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## **FUNCTIONING OF CARE FARMS IN POLAND ON THE EXAMPLE OF A SELECTED CASE STUDY**

Key words: local development, care farms, offer, rural areas, Poland

**ABSTRACT.** The aim of the article is to present the most important issues and key information regarding the concept of foster farms in shaping local development. The article uses the method of analysis of secondary materials, including the literature on the subject – Systematic Literature Review (SLR). Theoretical and practical conditions, methods and hitherto effects of implementing the concept of care farms were presented. An example of a caring farm with regard to the services provided was presented. The role and significance of this type of services are presented, which are undoubtedly an attractive product (service) that can be used by seniors. The establishment of foster farms in rural Poland is an innovative idea that is implemented in the context of social agriculture. In the future, social farming activities (social farming) can contribute to the sustainable development of rural areas. This will enable an increasingly sustainable development of rural areas by reducing poverty and increasing farm incomes. Such activities can stabilize social and economic life in rural areas.

### **INTRODUCTION**

The idea of establishing care farms dates back to the second half of the 1900s. A care farm is an interesting solution which consists in combining farming or agritourism activities with taking care of those in need for support, mainly including the elderly [Hassink 2009]. It contributes to improving the living conditions for rural seniors, helps them remain physically fit and makes their lives more comfortable [Lanfranchi et al. 2015]. Also, care farms are a perfect way to empower the elderly, especially (but not only) in rural areas, by promoting diverse forms of activity in different spheres of public life they may engage in [Chmielewska 2018a]. Often, they are viewed as providers of care or social integration services. Care farms enjoyed great interest in countries such as France, the Netherlands,

Italy, Norway, Belgium, Austria, Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States. It also seems that they may provide a development opportunity for rural areas in Poland [Roman 2018]. First, they enhance the offer of agricultural holdings and agritourism farms. Second, offering a contact with nature combined with the cultural resources of a rural environment is the starting point for creating high-quality services which will truly affect the users' quality of living. Social farming can thus become an axis of multifunctional rural development, since health, education and therapy are its basic products (in addition to marketable goods).

### LITERATURE REVIEW ON SOCIAL FARMING

In literatures around the world, researchers very often address rural development, with particular focus on regional aspects [Pawlak, Poczta 2010, Wilkin 2010, Rosner 2012, Senni 2013, Hassink et al. 2014, Leck et al. 2014, Czyżewski, Staniszewski 2018, Sadowski, Wojcieszak 2019, Roman et al. 2021]. Local development is not clearly defined in the literature [Wilkin 2011, Rosner 2012, Stanny 2013], because a number of definitions exist which demonstrate both common and distinct aspects. However, as emphasized by many researchers, local development means an appropriate, rational use of natural resources in a way that enables their self-renewal and growth in agricultural output attained through improvements in input productivity [Halfacree 2009, Kołodziejczak 2010, Stanny 2011, Wilkin 2011, Czyżewski, Staniszewski 2018]. In view of the above, it can be concluded that local development is also a path of economic development together with the associated social development, especially in a rural context. It allows to maintain the natural environment in the right condition and could even enable environmental recovery by eliminating or considerably reducing the adverse (often irreversible) phenomena taking place within it.

Another major mission is to build appropriate social relationships which could result in joint investments both in the physical sense and in terms of driving human interrelations (with a social dimension). Currently, the social and political debate in many developed and developing countries and in international social and political organizations is focalized on indicating the role and importance of local development because it often involves the multi-functionality of rural areas [Wójcik 2012, Zegar 2012, Tittonell 2014], including non-agricultural functions [Rizov 2005]. As noted by a wide group of experts in international literatures, rural areas become less and less involved in farming; that process is reflected in different aspects of rural living [Wilkin 2010, Czarnecki 2011, Halamska 2011, Stanny 2011, Garnet 2013, Karwat-Woźniak 2013, Scuderi et al. 2014, Turpeková et al. 2015, Król, Stępnik 2018, Chmielewska 2018b]. More and more often, local development is embedded in a social context [Karwat-Woźniak 2013]. Examples of such projects include the development of initiatives between the rural population, entrepreneurs and farmers.

