

Policy paper

Executive summary of the Policy Recommendation Plan in Social & Organic Farming

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In early 2022, **AGRIFORM Soc. Cons. r.l.** from Italy as leading partner, the **Hungarian University of Agriculture and Life Sciences (MATE)** and the civil non-profit organization **New Agriculture New Generation (NEAGEN)** from Greece, started to implement SOURCE Project funded by European Erasmus+ program.

The main project **objective** is to **strengthen the connection between social farming (SF) and organic farming (OF)** by supporting upskilling processes of farmers and aspirants to spread organic and social farming for sustainable and inclusive ecosystems.

The **activities of the project** carried out by the project were:

- to collect best practices on social and organic farming (SOF) at the EU level and their analysis to create a knowledge baseline as common ground for future development;
- to describe a social organic farmer profile and social organic farmer vocational training (VET) syllabus to identify skills and competencies.
- to engage stakeholder to co-create policy recommendations to boost social and organic farming.

The **results obtained are:**

- a digital **glossary** focused on agrosocial practices
- a document on **situation analysis and best practices** in social organic farming in Italy, Hungary and in Greece
- a social organic farmer (SOF) **profile description** and a social organic farmer (SOF) **vocational training syllabus**
- a **Policy Recommendations Plan (PRP)** and a **Policy paper** for stakeholders to support the diffusion of social organic farming through adequate educational policies

In this **Policy paper**, an executive summary of the Policy Recommendation Plan in SOF is given to make available recommendations and guidelines for government policies aimed at promoting and supporting social and organic farming practices.

The scope of the Policy Recommendation Plan is **to provide the general framework for designing and promoting VET programs related to SOF**, to increase the capacity for public and private stakeholders to align on the EU Strategy 2020.

The planned policy recommendation is also necessary and indispensable, as EU directives can be put into practice at national level if a well-founded, thorough study is prepared, together with a presentation of existing best practices in the context of social organic farming.



It will also allow **new areas of international cooperation** to be explored (e.g. in new Erasmus+ calls). This is because a common language can be used to define needs and design effective training partnership initiatives.

Goal of the Policy Recommendation Plan

The aims of the policy recommendation plan are:

- to provide a framework of activities related to organic farming as a means for the inclusion of vulnerable social groups in economic development;
- to encourage the development of sustainable and environmentally friendly farming practices that prioritise the well-being of both farmers and the environment;
- to create a supportive environment for farmers who are wishing to transition to organic and socially responsible farming practices;
- to promote the benefits of such practices, such as healthier soils, reduced use of chemicals and increased biodiversity, to the wider community;
- to promote further support in the early stages that can motivate stakeholders and beneficiaries to continue their involvement in SOF.

Negative aspects or weaknesses of the current situation of policy

1. **The lack of a clear identification** of the role of the farm as an operative subject in the context of social farming.
2. The public authorities recognize the value of farms involved in social farming, they do **not yet have clear management models** that can open up direct cooperation between public bodies and farms involved in these processes.
3. Healthcare institutions are **looking for immediate, guaranteed, easy-to-manage solutions for large numbers of people**, but above all at low cost.
4. In regions and municipalities, social services departments do exist, but they have **their own traditional frame of reference**, linked to social service providers.

Positive suggestions or strengths of the current situation of policy

1. Farmers are very interested in **the new content of social engagement**, both because it is now linked to their organic and **environmentally friendly** production, and because it can generate **new income**.
2. Many qualified young people have chosen agriculture to build **their own sustainable business and provide multifunctional services** to different types of users.
3. Multifunctional services, open **to different user groups, with a strong social footprint**.
4. Training systems in the agricultural world **are being pressed by new demands and needs**.



5. The positive trend of multifunctionality highlights the need for **new responses and new consultancy needs**.
6. The presence of farms, even in **marginal areas** where there is a high risk of depopulation, strengthens their position as their social role is recognized, both in **maintaining the population** in disadvantaged areas and in **providing services**.

