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## Polish experience of social farming in Bory Tucholskie area

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**Abstract:** *After Poland's accession to the European Union, there was an accelerated process of diversification of the income situation of farms in Poland. Many of them have problems to make a living from agricultural production. At the same time, the problem and the scale of the whole society becomes a demand for care in old age. This article describes the possibility of providing care on farms in the formula of care farm. The various forms of care farms quoted in the article are part of a wider trend of social farming. The first attempt to create a Polish care farm in Tuchola Forest offers hope for real development of this form of economic activity in the country.*

**Keywords:** *farm welfare, agriculture, care farm, outplacement farmers, new profession for the farmer*

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Several years ago, Polish villages were associated only with agriculture and food production. Almost 15 million people (38.2 per cent of the Polish population) live in rural areas, but more important is the fact that 27 per cent of Poles of working age are connected with agriculture, although only 18 per cent make a living out of it financially. The results of the Agricultural Census in 2010 shows that, of the 1,583,000 Polish farms larger than one hectare, up 92.3 per cent has an area not exceeding 20 hectares (MRRW, 2010). In most of these households at least one person should look for additional sources of income outside agriculture. Such a process has been taking place among the smallest farms for a long time. There remain hundreds of thousands of households (in the size group from 5 to 20 hectares are as many as 576,000) where for the owners and family members the process of finding additional sources of income outside agriculture has yet to start. Many of them still do not realise the seriousness of their situation, do not see a viable alternative, or have adopted a strategy of survival.

The need for vocational/ professional/occupational reorientation for farmers and their family members results from the changes in the social and economic structure of the countryside. In general, the development of modern agricultural production technologies supported by European Union (EU) funds has resulted in a great diversity of circumstances on farms. Working solely on their own farm is no longer a sufficient source of income for most farmers and their family members. There are one million unemployed in non-farming families (approximately 150 thousand) and about 850 thousand people who create the so-called hidden unemployment. A further increase in farming efficiency will result in the number of unemployed rising from a few hundred thousand to a million people.

Every year the traditional definition of what the countryside is as given by Szczepański (1983) seems to be less valid. According to his definition, the countryside is a place for food production where work is integrated with the household and the results of the activity are mainly dependent on the forces of nature. For the traditional countryside, the cultural aspects and relationships between the work carried out and the style of life were crucial. The future of the Polish countryside is connected with the need to implement a diversity of economic development projects for the local inhabitants. It is evident that farming will be a primary income source for less than half of the inhabitants over the next few years. Farmers who want to make a living solely or primarily from agricultural production have no choice but to implement essential modernisation and investment programmes. Many of them will have to look for additional sources of income in terms of alternative non-farming production or services. Most villagers, including the farmer's family members, will have to find completely new sources of income. According to the guidelines of the EU development model for the countryside and agriculture, non-farming or non-agricultural development means promoting the countryside as a good

place to live (a residential function), to take rest and for tourism, protection of the natural environment and landscape, the promotion of local culture and cultural identity, as well as providing other services. Finding new ways of mobilising the inhabitants of the Polish countryside to find their proper place in society in the future is a huge challenge.

The process of vocational reorientation differs considerably from other methods of education of adults (e.g. of unemployed persons). There is a proposal to create a new opportunity for farmers and household members based on the skills and abilities gained by them within the frame of work on a farm. The ability to operate different machines for field work, work in a garden, preparation of traditional dishes, care for children and elderly persons, are the skills very often encountered in a village which, in order to constitute an opportunity in the labour market, require their formal confirmation, certification, supplementation or acceptance<sup>1</sup>. The process of reorientation means mainly individual consultancy for a farmer, and sometimes for the whole family, within the frames of which there sometimes follow a new glimpse on own professional position and an attempt to find a positive solution. In view of the inability of most farms in Poland to develop their area, a big social problem arises from the necessity to secure substantial additional sources of income from outside farming. This was the subject of this study conducted in the kujawsko – pomorskie region – a typical agricultural area of Poland. The study aimed to recognise farmers' and household members' readiness for vocational reorientation<sup>2</sup>. The results show most farmers are not ready for reorientation. Analysing the main reasons why farmers do not want to reskill to another profession, it emerged that those polled mentioned the lack of time connected with an excess of work on the farm; a lack of financial means, as well as the distance from educational centres. On the other hand, women stressed their obligations to provide care for children and elderly relatives. However, special attention should be given to the lack of belief amongst those polled that they could get a job. From 2009, a special programme of vocational reorientation more than 4000 farmers and members of their families operated in kujawsko – pomorskie region (Kamiński and Sass, 2013). One of the solutions for a certain group of farms and farmers is the development of social farming, including the care function within the farm.