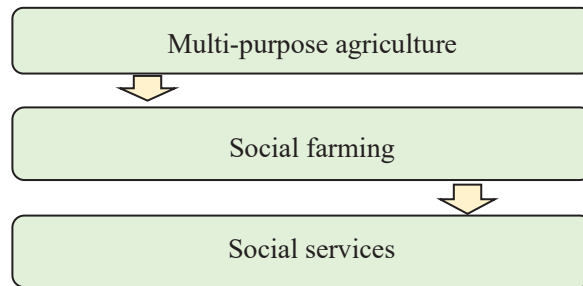


Figure 1. Position of social farming

Source: [Król 2017, p. 5]

The strategic documents of the European Union attribute new functions to agriculture, including in particular (in addition to its traditional manufacturing function) environmental protection and the social function (Figure 1) [Lanfranchi et al. 2014].

In the global literature, social farming is not a new concept, and is backed up by a long tradition. In Europe, the beginnings of social farming are estimated to date back to the second half of the 1800s. At that time, farms and institutions were established in rural and remote areas to take care of intellectually disabled people [Di Iacovo 2014]. Each country had a different reason to develop social farming. In Italy, it was mostly driven by the mass closure of psychiatric hospitals; in Germany, by the closure of institutions in charge of supporting marginalized people; in the Netherlands, by religious movements and communities [Wojcieszak-Zbierska 2021]. Based on an analysis of international literatures, the development of social farming can be divided into four periods, each being different in terms of social awareness, sectoral interests etc.

In the first stage, only a few examples of social farming and voluntary action based on strong motivation can be cited. The first models of care farms were created at that time. That pioneering stage was experienced in Austria, Finland and Sweden [Chmielewski et al. 2017]. The second stage was related to multipurpose farming, with a growing role of social farming which started to be financed with agriculture and rural development funds; examples include the UK and Italy [Subocz 2019]. The third stage mostly consisted in recognizing agriculture as being part of the social assistance system [Bombach et al. 2015] and was witnessed in countries such as Germany and Ireland. The last stage is based on the assumption that social farming must be viewed as an integration model [Dessein, Bock 2010] and forms part of the agricultural sector and the social assistance system. The Netherlands and France are examples of countries where the integration model is already in place [Subocz 2019].

While a similar range of social farming measures are taken by European countries, many differences exist between them due to such aspects as historical reasons, the approach adopted by the government administration, and business goals pursued at farm level. According to the literature, social farming has attained the highest development level in the Netherlands [Bombach et al. 2015]. The Dutch social farming model is an example of good practices; indeed, of all the European countries, the Netherlands have the fastest-growing population of farms offering social services.

The literature on the subject fails to provide a single definition of social farming. This is due to its very nature: a multidimensional phenomenon spanning over a broad range of different practices in countries around the world. Francesco Di Iacovo [2014] indicated that social farming means rural development which takes social and environmental aspects into consideration as per the principles of sustainable development. Therefore, it is important to put the social farming concept in economic practice as a response to the disadvantageous demographic situation in Europe. In turn, based on the analysis of the Opinion delivered by the European Economic and Social Committee, social farming can be viewed as “an innovative activity that combines two concepts. The first one is about multipurpose agriculture whereas the second one refers to social services in the area of healthcare at local and national level” [EU 2013]. Social farming is also referred to as “farming for health,” “care farming,” “green care” or “green therapies” [EU 2013]. These terms refer to social reintegration or care activities which can contribute to improving the health status and to social inclusion of disadvantaged people [Wojcieszak-Zbierska 2021]. As Francesco Di Iacovo et al. [2014] and emphasize, social farming is an innovative approach which relies on vegetable and animal resources to promote (or generate) therapy, rehabilitation, social integration, education and social services in rural areas. However, this is strictly related to agricultural activities where (small) groups of people can stay and work together with native farmers [Di Iacovo et al. 2014]. Hence, social farming spans over all rural farms, agritourism farms, and agricultural holdings whose basic activity consists in integrating physically, mentally or emotionally disabled people [Roman, Wojcieszak 2018] and caring for the elderly, children and youth. In the relevant literature, many authors [Elings, Hassink 2006, Dessein, Bock 2010, Di Iacovo 2014, FAO 2014, Scuderi et al. 2014] indicate that the delivery of social farming services brings numerous benefits to local operators, stakeholders, farm owners and the local community.

