

MANAGEMENT OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF NON-AGRICULTURAL SMALL FARM BUSINESSES TOWARDS CARE FARMS

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Purpose: The aim of the study is to investigate Polish farmers' interest in running a care farm, which could allow them to obtain additional funding. The main purpose of the study was to diagnose the knowledge and ideas of farmers about care farms.

Design/methodology/approach: The analysis used secondary data from the Central Statistical Office and reports. A CATI survey was also conducted on a group of 500 farmers.

Findings: Few respondents (12.8%) were interested in running a care farm, and only 30% of those who declared a willingness to expand their core business have rooms that they could allocate for the additional services. Over half of the respondents were inclined to allocate up to 20,000 PLN towards adjusting their facilities to the needs of elderly visitors. These farmers believed that seniors should be offered a range of activities, from walks to light farm labour. In addition, the respondents recognised the need to provide the elderly with medical consultations and rehabilitation services.

Research limitations/implications: A small percentage of respondents interested in running a care farm may lack the knowledge about the new business. It is recommended to conduct research in a deliberately selected group of farmers – participants of workshops on care farms.

Social implications: Economic activation through managing the non-agricultural functions of rural areas is a contemporary challenge for rural and agricultural development.

Originality/value: This article presents research on social innovation in rural areas related to the development of standards of operation and management of the care farm model.

Keywords: management of a social business, social economy, care farms.

Category of the paper: research paper.

1. Introduction

Social enterprises are becoming an increasingly significant entity. The challenges of sustainable development relate to three areas: economic, ecological and social. Thus, social enterprises have both economic and social goals. Managing such an organisation entails an obligation to meet standards in accordance with the principles of socially responsible business.

Social enterprises are part of the social economy trend, which, despite its increasing popularity, is not clearly defined. The social economy is sometimes referred to as the fourth sector and is understood as a network of organisations and businesses which, under appropriate legal regulations, aim to support people at risk of social exclusion (Dacin et al., 2010; Pearce, 2003; Wronka-Pośpiech, 2017). According to Narski, social economy includes the principles and rules of distributing part of the national revenue that is allocated to the population (Narski, 2001). According to the Ministry of Family, Labour, and Social Policy, social economy is “the sphere of civic activity, which, through economic and public benefit activities, serves the professional and social integration of people at risk of social marginalisation, the creation of jobs and the provision of social services of general interest (for public benefit) and local development” (www.gov.pl/web/rodzina/czych-jest-ekonomia-spoleczna-i-solidarna). In turn, according to Jerzy Hausner, social economy is responsible for organising alternative solutions, but it is not a systemic alternative. One side of social economy is the practical method of solving social problems on a local scale, understood as the economy of neighbourhood and solidarity and local services of public benefit; it is also considered to be the mechanism responsible for introducing deeper system-wide changes related to corporate social responsibility and public/social/private partnership (Hausner, 2008).

The social economy is directly connected with “social economy entities”, which encompass social cooperatives and non-governmental organisations registered as businesses, “social businesses”. Social Economy Support Centres are responsible for creating conditions conducive to the efficient operation of these entities. This support takes the form of training, activities coordination, counselling, non-returnable subsidies used in the process of creating new jobs, bridging financing, etc. (http://ksow.pl/uploads/tx_library/files/uslugi_opiekuncze.pdf).

Piotr Sałustowicz (2006) distinguishes five functions of the social economy:

1. From the perspective of employment policy and the labour market, it is the creation of new jobs for socially marginalised people, as well as, for example, vocational training services.
2. From the social policy perspective, it is social services for individuals and local communities.
3. From the perspective of social integration, it serves to multiply social capital.

4. From the perspective of the democratisation process, it activates individuals in the process of political decision-making.
5. From the perspective of social change, it is the emergence of, for example, an alternative economic and social system.

