.; Riccioli, F.; Mutinelli, F.; Espinosa Diaz, S.; Contalbrigo, L. Challenges and Perspectives of Social Farming in North-Eastern Italy: The Farmers' View. Sustainability 2022, 14, 8390.



**Discussion Points:**

- *What are the key innovations which social farming can bring to farms?*
- *What is the potential for further innovation? (in terms of economic, social and environmental activity, all of which are central to the social farming model)*
- *What are the different business models which can underpin social farming practice?*

#### 4e. Challenges and barriers to the development of social farming amongst the farming community

In their systematic review of the drivers and barriers towards social farming, a study by Nazzaro et al. (2021)<sup>11</sup> described four key obstacles or barriers identified in studies to date:

- **‘Lack of information’** on social farming, also identified by a quarter of Focus Group members as the foremost barrier. This lack of information is not only amongst farmers/potential social farmers but also amongst consumers and other stakeholders.
- The second key obstacle is **‘mentalities changing limitations’**. They refer to factors amongst the wider farming community such as the lack of ethics concerning nature, prejudice in carrying out activities with people in disadvantaged situations, the underestimated value of the agricultural sector and the lack of education and information of farmers.
- The third barrier is **‘need for additional resources’** with farmers needing to weigh the investments and efforts (marketing, networking, training, etc.) necessary for its implementation against the relative uncertainty of income in many contexts.
- Linked to the above are the **‘administrative and bureaucratic limits’**, with the majority of social farming projects/initiatives reliant on public funds. There is very wide variation in the levels of *sustained* administrative, legal and other supports for social farming coming from state actors.

**For inspiration: Do you know that some projects are trying to tackle one of the key barriers - lack of information?**

The Erasmus+ projects [SoFarEDU](#) & [SoFarTEAM](#) are developing materials and resources for teaching and learning about social Farming.

They are also developing an online tool to show how social farming can work best for and with different target groups. Furthermore, they have listed in a map, the various universities in Europe where social farming is part of the academic offer today.

<sup>11</sup> Nazzaro, C.; Uliano, A.; Marotta, G. Drivers and Barriers towards Social Farming: A Systematic Review. Sustainability 2021, 13, 14008.

Focus group members identified a number of additional barriers, including: the incompatibility of social farming with some existing farm systems; the absence of support organisations to promote social farming and support social farmers; (perceived) lack of human resources to work effectively with vulnerable people or adequately support them; and the lack of pre-existing links between the farmer and local service providers.

**Discussion Points:**

- *How to overcome these challenges and barriers?*
- *What resources, solutions or good practices can help?*

## 5. Social Farming and Innovation in Health, Social Care, Education, Employment, Social Inclusion

### 5.1 Social farming as an innovative response to meeting people's needs, aspirations and goals

For participants, social farms provide a space and a place where a very wide range of needs, goals and aspirations can be met, but in a natural, community, non-clinical setting. The wide range of benefits to participants in terms of health, well-being and personal development which have been identified in studies highlight the value of **social farming as a social innovation** which can deliver for people in a more holistic and meaningful way than many other mainstream options. Specific benefits include:

- improvements in psychological health and reduced stress and anxiety levels from spending time in the fresh air, in nature, working with animals and plants;
- the development of new skills which may provide pathways to training or paid employment;
- opportunities for social inclusion and the development of new friendships and connections;
- and improvements in physical health and well-being.<sup>12 13</sup>

**From a service perspective**, social farming also delivers real benefits, including:

- providing an innovative option for individual clients/service-users;
- helping to challenge assumptions about capacity;
- creating new connections and processes of co-design with a range of actors<sup>14</sup>;

<sup>12</sup> Elings M. (2012). *Effects of care farms: Scientific research on the benefits of care farms for clients*. Wageningen UR, The Netherlands: Plant Research International.

<sup>13</sup> SoFI (2019). *Social Farming and Mental Health Services*. Drumshanbo, Social Farming Ireland.

<sup>14</sup> Di Iacovo, F. & Moruzzo, R. & Rossignoli, C.. (2017). Collaboration, knowledge and innovation toward a welfare society: the case of the Board of Social Farming in Valdera (Tuscany), Italy. *The Journal of Agricultural Education and Extension*. 23. 1-23.