## THE ESSENCE OF CARE FARMS IN POLAND

It seems that care farms provide a development opportunity for rural areas in Europe, and especially for Poland. In Poland, social farming is at an initial stage [EU 2013, Roman, Wojcieszak 2018, Subocz 2019] because of the prolonged lack of an appropriate public policy and of financial support for such activities in rural areas. Despite the creation of the GROWID<sup>1</sup> initiative, administrative authorities continue to have many doubts as to the way care farms should function. Agnieszka Wojcieszak and Monika Wojcieszak [2018] emphasized that most initiatives taken in Poland are bottom-up measures implemented as a private activity of farmers and financed with private funds available under NGO schemes. However, it needs to be emphasized that the development of social farming has a number of positive aspects which affect the guest, the farmer and the local community (Table 1).

In recent years, Poland has witnessed a growing number of social farming initiatives. Social farming activities span over a large number of target groups based both in rural and urban areas (the elderly, youth, migrants, the disabled, convicts etc.).

Table 1. Benefits from the development of social farming in Poland

| Benefits                          |   |  |
|-----------------------------------|---|--|
| for the guest                     | for the farmer                              | for the local community                                |
| –improved wellbeing               | –new revenue streams or increase in revenue | –increased availability of social/ healthcare services |
| –becoming more active and engaged | –self-fulfillment                           | –local development                                     |
| –delivery of new services         | –expansion/diversification of activity      | –social activation                                     |
|                                   | –promoting a new image of agriculture       | –making rural areas more attractive                    |
|                                   |   | –fighting against social exclusion                     |

Source: own elaboration based on [Król 2019]

<sup>1</sup> GROWID is a project based on the finding that social farms rely on innovative solutions. The use of unique locations, such as rural areas and farms, is an important part of the underlying concept. The project assumes that when providing accommodation to people from outside, the farmers have a valuable offering which includes:

- the ability to be close to nature,
- contact with animals,
- the ability to perform some nice and easy work,
- entering into relationships with other people.

Farms could become the basis for a network of friendly locations where the elderly, ill, disabled and lonely can find support. “Establishing a network of care farms will allow to meet the challenges faced by Polish rural areas, which are related to population ageing, the need for improving the quality of rural living, and looking for additional revenue streams for farm owners. The purpose of GROWID is to develop tools that will make the above vision a reality in Poland” [<https://growid.pl/idea/>, access: 10.03.2022].

As noted earlier, Poland is at a pioneering stage of social farming services. One of the first measures consistent with that concept is the establishment of care farms. In Poland, the relevant procedure was developed by the Krakow Branch Office of the Brwinów Agricultural Consultancy Center, one of the major institutions in charge of bottom-up actions. The concept was the outcome of implementing the project “Care farms: building a collaborative network” co-financed by the National Rural Network under the 2014-2020 Rural Development Program [Care Farm, <http://www.gospodarstwa-opiekuncze.pl>].