Target groups

The most relevant target groups for involvement in SOF activities and synergies were identified as:

- Local municipalities or associations of municipalities
- Regional authorities
- Advocacy associations (e.g. organic farmers associations, farmers associations, farmers network, labour syndicates)
- Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Social Affairs, Ministry of Labour, Institutions belonging to aforementioned sectors
- Associations of Social Cooperatives and Social Enterprises
- VET schools and training agencies

Suggested activities

1. **The** Regional authorities have the resources, the financial means and the scientific capacity needed to promote:
 - a. **Advertising campaigns of organic products with an emphasis on local products** (environmental, health, tourism promotion criteria, etc.)
 - b. Training actions of agricultural technicians and farmers in the practices of organic production with an emphasis on **local crops**
2. **A separate study** should be done for each category so that they can be supported through Social & Organic farming actions. e.g. prisoners, people in rehabilitation, women with special problems, people with special needs or with disabilities etc. are differentiated groups that should be considered in what way they can be involved in the process.
3. The Ministry of Civil Protection in each country can promote partnerships between Rural Prisons and companies, individuals, etc. in organic farming. Also, it can promote **certified training of prisoners in organic farming**, as a basis for future vocational rehabilitation (cooperation with Academic, Educational Institutions, the Region, etc.).
4. Municipalities can contribute, **through their social structures** (homeless shelters, social feedlines, etc.) to the identification, characterization, and categorization of vulnerable groups orientation towards Social & Organic farming actions
5. **Independent legal entities** (e.g. KETHEA in Greece) can contribute by including Social & Organic farming practices in collaboration with private farms with a financial incentive



6. The private sector can contribute **by adding Social & Organic farming practices to increase their Environmental**, social and governance indicators (ESGs), through some direct or indirect financial incentive.
7. **The tourism industry should be associated with Social & Organic farming.** Especially in Greece, large hotels usually have gardens and productive land (vegetable gardens, fruit, other). It is excellent advertising and will mainly promote environmental and health claims. Social & Organic farming combined with agritourism services could be a potential new source of income for the farming household. This opportunity could be crucial for small farmers: in fact, it could provide the additional income required to enable them to continue, thereby reducing the risk of land abandonment.
8. The establishment of SOF local markets where SO farmers can sell directly to costumers.
9. The **provision of an official labelling system** to avoid fraud and negative practices.

Impact

The PRP made some suggestions on how to improve the impact of the policy to support SOF.

First of all, the willingness of decision-makers to promote social organic farming will only be facilitated if they:

- are adequately involved in qualified projects/strategies/initiatives on these issues;
- are convinced of its usefulness in providing services that are genuinely linked to the needs of the population;
- will find social farming offers economically viable in the service market;
- have access to qualified studies that can reassure them of the value of these activities;
- directly know (also through training/dissemination programs and the dissemination of the results of the SOURCE project) with examples of successful models already operating in the different reference realities;

It will also be useful to formulate a proposal for a document (a kind of vademecum) containing the following elements:

- an updated inventory of social farming practices, collected at national level (with the involvement of professional agricultural organisations);
- a collection of significant social farming projects, presented by individual farms or farm networks and financed by the Rural Development Programme;
- a simplified handbook (addressed directly to farmers) on planning social farming services, formulating bureaucratic procedures for setting up agreements with public and private bodies in their territory and beyond, setting up business networks.



Furthermore, in order to involve the decision-makers and support them it is proposed to organise a remote workshop (atelier) of participatory planning to collect and classify:

- the multifunctional/social services and the ways of continuously increasing the number of users, already successfully tested in some realities, in each of the partner countries.
- the most attractive and effective paths, already experimented, to realise opportunities for work and social inclusion of people in difficulty.
- the territorial links between public and private subjects in search of new spaces for further entrepreneurial intervention, to be shared and consolidated.

Importance of action

Even if, currently social farming is not yet a significant phenomenon in terms of the number of farms, it represents a growing social innovation, especially in marginal areas (hill and mountain areas, small villages) and its the benefits for society concern **social sustainability**.

This social sustainability consists of the following actions:

- the promotion of social inclusion in order to ensure the survival of the rural population;
- the building of new bridges between rural and urban areas;
- the re-establishment of links between local resources and needs, the economy and social issues;
- the stimulation of innovation in order to re-adapt traditional attitudes (subsistence farming and mutual aid networks); helping to meet new needs arising from the socio-economic crisis;
- the effort to preserve local knowledge by sharing and organising collective learning processes.

For more information, please refer to the full version of the Policy Recommendation Plan in Social & Organic Farming

<https://www.socialorganicfarming.eu/>



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