- connecting services more strongly with ordinary life in their own communities;
- and providing culturally relevant options for some hard-to-reach groups.

## 5.2 Social farming as an innovation within service provision

From the perspective of policy and practice in health, social care, education, employment support and social inclusion across the EU, a number of **key economic, societal and political trends underpin the increased interest in and development of innovations such as social farming**. These include: the scarcity of public funds and social services in both urban and rural areas; the demand for social support in rural societies to tackle urgent problems; and the need to include the contributions of many diverse stakeholders to complement the work of the State. There is also an increasing necessity and drive to provide more innovative, sustainable and equitable tools to increase the capabilities of disadvantaged people, including using nature-based solutions such as social farming. Shifts in policy and in (some) practice in service delivery for people in disadvantaged/vulnerable situations underpin the increased focus on social farming and other more de-centralised, community-based approaches:

- A **shift from a medical to a social model of disability which aims to be more person-centred, inclusive and community based in its approach**. Amongst the key drivers of this have been the normalisation movement initiated by Wolfensberger in the 1970s and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The Wolfensberger movement asserted that people with disabilities have the right to, and have the opportunity of, living their lives as close to normal in community based, mainstream settings. By reducing inequalities for people with disabilities living in rural areas and enhancing social inclusion, innovations such as social farming can also contribute to implementing the equality agenda and meeting key EU strategies/goals. These include the [European Commission Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030](#) and the [European Care Strategy](#) which calls for the investments to improve the accessibility of care services in rural and remote areas.
- Within **mental health**, [broad consensus](#) on the need to **shift from the model of care based on the traditional large psychiatric institutions to one based on modern comprehensive community-based models of care**, with a focus on a recovery model and meaningful participation and inclusion in community life<sup>15</sup>.
- An increased recognition of the need for a **person-centred, individualised approach** within social inclusion work *generally* including youth work, work with people who are educationally disadvantaged, work with unemployed people, work with refugees, work with people with addiction issues, etc.

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<sup>15</sup> Community-based services – which would support interventions such as social farming – are associated with greater user satisfaction, better participation in social life, increased met needs and adherence to treatment (European Commission Access to Mental Health Care in Europe Consensus Paper, 2016).

For inspirations: Some projects focusing on service provision in social farms

[FARCURA - Fostering Inclusion through social farming](#)

[FARMelder - Social Farming for the Elderly](#)

[Green4C - Innovating and promoting nature-based solutions for health, well-being, and social inclusion](#)

### 5.3 Challenges and barriers to adoption of social farming amongst actors in health/social care/education/employment /social inclusion

There are significant differences across EU countries in the extent to which innovations such as social farming and other green-care initiatives have taken root. **However, no focus Group members described the level of support for and engagement with social farming from within these sectors as 'high' and only six as 'moderate'. The remaining fourteen members described it as 'low'.** Eight participants felt that 'lack of knowledge of social farming as a support' as the number 1 barrier while a further six felt that 'funding' was the predominant barrier. Three identified 'lack of interest in or support for innovative community-based or non-clinical approaches such as social farming' as the key barrier. Other individual barriers cited include: lack of government policy and flexibility in funding arrangements to support individual choice (i.e. lack of individualised budgets); the complexity and fluidity of the policy environment; the lack of specific frameworks or incentives for staff to place people on social farms; and lack of political knowledge or support.

## 6. Social farming and wider community connectivity

Social farming can have a strong role to play in developing linkages and relationships between agriculture/farming and the wider population – and particularly stakeholders within health/social care/education/employment/social inclusion – and between urban and rural areas. Drawing on the responses of Focus Group members to this question we can say that:

- Social farming **helps connect people** who come to the farm with the seasons, with **where food comes from, with the environment**, and with **the community** around the farm.
- It provides broad, accessible and grounded **education on how farming works**, what is involved in animal care and welfare and the complexity and challenges of farming and working with nature. This **increases societal appreciation** of and support for farmers.
- Events on social farms such as harvest celebrations, Open Days, cultural events, lambing days, etc. **open up the farm** and its facilities to wider numbers of people in the local community, neighbours, etc, and re-position **farms as informal community hubs**.