In Poland, the current legal framework restricts the ability to combine farming activities with care services; this is mostly due to the absence of appropriate legal regulations. Care farms can be operated as an economic activity in the form of a social cooperative, association or foundation. This makes them eligible for co-financing from various sources, e.g. social economy support funds, and central and local government funds allocated to the establishment and development of care facilities [ACC 2017]. Polish creators of the care farm concept (i.e. the Krakow Branch Office of the Brwinów Agricultural Consultancy Center) propose that services offered by care farms be mostly targeted at economically inactive or dependent elderly (60+) people [Chmielewski et al. 2017, ACC 2017, Subocz 2019]. They also believe that Polish care farms should be organized in a manner which is characteristic of the social assistance system, i.e. be operated as: day care centers, family assistance centers or sheltered institutions [Chmielewski et al. 2017, ACC 2017]. Currently, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development plans to launch a network of care farms. They are supposed to help the rural seniors and, importantly, provide additional revenue streams for the farmers. The final legal form of care farms and of the related care model will be decided by the interministerial team in charge of implementing the care farm model in Poland, which includes several important collaborators: the competent minister in charge of family and social security, the minister of the economy, regional development and finance, as well as the Farmers’ Social Insurance Institution and the State Fund for Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons.

#### “TOSKANIA KOCIEWSKA” CARE FARMS: A CASE STUDY

In Poland, the concept of care farms seems to be a development of traditional assistance to people in need provided by multigenerational rural families and neighborhood self-help systems. The demographic change experienced in Poland, especially in late 1900s / early 2000s, caused an unprecedented acceleration of population ageing, whereas the economic transformation had a radical effect on agriculture and farms by intensifying and mechanizing production in a way never seen before. This contributed to strong social changes in rural areas, primarily including the significant migrations from rural to urban areas and the decline of the multigenerational family model. As a consequence, rural

areas saw increased numbers of elderly, excluded and vulnerable persons. In theory, all of the above should be addressed by social assistance centers. However, the complexity of this issue, especially in rural conditions, and the mindset of some beneficiaries are the reasons why the scope of services offered is not enough to meet the needs of excluded or economically inactive people. Both human sensitivity and different kinds of ventures, programs and projects resulted in the emergence of local initiatives taken to help and take care of those in need.

Unfortunately, social assistance and agriculture are two extremely distant areas of government policy, and so far the Polish legislation has not provided any regulations to couple them. As a consequence, there are virtually no care farms (properly so-called) in Poland. Only the GROWID project provides for defining the adequate legal and organizational form of care farms. Hence, this study can consider and examine some individual cases of initiatives taken to establish a care farm or projects which demonstrate such characteristics to a smaller or greater extent. It needs to be emphasized that the determinants found to be likely based on previous experience are individual attitudes and mindsets of people who seek more ecological, “nature-friendly” forms of agricultural production and want to combine them with a more holistic vision of rural functioning, taking account of social and psychological aspects of how local communities live. The aspect of looking for non-agricultural revenue streams and ways of financing for the farms also seems to be an important driver of initiatives taken to combine agricultural production and social care (at least to a certain extent).

The greatest contributors to promoting care farms in Poland are agricultural consultancy centers, in particular the Agricultural Consultancy Center of the Kujawsko-Pomorskie Voivodeship. The territory under its competence is home to “Toskania Kociowska,” an active farm which seems to meet the characteristics of a care farm to the highest extent. It was established as a consequence of its owners’ commitment to pursue a valuable, healthy lifestyle in harmony with, and with a positive impact on, the local community.

Run by an Italian-Polish couple, it is based in Nowe, an urban-rural commune located in the northern frontier of the Kujawsko-Pomorskie voivodeship.

Its history dates back to 2009 when the owners moved from Italy to Poland, bought a slightly neglected 12-hectare farm and started to develop it from the scratch. Initially, they planned to focus on organic crops. They did not have any education or experience in agriculture, but going organic was not a purely economic decision. Instead, it reflected the lifestyle and values adopted by the owners. Today, the farm has an area of 30 hectares but due to the developing non-agricultural business, its food manufacturing functions undergo a considerable reduction. It is difficult to clearly indicate the moment where “Toskania Kociowska” launched its social activity, or to list all educational and health-promoting programs ran by its owners. It seems that for their farm, becoming “social” was not a fully planned operation. It certainly began with onotherapy, i.e. a therapy which uses animals

(donkeys). The farm ran a number of related projects, including “Traveling around the world on a donkey back,” financed by the Civic Initiatives Fund.