One of the areas of social economy is social farming, which is defined by the European Economic and Social Committee as an innovative approach combining two concepts at the local level: multifunctional agriculture and social services/healthcare. Multifunctional agriculture is tied to the activity of family farms which supply non-market goods in the form of, e.g., maintaining the social and economic viability of rural areas, landscapes and natural values (Czudec, 2009; Zegar, 2011; Sikorska, 2013). Multifunctional farms are elements of the concept of sustainable development, and their growing number guarantees the implementation of new functions of rural areas (Rizov, 2006; Czudec, 2009). In the opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee, social farming contributes to the improvement of well-being and the social integration of people with special needs (EESC, 2012). Similar aspects are emphasised by the definition formulated by the Agricultural Advisory Centre in Brwinów, the Kraków Branch. According to this institution, “social farming relies on its multifunctionality, defined as the ability to satisfy not only production and market needs on a farm, but also non-agricultural needs: environmental, cultural, economic and social” (Stępnik & Król, 2017). An important element in a care farm is the use of farm resources for carrying out therapeutic, care and social activities. Care farms combine daytime or long-term care with elements of agricultural production and breeding. They belong to a broader category of “green care”, which includes therapeutic agriculture and animal therapy (Matysiak, 2018).

In the process of developing multifunctional agriculture and rural areas, non-agricultural businesses run by farmers and their family members are of particular importance. They create non-agricultural jobs and sources of income in rural areas, thus improving the material situation and living conditions of the agricultural population, and they help to improve the exploitation of resources found on agricultural farms and households. Non-agricultural businesses of the agricultural population trigger many beneficial social, economic and agrarian processes that have so far shown symptoms of stagnation.

The development of non-agricultural business among the agricultural population depends primarily on the following factors: the quality of the workforce, the quality of resources and economic production, the equipment and technology of the agricultural holding, the level of development of the local agriculture and farms – especially the institutional background, the degree of concentration of the population and their wealth, the situation on the labour market, infrastructure, etc. The development of non-agricultural business in rural areas, including the businesses of farmers and their family members, is also largely determined by macroeconomic conditions (inflation rate, economic growth rate, loan availability and interest, taxation and state and European Union policy) (Pietrzyk, 2006; Duczkowska-Małysz, 2009). Launching a non-agricultural business is of particular importance in the case of small farms,

which most often have an area of up to 20 ha (Floriańczyk et al., 2016). In their case, agricultural activity often did not guarantee an income of at least the average wage (Chmielewska, 2018).

In the period 2005–2016, agricultural income fell in 2016 compared to 2005. Small farms supplemented agricultural income primarily with income from contract labour and pensions and disability benefits, as evidenced in the income structure by the highest percentage of households with income from contract labour (46.8% in 2016) and social benefits (33%) (Figure 1).

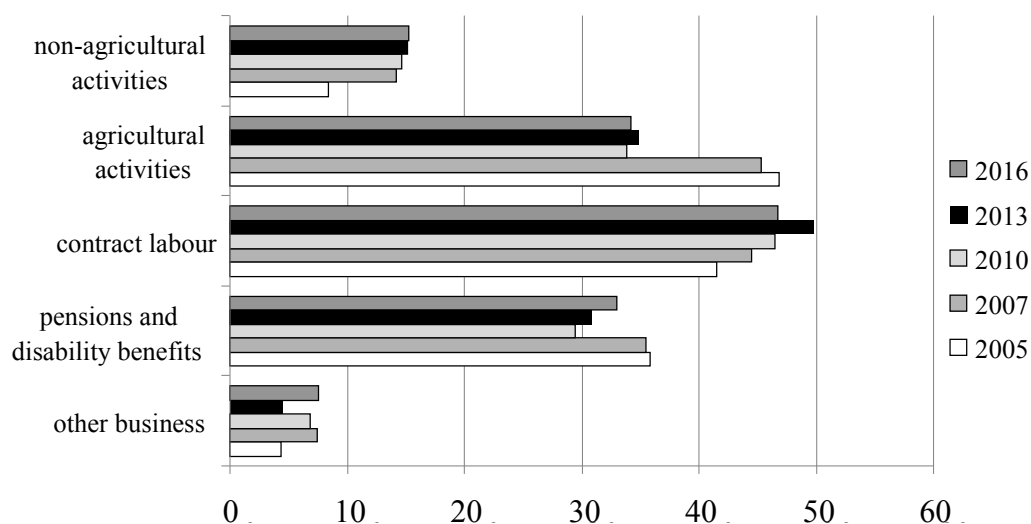


Figure 1. Sources of income for households, 2005-2016. Source: Based on stat.gov.pl (accessed 28 February 2020).