- It can encourage and support **short-food supply chains** and give people accessing the farm and the wider public easier access to local wholesome foods.
- Social farms in **peri-urban and urban areas can develop ongoing connections with urban communities** based on access to a large and diverse population base.

**Discussion Points:**

- *What are good practices in strengthening the links between farms and the wider community, and in particular, with stakeholders in health/social care/education/employment/social inclusion?*
- *What are the inspiring examples and good practices in connecting urban and rural people via social farming?*

## 7. Next Steps

Drawing on the literature and from the inputs of Focus Group members, this Starting Paper provides a broad framework and jumping off point for the first Focus Group meeting where the key themes will be explored and debated further. Some foundational topics, such as the definition of innovation in this context and the place of social farming within EU policy are described in some detail and will not require detailed discussion in the Focus Group meetings. Instead, we will focus on areas which are absolutely core to the overall theme of Social Farming and Innovations and where the richest source of knowledge will lie in the inputs and interactions of the 20 experts gathered from across Europe. In the first Focus Group meeting, we will focus on addressing the Discussion Points highlighted in this document and on arriving at topics for Mini Papers which will be developed based on needs, gaps, interests, etc.



## 8. Annex 1: EU funded/co-funded projects on social farming

The following table compiles a list of some EU funded or co-funded projects focused on, or highly relevant to, social farming for the period 2012-2022. This list will be further enlarged with the inputs of the Focus Group members.

| Title of the project                                                                                                                                      | Country  | Type                   |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|------------------------|
| <a href="#">Added value of social farming for agricultural production</a>                                                                                 | Germany  | Operational Group      |
| <a href="#">Organic vegetables: Enabling regional cultivation, creating jobs for people with disabilities, shaping processing, developing sales.</a>      | Germany  | Operational Group      |
| <a href="#">Social farming as an instrument for the diversification of agricultural enterprises in Bavaria - Development of innovative model projects</a> | Germany  | Operational Group      |
| <a href="#">Comeragh Uplands and Communities EIP Project</a>                                                                                              | Ireland  | Operational Group      |
| <a href="#">BIOSOCIAL Small farm organic vegetable production as integrated model between production and local social impact</a>                          | Italy    | Operational Group      |
| <a href="#">Montessori thought as innovation in social agriculture in the Marche Region</a>                                                               | Italy    | Operational Group      |
| <a href="#">MULTINET - social and organizational innovation for developing multifunctionality in farms: models, co-production, inclusion</a>              | Italy    | Operational Group      |
| <a href="#">SoCial Farming - Innovative Agriculture</a>                                                                                                   | Multiple | INTERREG               |
| <a href="#">SoFAB - Social Farming Across Borders</a>                                                                                                     | Multiple | INTERREG               |
| <a href="#">Social Innovation in Marginalised Rural Areas (SIMRA)</a>                                                                                     | Multiple | H2020 project          |
| <a href="#">NEWBIE New Entrant Network: Business models for Innovation, entrepreneurship and resilience in European agriculture (2 of 2)</a>              | Multiple | H2020 Thematic Network |
| <a href="#">RURALIZATION - The opening of rural areas to renew rural generations, jobs and farms</a>                                                      | Multiple | H2020 project          |
| <a href="#">FARCURA - Fostering Inclusion through social farming)</a>                                                                                     | Multiple | Erasmus+               |
| <a href="#">FARMelder - Social Farming for the Elderly</a>                                                                                                | Multiple | Erasmus+               |
| <a href="#">SoEngage/SoEngage Plus Engaging Farmers in Social Farming</a>                                                                                 | Multiple | Erasmus+               |
| <a href="#">SocialFARMS - Social Farm Activities for Rural Management Services</a>                                                                        | Multiple | Erasmus+               |
| <a href="#">SoFarEDU &amp; SoFarTEAM – Social Farming in Higher Education</a>                                                                             | Multiple | Erasmus+               |
| <a href="#">Green4C - Innovating and promoting nature-based solutions for health, well-being, and social inclusion</a>                                    | Multiple | Erasmus+               |