## Social farming

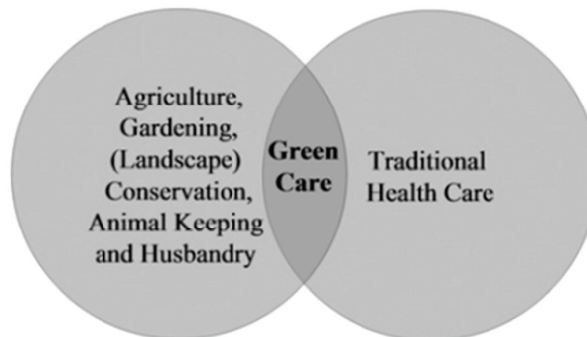
The origins of care farms can be found even in the Middle Ages. One of the most famous examples comes from the village of Geel in Vlaanderen, currently in Belgium (Roosens and van de Walle, 2007). The assistance there was provided to those in need who, under their specific therapy, were involved in the daily agricultural activities. More examples of functioning farms, dealing

<sup>1</sup> See [http://www.rkk.no/en/INTERNATIONAL/European\\_projects/Euro\\_Validation](http://www.rkk.no/en/INTERNATIONAL/European_projects/Euro_Validation)

<sup>2</sup> <http://ifmaonline.org/contents/pr-vocational-reorientation-of-farmers-and-members-of-their-families-a-new-challenge-for-rural-poland/>

at the same time with care, must be sought in the second half of the nineteenth century, when people with intellectual disabilities, and sometimes physically, were placed in special care institutions located in rural areas and in the areas enclosed by parks and forests on the outskirts of large cities (Bird, 2007). The most important reason for placing disabled persons in such places was to isolate them from the rest of society, because they were considered as an embarrassing social problem. Even then, however, it was noted that the natural environment soothed the patients. A common phenomenon in these institutions was the foundation of one or more farms producing basic foods, which helped to reduce operating costs. Where indicated, patients could participate in agricultural work. Apart from the obvious financial benefits, it was observed that the work had a beneficial effect on patients. In the mid-twentieth century, the first special therapeutic communities known as ‘community Camphill’ or ‘movement Camphill’<sup>3</sup>, were founded which carried out therapeutic work with disabled children, and nature was recognised as a key element of the therapy.

In the meantime, according to the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) report of 2013, an increasingly innovative attitude is developing in Europe which links two seemingly disparate areas, those of multifunctional farming and social services, in particular that of health care at the local level. In practice it has been found to enhance the feeling of self-worth of the participants and to encourage the social integration of people with special needs. The term social farming includes many activities referred to as farming for health, care farming, green care or green therapies (Figure 1).



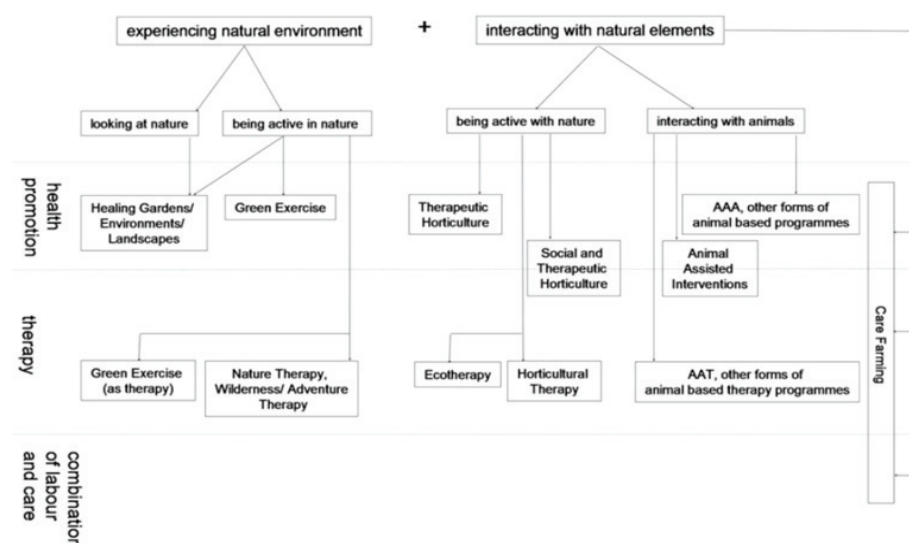
**Figure 1. Green care and traditional health care**

Source: Haubenhofer et al. (2010).