Divided by voivodships, households in which over 50% of total income came from non-agricultural activities are most frequently found in Mazowieckie, Lubelskie, Małopolskie and Łódzkie (Figure 2).

Compared to 2010, the percentage of farms engaged in non-agricultural activities increased in 10 voivodships. The greatest changes in this period occurred in Mazowieckie (by 2.5%) and Łódzkie (2.1%).

Among the various types of non-agricultural business undertaken by farmers, we selected several of the most common categories. These include agritourism, handicrafts, processing agricultural products, as well as those providing health, social and educational services. In the farms engaged in commercial activity other than agriculture, the most numerous group in 2016 was farms offering agritourism services (26%), followed by contract work; 6.6% of owners were involved in agricultural product processing. Other business types did not exceed 3%. Forestry, aquaculture and health, social and educational services can also be mentioned in this group (Figure 3). The last category includes care farms that may be a response to the needs of farmers and, at the same time, of people with disabilities, the elderly, people with dementia and other groups at risk of social exclusion. Most often they operate on the basis of daily (sometimes round-the-clock) care/stay/therapy centres or inclusive activities. Farms with equipment, duties, animals and natural surroundings can become a place of rest, therapy and

socialisation. Despite the fact that running such a farm is certainly a big challenge, there is a group of agricultural holdings interested in expanding their agricultural activity to include a care farm.

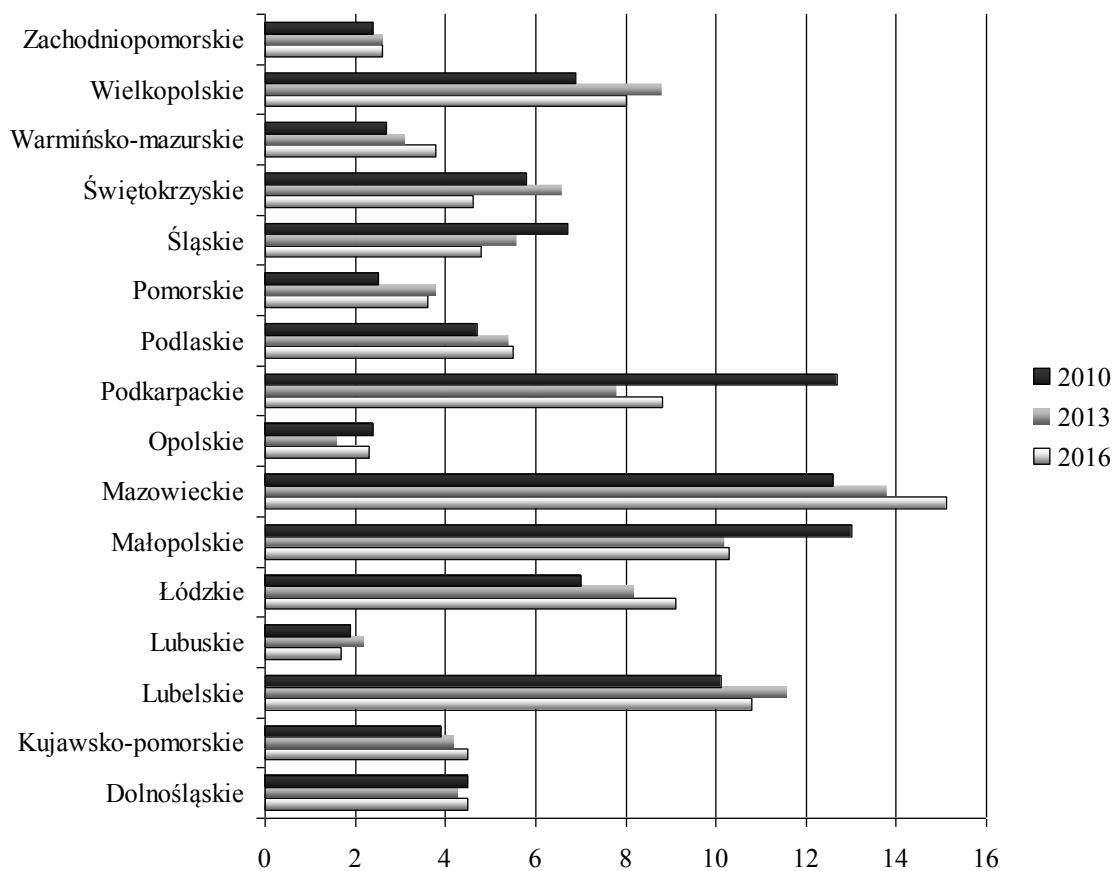


Figure 2. Percentage of farms with non-agricultural income, 2010-2016. Source: Based on stat.gov.pl (accessed 28 February 2020).

