8th International Scientific Conference
RURAL DEVELOPMENT 2017
Bioeconomy challenges
23–24 November, 2017, Aleksandras Stulginskis University

Proceedings of the 8th International Scientific Conference Rural Development 2017

Edited by prof. Asta Raupelienė

ISSN 1822-3230 / eISSN 2345-0916
eISBN 978-609-449-128-3

Article DOI: http://doi.org/10.15544/RD.2017.216

SOCIAL FARMING – INTRODUCTION OF THE CONCEPT AND THE CURRENT SITUATION IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

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Historically, agriculture always fulfilled a social function as well. However, its intensification taking place in the 20th century brought about a number of changes accompanied by putting this and a number of other non-productive functions in the shade. However, recent years have seen the establishment of agricultural directions that contribute to their renewal. This also includes social farming. Social farming is the most complex component of the concept "green care". In its current form, it creates room for providing for the people who have hardly any chances on the labour market and for their involving in farming activities. While in a number of European countries this concept has been used for many years, in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe it has still been in the early stages and has not been formally defined in many countries yet. In the Czech Republic, the concept of social farming has been developed approximately since 2013, growing and gaining in importance continuously. The article introduces the concept of social farming and describes its current situation in the Czech Republic. The data were obtained through questionnaire surveys and directed interviews in the field. As part of the analysis of the structure of social farming in the Czech Republic, the selected set of thirty entities involved in social farming is described in terms of the structure of the farming production, the main target groups of clients and the funding sources.

Keywords: Development, green care, social farming, structure analysis

INTRODUCTION

In historical terms, the main functions of agriculture have been the production of food and providing jobs and income for rural populations (Vereijken, 2003) and, as part of its productive function, also e.g. the production of energy from phytomass, etc. (Bernas et al., 2016). However, in addition to the productive function, agriculture also fulfils numerous non-productive functions (Kopecký et al., 2015, Šaraptka and Urban, 2006). They include e.g. environmental or socio-economic functions (Miškolci, 2008). As part of environmental functions, the impacts of agriculture on water (Moravcová et al., 2008, Lies et al., 2001), soil (Kopecký et al., 2016, Šimek, 2003), biodiversity (Fuller et al., 2005, Hole et al., 2005) or air (Miňovský et al., 2013, Moudrý et al., 2013) have been mentioned. In recent years, however, the importance of other non-productive functions including social functions has also been emphasized (Peréz-Soba, et al., 2008). Such functions have been largely developed by the concept of social farming as well.

In historical terms, the agriculture sector ranked among the most significant employers in rural areas. In the 20th century there was a decline which has been gaining speed. For example, in the Czech Republic, there were 533 thousand people employed in agriculture in 1989, while in 2000 agriculture employed only 165 thousand people (Bičík and Jančák, 2005, Spěšná, 2009). In addition to the conventional provision of jobs, it also offered employment for people disadvantaged in various ways on the labour market. Di Iacovo and O´Connor (2009) state that historically, agricultural and rural societies, all over Europe, have developed initiatives and practices promoting different forms of solidarity, social assistance and social inclusion. Prior to the industrial revolution, industrialisation and mass urbanisation, a farmhouse represented the most fundamental organisational unit which included almost all social groups living in a rural area. Farming provided jobs to many people, created all types of work teams, thus offering jobs to almost everybody, with different skills and needs (Chovanec et al., 2015). The first activities that may fall within social farming or within its therapeutic component – establishment of a therapeutic community on a farm, were recorded as early as in the 14th century (Elings, 2012). So activities that may fall within social farming were developed in distant past. However, the intensification of agriculture in the 20th century resulted in many changes including not only reducing the number of

people employed in agriculture but also suppressing numerous non-productive functions (Moudrý et al., 2015) and pushing smaller farms out to the edge of the traditional agricultural market (Lanfranchi and Giannetto, 2014). In connection with the development of alternative farming systems and rediscovery of some non-productive parts of farming, the concept of social farming began to develop again. Its current concept is identified as a relatively new concept e.g. by Hasink and Van Dijk (2006) or (Ujj et al., 2017). Di Iacovo (2009) also states that social farming is a new as well as a traditional concept. It originates from the traditional rural self-help networks present in rural areas before modernisation of agriculture and the rise of the public welfare system. Nowadays the concept has been deeply reformed in an innovative and still changing way.

Almost all of Europe's rural areas have experienced the development of social farming since the end of the last century as a new, economically sustainable practice and experience with it is constantly expanding. While social farming is the umbrella term for these activities, the expressions "farming for health", "care farming", "green care" and "green therapies" are also used (Willems, 2012). The growing importance of social farming is also stated by O´Connor, et al. (2010) who states that it has been perceived as a useful concept and has been introduced into practice by an increasing number of actors in rural areas.