Green care is a link between traditional healthcare and other sectors of human societies, such as agriculture, gardening, landscape and nature conservation, animal keeping and animal husbandry, and different combinations lead to different types of green care. These terms refer to various activities connected with

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.camphill.org.uk/about/camphill-history>

care, social reintegration, training, social and vocational rehabilitation for people with difficulties and training for people with special needs. Implementation of such activities provides improved feelings of self-esteem for those who find themselves in a difficult situation. It also improves both the state of their health and their social integration. Regular contact with nature and with production activities can improve learning, enhance self-esteem and make it easier to participate socially. According to the EESC, social farming is a set of activities using agricultural resources, both plants and animals, in order to provide social benefits. Allowances in the countryside or in the suburbs such as rehabilitation, therapy, protected work places, life-long learning, and other activities which aim at enhancing an individual's social integration. Specifically, it means creating a suitable farming environment which facilitates the participation in everyday agricultural activities of people with special needs to cater to their development and progress as well as improve their feeling of self-worth. Haubenhofer et al. (2010) (Figure 2) presents a classification of most common sectors of green care in Western Europe. The sectors are categorised into the healthcare aims they follow (health promotion, therapy and the combination of labour and care), the sorts of natural elements they are built on, and the way use these elements: AAA: animal-assisted activities, AAT: animal-assisted therapy.



**Figure 2. Overview of sectors of green care**

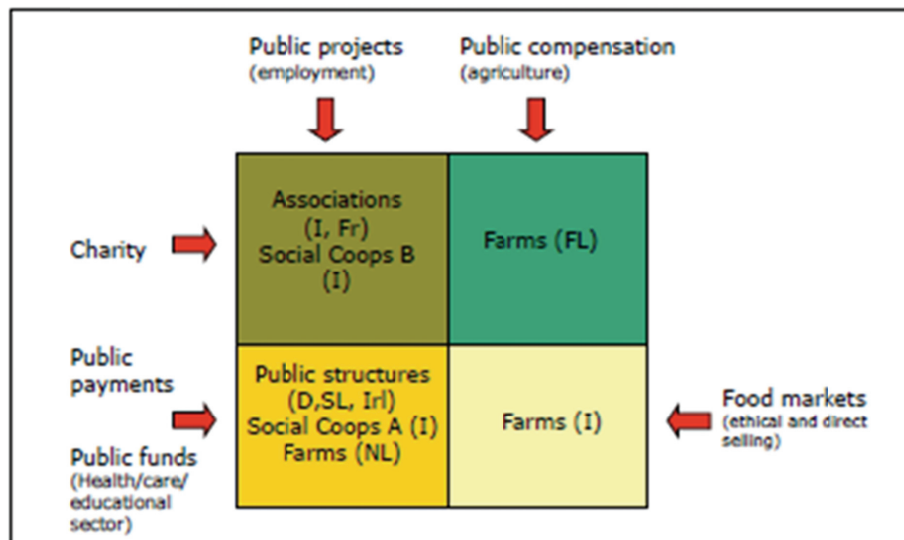
Source: Haubenhofer et al. (2010).

Social farming includes most often the following areas of activity:

- Re-education and therapy classes;
- Integration in the world of work as well as social integration;
- Pedagogical activities;
- Care services.

The benefits of care on a farm are manifold (Sempik et al., 2010). It is often a combination of factors that support clients and they can be summarised as follows:

- A Care Farm can provide a rural and peaceful environment. This offers many clients an opportunity of freedom from disturbance.
- Working with plants and animals stimulates the feeling of responsibility for other creatures; this in turn can also help the individual to feel more responsible for themselves. An important effect can be a marked increase in self-esteem.
- Owing to its dependency on factors which cannot be controlled, such as the climate or soil quality, farm life can help to develop an easy-going attitude. This, in turn, can contribute to developing true peace of mind.
- The character of the Care Farmer or Care Farming family determine to a great extent how they deal with the basic values of life, i.e. caring for plants and animals. This is a principal element for a client to build their sense of trust and self-confidence.
- Despite its rural location, a farm is also an economic enterprise, which needs to be considered in order to ensure its survival. This requirement stimulates a realistic viewpoint.