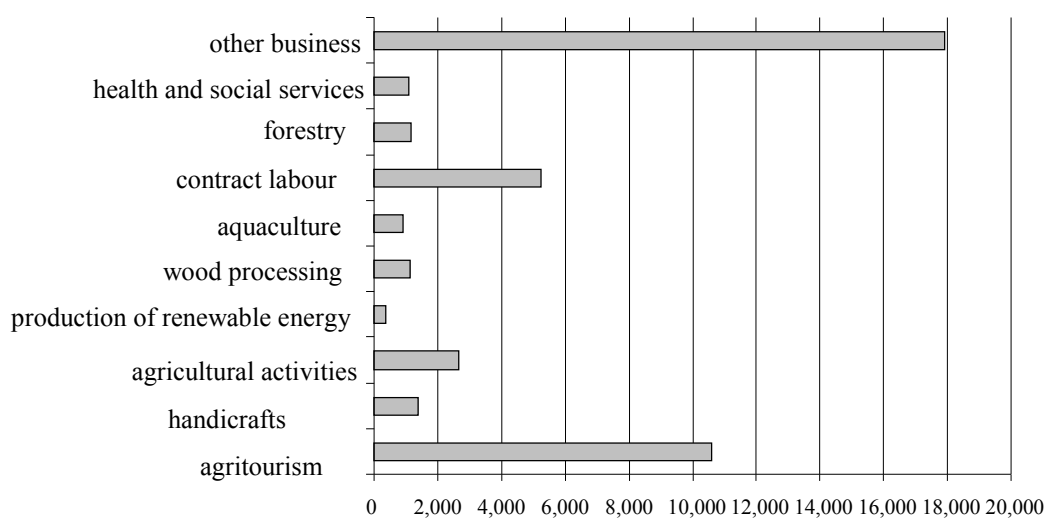


Figure 3. Farms with business income other than agriculture. Source: Based on stat.gov.pl (accessed 28 February 2020). Central Statistical Office Characteristics of Agricultural Holdings 2016, (2017), Central Statistical Office, Warsaw (p. 262).

Farmers who declared a willingness to undertake such activities were selected from a group of 500 farm owners, among whom surveys were carried out.

2. Material and methods

The objective of the study was to identify the potential for rural households in providing social and care services for the elderly. This survey was conducted among 500 farm owners from all over Poland using the CATI interview technique, from 8 May 2019 to 3 June 2019, as part of an ongoing research project¹. The main purpose of the study was to diagnose farmers' knowledge and conceptions about care farms and the readiness to use the services they offer or to run such a business as complementary to the economic activity of the farm.

The study assessed the readiness of farmers to run rural care farms. We analysed 62 farms which expressed a desire to open a care farm.

Recognising the potential of their farms to provide care services for people with limitations of independence resulting from age or health is viewed as a sign of some farmers' openness to expanding the profile of their economic activity. The study presents the profile features of this category of people and of their households, as well as their expectations in terms of forms of assistance and benefits from taking up possible care and stay services – and even rehabilitation services – for the potential beneficiaries, i.e. people of advanced age.

The respondents' willingness to open a care farm was verified through a questionnaire.

There are several arguments for promoting the concept of care farms. For one thing, this model takes into account the demographic trends observed in Poland: on the one hand, the increased life expectancy of Polish residents, and on the other hand, the aging of the population.

In 2016, over 15.2 million people lived in rural Poland, of which over 2.1 million were individuals over 65 years of age. It is expected that by 2035, this figure will increase to 3.4 million, which is a rise of almost 60%. Eurostat data shows that the proportion of people over 80 years old living in the countryside will increase from 5% in 2016 to 12% in 2030. The presented demographic forecasts confirm that the design and implementation of a comprehensive policy targeted at the needs of older people in rural areas should be a priority (Chmielewski et al., 2017).