In 2012, the opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) defined social farming as an innovative approach that brings together two concepts: multipurpose farming and social services/health care at local level. On the one hand, it ties in closely with the multipurpose nature of farming and is part and parcel of the concept of rural development, giving farmers the opportunity to diversify their sources of income. On the other hand, it benefits society by delivering social services and improving existing services for those living in rural areas by drawing on agricultural and rural resources in the broadest sense (Willems, 2012).

METHODICS

Information about the concept of social farming in the Czech Republic and its definition are based on the conceptual materials which were created with the participation of the authors of this article.

The analysis of the structure of social farming in the Czech Republic is based on a questionnaire survey and directed interviews held in entities pursuing activities that may fall within social farming. Given the relative newness of the current view of the issue and absence of a legal definition of social farming in the form of an Act, there is not any clear information about the number of farms and other entities falling within social farming in the Czech Republic at present. So the analysis is based on analysing the structure of entities in the selection set of 30 entities which claim they have adopted social farming and, at the same time, meet the requirements for being classified under such a concept.

As part of the analysis, the basic farming characteristics, information about overlap into the social sphere, and supplementary information were assessed. The following information was obtained:

Agriculture:

- Size of the agricultural land
  - Size of arable land
  - Size of permanent grassland (meadows and pastures)
  - Size of areas with permanent crops
- Main cultivated crops
- Species and numbers of reared livestock
- Production processing
- Non-productive activities
- List of activities in which the social farming clients are involved

Social sphere:

- Target groups of clients
- Type of activities
- The most important cooperating actors

Supplementary information:

- Date of commencement of activities
  - Farming activities
  - Social activities
  - Educational activities
- Initial direction of the establishment
  - Focus on farming
  - Focus on social activities
  - Confluence of both directions

The directed interviews also brought information about main obstacles and risks of development of the concept, strengths of various entities and expected development of social farming and activities falling within social farming. Based on foreign experience, current development in the Czech Republic and outputs of directed interviews, the expected development of social farming in the Czech Republic is predicted.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The concept of social farming in the Czech Republic

Social farming does not have a legal definition in force at the level of the European Union so far. Individual countries have either national Acts on social farming (Italy, Norway) or a generally accepted definition of the concept. A legal definition in the form of an Act is relatively new, e.g. Italy has such an Act from 2015 (Seni, 2016). Despite certain differences in the definition of the social farming concept between various countries, in most cases those concepts are in line with the opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee of 2012.

In the Czech Republic, social farming was defined on the basis of the development in the last few years. The Working Committee for Social Farming established by the Ministry of Agriculture defined the concept on the basis of the above stated definition by EESC as follows: "Social farming can be defined as a cluster of practices that use agricultural resources – both animal and plant – to create adequate environment for the disabled or socially disadvantaged and for the general public with the aim of providing jobs, encourage their social integration, or, through education and leisure activities, contribute to their relationship to the countryside and nature. Therefore, such conditions must be created within the framework of farms or farming practices where people with particular needs can take part in daily farming routines as a way of furthering their development, making progress and improving their wellbeing."

Therefore, in addition to saleable produce, the mission of social farming is offering and creating services, new jobs, educational activities, and provide various therapies to a wide spectrum of people with specific needs, using farming resources available in a given location. Even though social farming comprises a very wide range of activities, they always have two elements in common:

a) the activities are closely linked to farming activities or farms; and
b) they are designed for people who – either temporarily or permanently – have specific needs.

As a result, based on these common elements, we can partially define some social farming objectives:

1. Labour market integration of a large spectrum of people with specific needs;
2. Rehabilitation and therapy in terms of the provision of professional social care and social services, and preparation for employment;
3. Education and other activities contributing to better knowledge of farming practices, rural culture, landscape management and its sustainability.

Social farming has an important added value and it is the possibility for the disabled and socially disadvantaged to be integrated in the environment that they are closely familiar with – provided that they are rural inhabitants. At the same time, it can create similar opportunities for city people moving out to the country. Agricultural activities provided by different organisations offer flexible, intimate and informal relationships and activities that are by their nature purposeful, jobs that enhance those people's personal and professional skills and qualities, and increases their independence, responsibility and social standing (Chovanec et al., 2015).

Structure of social farming in the Czech Republic

A number of entities from both the farming sphere and the sphere of social business have begun to adopt the newly defined concept. As social farming becomes more widely known, it has been addressed at the level of involved ministries (not only the Ministry of Agriculture but also the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs) and medialized, and the number of entities adopting the concept has been growing continuously. The estimated number of entities that may be classified as falling within the concept of social farming in the Czech Republic is approximately 100 at the moment, and approximately 40 from them have already officially adopted the concept, so we may regard them as practical actors of social farming. The following analysis of the structure of social farming in the Czech Republic is based on the data obtained from 30 establishments officially claiming that they have adopted the concept, so it provides a general overview of the current form of social farming in the Czech Republic.

