

Social Farming (SOCIAL FARMING)

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Multifunctional Agriculture in Europe

Social farming is part of multifunctional agriculture, which represents a model of farming where other accompanying activities and functions are also developed. Social farming, in particular, is a model of a sustainable agricultural community that also includes social activities, primarily opportunities for living and employment for people with disabilities, illnesses, the unemployed, the homeless, and lonely seniors.

Often referred to as "social agriculture" or "green care," adapting farms for therapeutic purposes represents a sector with growth potential for farmers across the EU. Various types of care can be provided on farms, and the most successful "social farms" in this area work in partnership with public or private healthcare institutions. In this way, institutions provide professional care services, while farmers organize therapeutic activities related to agriculture.

Living and working conditions on a social farm depend on the specific model. Each social farm has a preferred social group to which it offers opportunities. In Europe, the most numerous farms are those where people with intellectual disabilities and mental illnesses live and work. In this case, farm activities are used as a therapeutic tool that directly influences the condition of the person involved, and their participation in the farming community improves their quality of life.

In Bulgaria, two projects in social farming have already been launched:

The project Multifunctional Agriculture in Europe – Social and Ecological Impact on Organic Farms includes representatives from Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Italy, Portugal, the Netherlands, Finland, and Germany. In Bulgaria, the project is coordinated by the Centre for Continuing Education and the Agroecological Centre, which are service units within the structure of the Agricultural University – Plovdiv. The project's goals are to qualify students, lecturers, instructors, social workers, farmers, and educators in various aspects of Multifunctional Agriculture/Social Farming. The material will be developed into modules and offered in eight languages as an online training tool. It will be aimed at people who need additional professional training. Also, establishing contacts, which in the context of the project will be regarded as an opportunity to connect participants through the sectors of agriculture, social services, health, law, and education. Social farming is an integrative tool that can be used not only for agricultural purposes but also to deliver other benefits; for example, offering elderly people to live in a rural farm environment. The development of rural areas and increasing their attractiveness, not only as a place to live but also as a requirement for a high-quality and fulfilling way of life, will be a priority of the project.

www.maie-project.eu

The other significant project within social farming in Bulgaria is the INCLUFAR inclusive social farming project. The project is related to promoting inclusive social farming in Bulgaria and several other European countries, with the help of organizations that have been involving people with disabilities or illnesses in farming communities for decades. INCLUFAR starts on October 1, 2013, and lasts for 2 years. The project coordinator is the SALPST association, Varna.

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