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3. Social profile of farm owners who declared an interest in running care services

At the beginning of the survey, we characterised the farm owners and the farms themselves. This profiling was based on answers to questions about metric data. The form contained questions about the respondent's gender, age and education and the function they perform on the farm. In addition, the respondent was asked to specify the size of their farm, the number of people in the family running a joint agricultural holding, their place of residence (township) and place of residence by voivodship. The construction of the survey form itemising the characteristics of the surveyed farms enabled us to analyse them against the adopted criteria.

The remaining survey questions were substantive and also allowed us to identify the challenges that the farmers face when planning to set up a care farm. The questions concerned many aspects of the business's operation: from which area it would be easiest for the farm to attract customers, how much financial resources the owner could invest in starting a care farm, how many family members could participate in running a care farm, whether the respondent would be interested in managing such a business and whether there are people in the immediate vicinity who could be offered a job at a care farm. The respondents were also asked whether the owner has rooms that can be adapted for the purposes of a care farm. Other questions inquired about additional elements useful in running a care farm, as well as what services the farm could offer to seniors.

Out of the 500 respondents, 62 expressed an interest in running a care home (by marking the answer "yes/rather yes") in the survey.

The largest number of people interested in running a care farm was reported in Mazowieckie ($n = 12$), and the smallest number was in Dolnośląskie, Opolskie, Pomorskie, Świętokrzyskie and Zachodniopomorskie ($n = 1$). The largest number of undecided people was noted in the Mazowieckie voivodship ($n = 8$). The voivodships of Mazowieckie, Małopolskie and Wielkopolskie had the largest percentage of people who were not interested in managing a care farm (Figure 4).

The largest group by age were people in the 41–50 age group, who constituted 25.81% of the total number interested in running a care farm. The next group were respondents aged 31–40 (24.19%). Subsequently, in descending order, were people over 60 years of age (22.58% of respondents), 51–60 years of age ($n = 13$; 20.97%) and 18–30 years of age (6.45%).

The division of the 62 people according to their function on the farm produced the following results: the largest group, as many as 36 people (58.06%), were the owners of a farm. The next group ($n = 19$; 30.65%) were co-owners of farms. The last, smallest group were family members ($n = 7$; 11.29%).

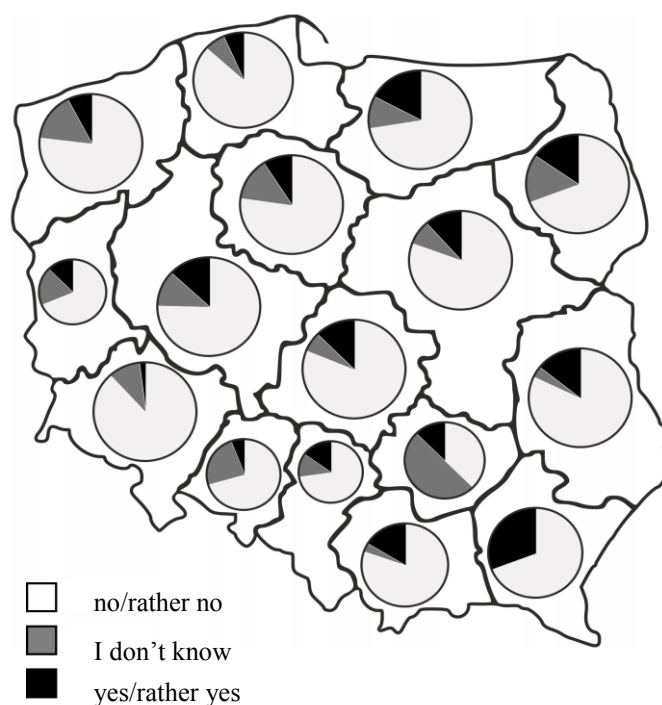


Figure 4. Percentage of people interested, undecided and uninterested in running a care farm.

Another division of the respondents was done with respect to their education. In the group of 62 people who were interested in running a care farm, the most numerous group of respondents were people with a secondary education ($n = 27$; 43.55%). The next largest group consisted of respondents with higher education ($n = 18$; 29.03%), followed by people with vocational education ($n = 13$; 20.97%). The two smallest groups of respondents divided according to education turned out to be individuals with post-secondary-school education ($n = 3$; 4.84%) and one person with a primary-school education (1.61%).