We can see two basic directions in social farming in the Czech Republic. The farms that undertook social activities as supplementary activities or, more often, social establishments that use farming as a form of therapy. Most of the studied establishments (76.6 %) state that they began either as a social establishment or as an establishment combining farming and social activities. It is evident that the establishments starting their business as farming establishments mostly have an agricultural land of a larger size. The size of entities or rather the size of agricultural land is very variable, but, as it also follows from Figure 1, most of the entities fall within the categories with the agricultural area up to 15 ha, and half of the entities fall within the categories with the agricultural area up to 10 ha. A majority of them are entities focused particularly on social activities, which are also the main source of their income, and the activities on the agricultural land are usually regarded as a form of therapy and are of secondary importance for the entity in economic terms. However, the size of the establishment is not important for implementing the concept of social farming; the studied set of entities include a social establishment with the agricultural land smaller than one hectare as well as a large farm with the agricultural land of 2000 ha.

The size category of the entity is also reflected to a certain extent in its farming activities. For the work with the target groups of social farming, the most suitable farming activities are those that require direct human labour and a lower degree of mechanization. Despite obvious differences between various target groups in terms of their ability to carry out particular farming activities, the most prevalent (and, for a majority of target groups, the most suitable) activities are, in general, the growing and processing of vegetables and herbs, the growing of fruit, and work in animal production. A similar structure is also stated by Rose et al. (2016) for social farming in Germany. From 30 studied entities, arable land is used in 29 cases, permanent grasslands in 24 cases and permanent crops in 21 cases.

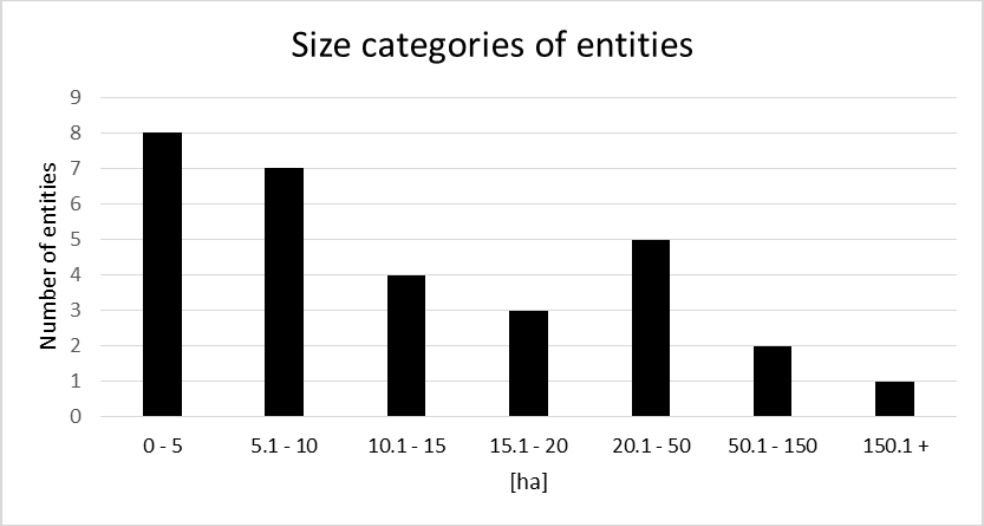

Figure 1. Size categories of entities

It is evident from Figure 2 that the largest areas under cultivation are permanent grasslands (pastures and meadows) to which animal production is linked. Figure 2 does not include an entity which manages an area of thousands of hectares, because it can be regarded as atypical in terms of the current structure of social farming in the Czech Republic, but even this entity carries out most activities on permanent grassland. Permanent cultures (orchards) cover the smallest area.