**Figure 3: various European social farming regulations**

Source: the Project So Far.

While analysing the systems of social farming in Europe, Hassink (2009) pointed out varying attitudes in different countries. The Netherlands is the primary reference point for the activities described in this article and the dominant model for implementing Care Farming. Similar mechanisms are popular in Vlaanderen, the Dutch speaking part of Belgium, Public institutions



and health care institutions in social farming dominate in Germany, France and Ireland. In Italy the system is mixed since there are both private farms and publicly-funded developments. In the Netherlands social farming is closely allied to the care sector, while in Germany, the United Kingdom, Ireland and Slovenia it is divided between the social and the health support sectors.

In terms of financing, in both Italy and France, the dominant funding comes from publicly-funded projects and from projects implemented by charities and (primarily in Italy) social associations. In the Netherlands, financing comes from public funds from the health and welfare sectors. In Germany, Ireland and Slovenia, financing for social farming is implemented by public institutions, and financed by public funding for health care and education (Hassing 2009).

### **Polish context of social farming**

Social farming is not well known in Poland, and it is difficult to find any direct references to it in the literature, or to encounter any practical applications. Information about social agriculture and rural areas in general, as a traditionally friendly place for the elderly, are consistent with the demographic forecasts for both Western Europe and Poland. According to Błędowski (2012), in the period 1950-2011 the share of people aged 75 years and older increased from 1.6 to 6.5 per cent, while in 2035 this figure will reach 12.3 per cent. According to forecasts by the Central Statistical Office (GUS), in 2030 up to 53.3 per cent of single-person households will be composed of a person aged at least 65 years, including 17.3 per cent for those aged 80 and over (GUS, 2010). This means that 2,740 thousand people aged 65 and older will remain alone in their households, including 887 thousand people aged 80 years and older (Table 1). The calculations of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy confirm these trends. According to the population forecast published by the GUS an increase the number of people aged over 60 years old is expected in the next ten years (2015-2024). The population of people aged 60+ will increase by approximately 1.8 million people, i.e. 21 per cent. Currently (2014), the contribution of older people in society is 22 per cent, and in the forecast period it is expected to grow regularly to a level of 27 per cent in 2024.

The above-described change, sooner or later, will force the necessity of creating new solutions to cope with an aging population. The use of the new features of agriculture, as agriculture and social contribution on the one hand to the development of entrepreneurship in rural areas in innovative directions, and the other will solve the problems associated with the care and the social exclusion of the elderly and disabled.



**Table 1. Single-person households conducted in Poland by people aged 65 years and more in the years 2002-2030**

Age group	Years		
	2002	2030	
	%	%	thous.
65 – 69	9,4	9,5	487,5
70 – 74	10,7	12,9	663,5
75 – 79	9,5	13,7	702,3
80 and more	9,2	17,3	886,9
Total	38,7	53,3	2740,3

Source: Błędowski (2012)

### Innovative project of KPODR Minikowo

In 2008, the Kuyavian-Pomeranian Agricultural Advisory Centre (KPODR) undertook activities related to the reorientation of farmworkers and their family members. The direct inspiration of actions for developing care farms in the Kuyavian-Pomeranian region were attempts of this type of activity undertaken in 2002-2004 in Podkarpacie and Lubelszczyzna region. In 2013, the Kujawsko-Pomorski Agricultural Advisory Centre in Minikowo (KPODR Minikowo) began talks with the owners of agri-tourism farms from the area of Tuchola Forest affiliated to the Association of Agrotouristic Farms 'Tuchola Forest' about the possibility of extending their activities with caring functions. In 2014, KPODR Minikowo started to create care farms in Tuchola district based on the Dutch experience. According to Manintveld (2014), care farms in the Netherlands provide a variety of services for the following target groups:

- Mentally disabled;
- People with reduced mobility;
- The elderly disabled mentally / physically;
- People with brain damage resulting e.g. as a result of accident or illness such as dementia;
- People with mental health problems;
- Reintegration of (former) prisoners;
- Reintegration of addicts (e.g. drugs, alcohol);
- People suffering from autism;
- Child care (before and after school hours);
- Difficult youth;
- The long-term unemployed;
- People with occupational burnout;
- People seeking asylum.