The respondents who expressed a willingness to run a care farm also described the size of their farm. The largest group of respondents was made up of owners of farms of 50 ha and above ($n = 18$; 29.03%). Another group of respondents were people with farms 20-49.99 ha in size ($n = 13$; 20.97%). The figures were similar for farms with a size of 10-19.99 ha and less than 5 ha. Three people (4.84%) owned farms 5-9.99 ha in size. Two people (3.23%) declined to provide information on the size of their farms.

Respondents interested in managing a care farm also indicated their main sources of income in the survey. As many as 33 people (53.23%) indicated only their own farm as their main source of income. The answer “my own farm and additional work” was selected by 15 people (24.19%). There were seven retirees and disability beneficiaries (11.29%). Work outside the farm as the main source of income was indicated by six respondents (9.68%). One person (1.61%) turned out to be unemployed.

4. Interest in setting up a care farm in the respondents' opinion

Few respondents were interested in starting up a care farm. Generally, the figures show that only 12.4% of the respondents expressed an interest in establishing a care farm, which does not mean being ready to run one. Only 6.8% of respondents indicated that they would establish a care home as a business to generate an additional source of income. In turn, the cumulative percentage of “no” answers (“rather not/no”) was as high as 76.2%, while the sum without any declaration was 11.4%.

The distribution of positive answers on running a care farm according to voivodships is presented in Figure 5.

Among the people interested in expanding their business to include a care farm, most farm owners came from the Mazowieckie, Małopolskie and Wielkopolskie voivodships. In some voivodships – Dolnośląskie, Kujawsko-Pomorskie, Lubuskie and Zachodniopomorskie – none of the respondents declared a willingness to run a care farm; they only expressed a general interest in such an initiative (Figure 5).

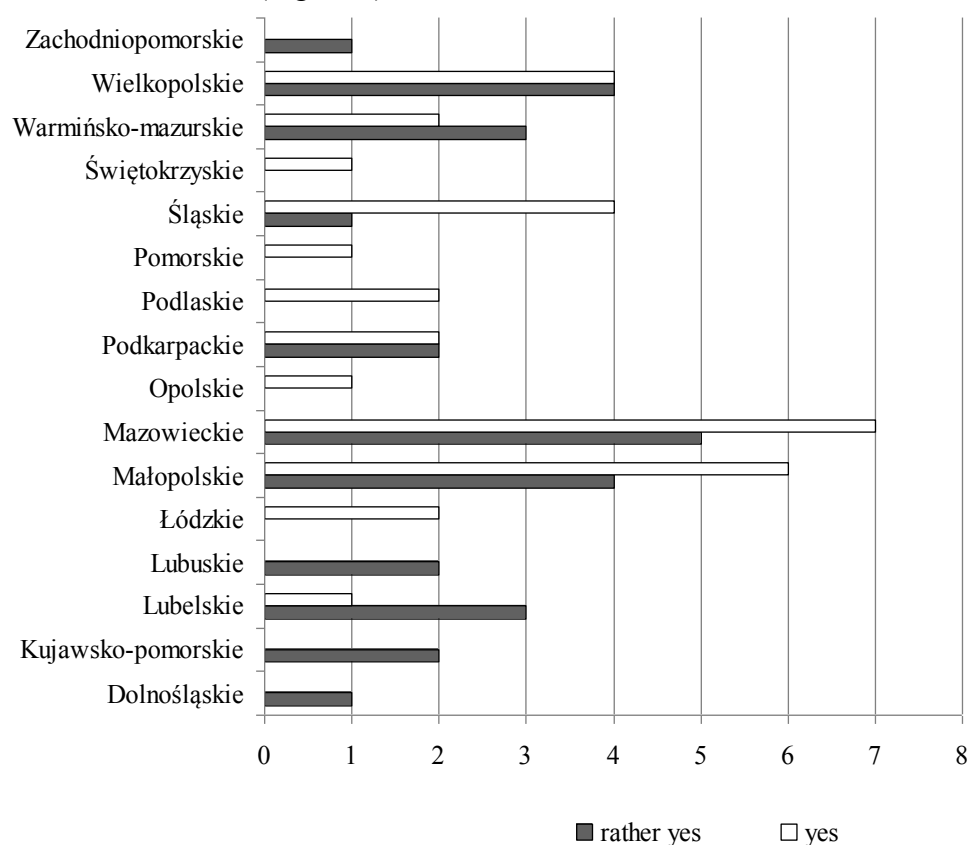


Figure 5. Distribution of people interested in managing a care farm.