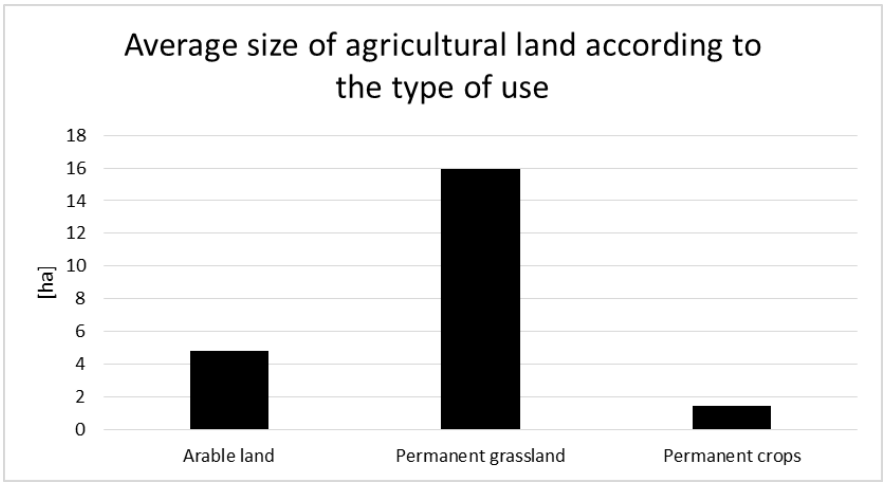

Figure 2. Average size of agricultural land according to the type of use

In crop production, in addition to the management of permanent grasslands and cultivation of vegetables, herbs and fruits, the establishments also often reported the cultivation of potatoes and, in rare cases, the cultivation of other crops on arable land (cereals, feed mixtures, buckwheat).

In animal production, sheep (17 entities, 56.6%), cattle (13 entities, 43.3%) and goats, pigs and poultry (12 entities, 40%) are raised in most cases. The raising of horses (8 entities), rabbits (8 entities) and bees (6 entities) was reported in several cases, and the raising of other animals (donkeys, lamas, guinea pigs, camels…) in isolated cases. While the entities which are focused primarily on agricultural activities mostly raise tens to hundreds of farm animals, the establishments focused primarily on social activities often raise less than ten animals.

Very often, the plant and animal production is processed directly (90%) by the entities; reduction to the primary agricultural production without subsequent processing was only reported by 3 entities (10%). The processing of the agricultural produce as a significant element of the concept of social farming is also stated by Signoriello (2016), Dessein and Bock (2010), or Hasink and Van Dijk (2006). The most commonly processed crops are vegetables (22 entities) and fruits (17 entities), and their products usually include preserved and dried vegetables, chutney, pastes, ciders, jams, dried fruit, etc. The establishments also report the processing of herbs (11 entities), milk (9 entities), meat (7 entities), honey (6 entities) and wool (3 entities).

As for non-productive activities, the most commonly reported activities are educational events, work camps, landscape care, cultural events, but also accommodation of clients and agro-tourism. The importance of non-productive activities is also stated by Hassink et al. (2007) who states that in Holland 70% of social farms carry out such activities.

Most commonly, the target groups of social farming include long-term unemployed persons (14 entities) and persons with a mental (13 entities) and health disability (10 entities). The long-term unemployed are also the most common target group of social farming in Slovakia (Lacko Bartošová, 2016), while in Holland the most common target

group is persons with a mental disability (Hassink et al., 2007). The other mentioned groups are persons addicted to drugs or alcohol (6 entities) and children from children's homes (5 entities). Some entities also cooperate with volunteers and students or provide work experience to graduates. Clients are usually involved in a majority of farming activities carried out by the entity. In addition to minor ancillary work and vegetable cultivation (28 entities), such activities mostly include work in animal production including assistance with some veterinary work (21 entities), work in orchards and management of permanent grassland (18 entities), landscape care (11 entities), processing of plant (13 entities) and animal produce (4 entities) and sale of products (4 entities).

As for social activities, the most commonly reported activities are therapies (22 entities), employment (20 entities) and education (13 entities). The most common cooperating actors are local governments, labour offices, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and schools, and the establishments also mention cooperation with non-profit organizations, the Ministry of Agriculture, WWOOF and churches. The importance of local governments is also evident in other countries; as key actors they are described e.g. by Seni (2016) for Italy or Rose et al. (2016) for Germany.

CONCLUSION

In the Czech Republic, social farming is a field with a very dynamic growth. The number of entities adopting it has been increasing, and the concept is also supported by numerous institutions including the Ministry of Agriculture. Based on the current development and foreign experience, further development of social farming, which will be influenced by a number of internal and external factors, may be expected in the Czech Republic as well. In addition to the continuing defining of the concept and the legislative framework, the key fields are likely to be education, promotion and support. So in the long term it will be necessary to increase the transparency of social farming, thus the development of certification, labelling and consequently a certain form of control may also be expected. With the growing importance of the productive element of social farming and awareness of the concept, involvement of a larger number of entities focused primarily on farming may be expected as well. It will be important to cover the dual nature of entities involved in the concept of social farming or rather the huge differences between the farms that, as part of common farming business, also provide opportunities for the target groups of social farming on one side, and the organizations for which the primary activity is the work with people disadvantaged on the labour market and other disadvantaged people, and for which farming is only a supplementary activity used particularly as a therapy instead of securing the economic independence of the entity on the other side. Therefore, it is not possible to exclude future division of social farming into two directions as part of the concept to which different rules may apply and different forms of support may exist to a certain extent.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work was supported by the University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice (project No. GAJU 094/2016/Z).

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