At the launch of the “Green care: care farms in the Kujawsko-Pomorskie voivodeship” project, “Toskania Kociewska” was already a developing care farm.

When starting care activities, the initial assumption of the owners was to provide daycare services in working days based on a defined schedule. The group of participants is what made “Toskania Kociewska” stand apart from other “Green care” operators. They were not elderly people but persons seeking assistance due to reasons other than age, i.e. loneliness, illness, social exclusion or addiction problems.

The participants became quite quickly specialized in performing specific farm tasks, e.g. helping in gardening or preparing meals for the tourists. Although engaging the participants in farm chores was the initial plan of the owners, specific activities of the care farm evolved very rapidly. The example of “Toskania Kociewska” clearly shows that the functioning model of a care farm must provide for a great degree of flexibility because the farm is always an evolving “organism” rather than a fixed set of technical tasks to be performed.

Currently, “Toskania Kociewska” is a conglomerate of various activities. The broad range of measures related to accessing funds and revenues from different sources requires the adoption of properly adjusted legal forms of their economic activity. The owners earn part of their revenue from an agricultural activity, including agritourism. Additionally, they run Organizator Turystyki, a registered company with a tourism profile which helps them providing comprehensive service to large groups of guests. The farm continuously offers therapeutic and educational classes, and welcomes study tours. Its employees help running the different areas of activity, i.e. prepare meals for the tourists and participants to educational programs, workshops and study tours, make sure the facilities are tidy, take care of animals and the garden, and perform ongoing repairs.

## CONCLUSIONS

The concept of care farms is part of a continuously evolving tourism accommodation portfolio in rural areas [Roman et al. 2020]. In Poland and other European countries, it comprises a diversified and broad range of services depending on the number, age and health condition of participants. The establishment of care farms in Polish rural areas is an innovative idea that falls in the context of social farming. In the future, social agriculture businesses (social farming) could contribute to sustainable rural development. This will enable an increasingly stable rural development by reducing poverty and boosting farm revenues. Hence, these measures have the potential to stabilize the social and economic life in rural areas.



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## FUNKCJONOWANIE GOSPODARSTW OPIEKUŃCZYCH W POLSCE NA PRZYKŁADZIE WYBRANEGO STUDIUM PRZYPADKU

Słowa kluczowe: rozwój lokalny, gospodarstwa opiekuńcze, oferta, obszary wiejskie, Polska

### ABSTRAKT

Celem artykułu jest zaprezentowanie najważniejszych kwestii i kluczowych informacji dotyczących koncepcji gospodarstw opiekuńczych w kształtowaniu rozwoju lokalnego. Wykorzystano metodę analizy materiałów wtórnych, w tym literatury przedmiotu – Systematyczny Przegląd Literatury (SLR). Przedstawiono teoretyczne i praktyczne uwarunkowania, sposoby oraz dotychczasowe efekty wdrażania koncepcji gospodarstw opiekuńczych. Zaprezentowano przykład gospodarstwa opiekuńczego w zakresie świadczonych usług. Przedstawiono rolę i znaczenie tego typu usług, które niewątpliwie są atrakcyjnym produktem (usługą), z którego mogą korzystać seniorzy. Powstawanie gospodarstw opiekuńczych na obszarach wiejskich Polski jest pomysłem nowatorskim, który realizowany jest w kontekście rolnictwa społecznego. W przyszłości społeczna działalność rolnicza (rolnictwo społeczne) może przyczynić się do zrównoważonego rozwoju obszarów wiejskich. Umożliwi to coraz bardziej stabilny rozwój obszarów wiejskich poprzez zmniejszenie ubóstwa i zwiększenie dochodów gospodarstw rolnych. Takie działania mogą stabilizować życie społeczne i gospodarcze na obszarach wiejskich.

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