When asked about the area from which it will be easiest for a care farm to attract potential customers, most people – as many as 208 (41.6%) – named their own village, but also the surrounding towns. Half that number of people (21.4%) thought potential customers would

come from other localities, while 79 respondents (15.8%) indicated only their own town or parish.

The largest group of farm owners interested in running a non-agricultural business (50%) was willing to allocate up to 20,000 PLN towards introducing the changes necessary to transform their farm into a care farm. The owners of farms with an area of 50 ha and over were prepared to commit the most financial resources. An equally large group of people, who owned farms with an area of 5 to 50 ha, thought they could pledge up to 20,000 PLN for necessary modifications. Among the owners of farms with an area of up to 5 ha, the majority stated that they would not invest any funds in making changes to the farm (Figure 6).

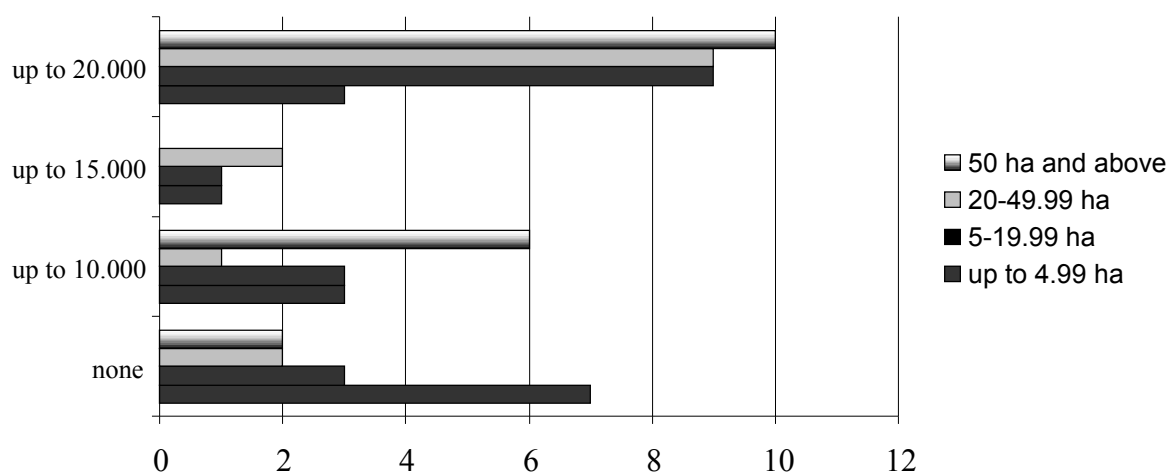


Figure 6. Amount of funds intended to be used to transform an agricultural farm into a care farm, as declared by interested individuals.

In some cases, expanding the business may require a farmer to hire additional employees to service their residents. Therefore, we included a question in the survey about people who could be offered work at such a care farm. The largest number of respondents (68%) answered that there are people in the immediate vicinity who can be offered such a job. A further 17.74% of the respondents answered negatively, while 14.52% did not give either a positive or a negative answer to this question.

Most people interested in running a caring farm believed that visitors staying on such a farm should be offered a wide range of activities of various types, mainly in the form of walks or preparing meals together. Respondents underlined the importance of working together, be it in the garden or in the field. They believed that in the case of the elderly, consultations on their health and improvement of the physical condition were also necessary (Figure 7).