Initially, there was a local vision of a Dutch expert and workshops with owners of farms and institutions from the Tuchola district. This was followed by a study visit to the Netherlands, where farmers with Polish specialists had the opportunity to visit several care farms and have direct conversation with the owners and their charges. They became acquainted with the ways of care farms conduct and operation. Each of the households had a different character. A visit to the Dutch farms helped to plan the operation of such farms in Polish conditions. Particularly important was the realisation of specifics and requirements for the care of different target groups. After returning from the Netherlands, during several days of workshops and visits to each of the farms a founding concept of care farms in Tuchola district (Individual Care Farms Plans – IPUGO) and an overview of farms for compliance with the technical requirements of individual rooms and all space offered for charges were developed. Also was made a preliminary analysis of the financial transformation from agricultural farm to care activities.

The primary effect of the above actions was to develop several models incorporate a farm in the provision of care. After analysing the formal and legal situation for interested farms in Tuchola district, the following target groups and forms of care were determined:

- *Care for children and adolescents.* For this group care farms can function as a foster family or a family orphanage. One of the farms participating in the project within a few months after returning from the Netherlands and developing a plan (IPUGO) decided to take the difficult challenge of the function of a foster family (initially non-professional), with later plans for setting up a professional family or emergency family, and even a family child care home. In the following months, two other families started preparations for the function of care towards children.
- *People with intellectual or mobility disabilities.* Many tourist farms are ready to provide this type of support; participants of project gained formal qualifications to care for people with disabilities.
- *Older people requiring support.* Older people needing all-day support are generally single or sick people whose family members are no longer able to provide care. The elderly and sick people very often do not have constant care, which undoubtedly needed. Creating care farms in the form of family in assistance to large social care homes can meet the expectations of older people who need warmth, interest and closeness with others. This business model of care farms is possible in accordance with applicable laws and several farms are now preparing for this form of care.
- *Inactive elderly people who do not require care but interesting forms of spending free time.* Care farms can offer in this case the creation of a self-help club and ‘Tucholskie Forest for Seniors’ was developed as a joint offer tourist product aimed at older people.
- *Day care for the elderly.* This type of care farm is the most popular in western countries and completely absent in Poland.

In 2016 KPODR Minikowo started the implementation of a new project with the objective of forms of day care under the Regional Operational Programme 2014-2020 (Sub 9.3.2: Development of social services). Fifteen care farms will be created in the counties Brodnickie, Mogilno, Świeckie, Tuchola and Wąbrzeźno in the years 2017-2018. Wards are dependents, who will benefit from the support and activities for eight hours a day, five days a week (in groups of 3-8 person). Each person in the project will make use of care help for half a year (a total of 225 people). The project will provide advice for households to support their functioning and development of the offer, for adapting lessons to individual needs of clients. Training supporting the establishment and development of this activity will be also organised. So far in Poland individual care for the elderly is dominating, which usually does not cover the period of eight hours. The project will expand the care in small groups which, by a factor of social relations will help solve associated with loneliness psychological problems of the elderly.

The future of this form of care known has in Poland a lot of prospects. This follows on the one hand with the growing needs of older people, and on the other the potential of farms, as a good place for senility.

### **Concluding remarks**

The formation of care farms as a new trend associated with the so-called social agriculture or socially-engaged agriculture is still a very little known issue in Poland. Taking such initiatives by farmhouses is quite a natural progression or specialisation because it is not far from the reception of guests at the farm to care for them in a situation where they become more dependent. Social farming as an undiscovered functioning direction of private farms in Poland is currently at the experimental stage. Already in Poland there are public institutions involved in health care which use the benefits of the natural environment as a supporting element of therapy. However, the opposite approach, involving the creation of new services on the basis of farms, is basically pioneering.

As a result of the described actions under the international component, farmers in Tuchola district attempt to create care farms, in some cases very advanced, and are already taking the first wards. The described models in this article are possible to implement in existing legal status in Poland. Complement requires only the function of care in the form of day care, which is most common in the Netherlands.

Giving care in the Tuchola Forest are the experiment and basis for creating other solutions of implementing social farming in Poland. For many tourist farmhouses the direction of specialisation may become a real opportunity for development in the future, while acting in an alternative form of care for the growing number of older people requiring support. So after appropriate preparation of farms and villages, they can become a good place for old age.

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