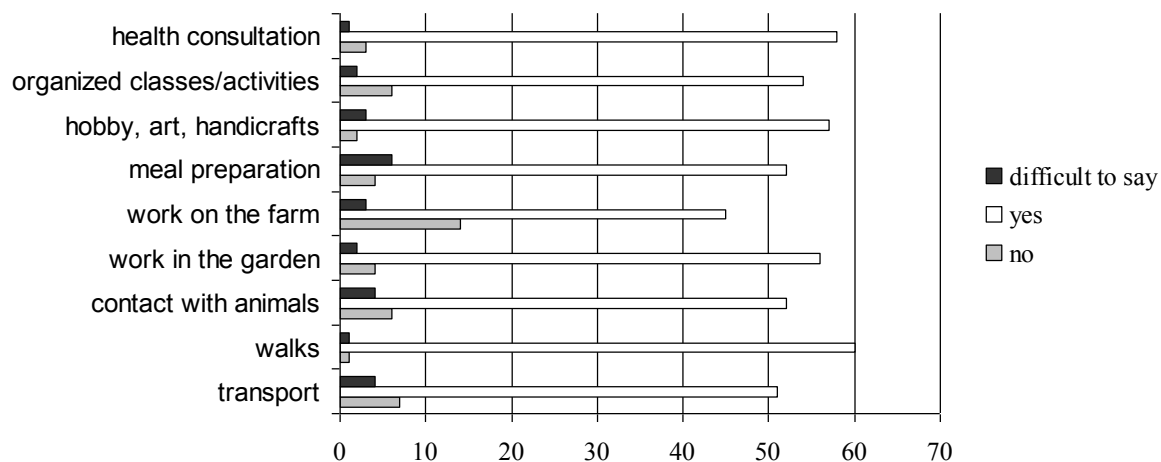


Figure 7. Main forms of activity/assistance which care farms should offer, according to those interested.

Another important factor that is a condition for running a care farm is having rooms that can be adapted to provide individual services. Rooms are immediately ready to be used for care home purposes at 32.26% of the respondents' facilities, while 37.1% of the respondents have an outbuilding that can be adapted for care home services. Other respondents would have to build or add such rooms.

Another research problem was identifying facilities which may be useful for a care farm. A garden is the most frequent answer, chosen by up to 81% of respondents. Next was convenient access to the property (72.58%), possession of animals on the farm (66.13%), provision of parking spaces (61.29%) and a chicken coop (52.23%). Additionally, 35.48% of the respondents marked a conservatory, 29% indicated a bus which can transport seniors, and 6.45% indicated other, unspecified facilities.

The last issue analysed by the survey concerned services that can be offered by a care farm. Three options were proposed in the survey: basic, extended and full package. Most owners interested in running a care home (83%) can offer a basic package, which includes time management, one meal a day, help in washing/bathing and medication administration. The extended package, which was indicated by 64.52% of the respondents, includes the basic package, as well as full board and transport. The "full package" was selected by 38.71% of the respondents. It consists of the basic package and extended package and services, rehabilitation, insulin delivery, full washing/bathing, help in receiving meals, etc. The remaining group of respondents (22.58%) was not able to offer any additional services within a care farm.

5. Conclusion

In all voivodships, there is a group of farms where the income from non-agricultural business constitutes over 50% of the total farm income. The largest number of such farms is

found in the Pomorskie, Lubuskie and Śląskie voivodships, where farms with income from non-agricultural activity constitute about 10% of all farms. Most often, additional income is obtained from agritourism, processing of agricultural products and contract work. Some farms deal with aquaculture and obtaining energy from renewable sources.

In the future, care farms may contribute to improving the quality of life in the countryside, as well as to levelling inequalities in access to social services, which are particularly felt by the inhabitants of smaller towns. The principal idea behind offering day care for dependent people in a rural environment is to support the weakest members of local communities who, due to their advanced age and poor health, require supervision and stimulation, which can secure their psychological and social well-being and quality of life. The survey study has shown that interest in running a care home is low. Only 12.8% of the respondents expressed an interest in expanding their business. These farms are located in the following voivodships: Mazowieckie, Małopolskie and Wielkopolskie. Most farms declaring a willingness to invest funds in the transformation of a farm into a care farm named an amount of 20,000 PLN and were farms over 50 ha. In turn, the owners of small farms (up to 5 ha) did not intend to invest any financial resources. In the respondents' opinion, it is important to offer a wide range of activities to residents. They mainly mentioned walks and working together in the garden and on the farm. For the customers of a care home, it may also be important that medical consultations and rehabilitation sessions are provided. A large group of farms have a room that can be used to carry out additional activities. Care farms can be an alternative to other types of business, and in addition, they can offer new jobs for socially marginalised people in areas where unemployment is usually high. Furthermore, the social services offered will usually be intended for people living in small towns, where access to this type of service is limited.

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