



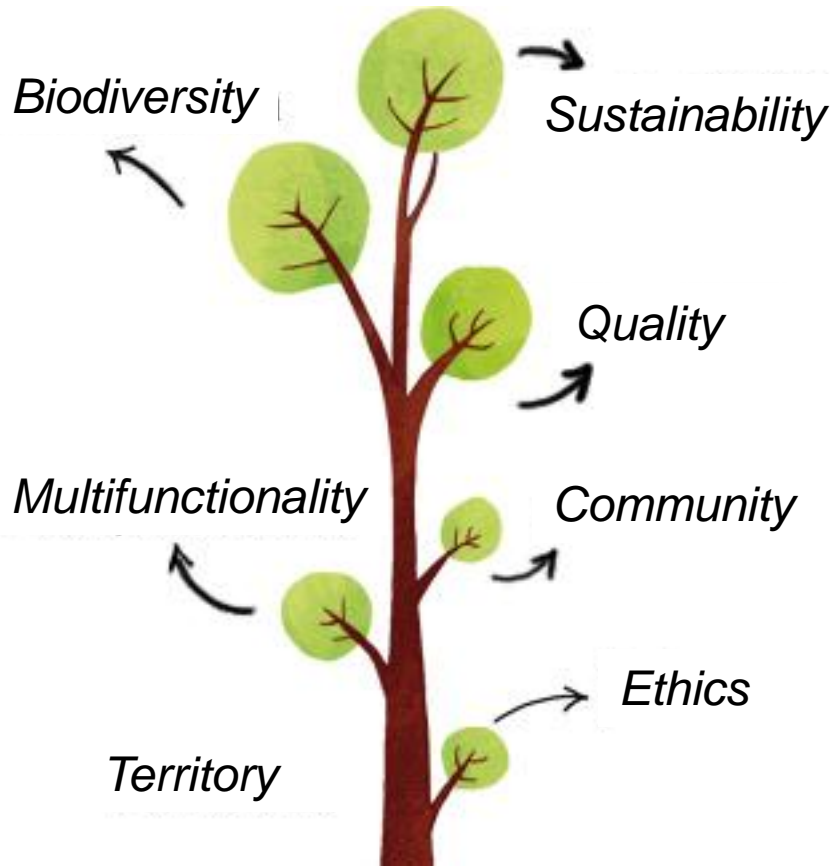
Forum Nazionale Agricoltura Sociale

# **Sustainability, biodiversity and territory: the Social Agriculture role**

**Alma Sinibaldi**  
**FORUM AGRICOLTURA SOCIALE PUGLIA**  
**[www.forumagricolturasociale.it](http://www.forumagricolturasociale.it)**

The EU now defines social farming as "**the crucial link between sustainable agriculture, food safety, territorial balance, preservation of landscape and environment, as well as food supplies**" and confirms the status of privileged subject for Welfare policies of its Member States.

## Food safety and territorial balance



That statement is linked to an ancient attitude of agriculture – which has always been characterised by a link between farm and rural family and by solidarity practices and mutual aid – that actually looks like a further variation of the concept of multifunctionality, able to respond to more needs of our society, especially because of the changes that affect and will affect the Welfare system.

## An operational tool for Welfare policies



# Italian laws and Regional acts

In 2015, Italy has adopted a law (n. 141 of 18 August):  
"Provisions relating to Social Agriculture".

But only recently, on 27 January, it was held the inaugural meeting of the Social Farming National Observatory, which involves the participation of representatives of central and regional authorities, farmers' organizations and organizations and associations working in the social farming field.

Yet the **first experiences of Social Farming in Italy** can be identified in the activity of many social agricultural cooperatives arose in the 70s of last century aimed at providing employment for people with difficulties of different kinds.

# Appropriate legislation for an innovative policy

On a regional level the situation is more complex and articulated.

Waiting for national legislation, in recent years, some regions such as Lombardy, Umbria, Sardinia or the Veneto, have approved their measures to try to regulate the sector.

Other regions, such as Lazio, did it immediately after the enactment of the national law, following assiduously the guidelines.

Regions such as Emilia Romagna, Sicily or Apulia are without a local law, although social farming is an articulated, consolidated or otherwise rapidly growing reality.

# Law no. 141

## August 18, 2015

Under national law 141/2015, the Social Agriculture:

- It includes the set of practices carried out on a territory by agricultural enterprises, cooperatives and other organizations that combine the use of agricultural resources with the social activities
  - finalizes its activities to generate inclusive benefits, promote therapeutic programs, rehabilitation and care;
  - It supports the social and occupational integration of disadvantaged population groups and people at risk of marginalization;
- It promotes substantially and continuously the social cohesion.

Those activities are carried out in cooperation with social and health services and the competent public bodies of the territory and monitored through periodic checks.

# Social farming

## Sustainability 100%

Inspired by the values of solidarity and inclusion, social farming is environmentally-friendly, aimed at the conservation of biodiversity, the preservation of soil and water resources.

But above all it is an instrument of knowledge, environmental education and involvement of people at high risk of social exclusion.



# **A biological choice to overcome the handicap**

These farms are companies where there is cultivation, very often organically, breeding animals and manufacturing some products.

The difference from other agricultural activities is that there are working people, who thanks to agriculture, find new areas of thought and action. People with physical or mental handicaps, with addiction to alcohol or drugs, ex-prisoners, and maybe even who doesn't find a new job for years.

The AIAB (Associazione Italiana per l'Agricoltura Biologica) is among the Italian promoters of bio-social agriculture, creator of several educational and rehabilitation projects of great social value.

This association has long been involved in a process of awareness and territorial promotion of new biological agro-social enterprises.



# Italian laws and Regional acts



Italy has 400 social agricultural cooperatives (out of 14,000 total), involved in the whole chain of the agricultural sector, from cultivation, to food industry, to commerce, with 4,000 employees all over the national territory (out of 320,000 total), and a production value of 200 million euro.

Social Agriculture is therefore a practice of local development socially, economically and ecologically sustainable. As part of multifunctional agriculture, it can offer a wide range of services aimed at pursuing the welfare of all citizens and then responds to a wider need for welfare policies.

# The farm becomes «agri-social»

The most common form of aggregation that allows the application of such policies, is the so-called "agri-social company" also known as "social farm". It is a traditional farmhouse, or a herd of various kinds of animals, economically and financially sustainable, and managed by one or more associated persons.



# The emerging role of social connection

The company carries out its farm or zootechnical activity to sell its products on the market, but it does it in an "integrated" way and for the benefit of disadvantaged people, residents in fragile areas, and in collaboration with public institutions.



# A “multifunctional” pact for weaker parties

This type of social association can be defined as "multifunctional," because it makes therapeutic, rehabilitation and reintegration paths for the involved people.

The activities of the operators involved in socially useful agricultural initiatives can be articulated in different ways.





# Therapy and rehabilitation in contact with earth

About the therapeutic  
and rehabilitative profile,  
the most popular  
animal assisted therapies  
are:

**pet therapy**  
**hippotherapy**  
**onotherapy.**

There are also  
**horticultural** therapeutic  
activities.



# Acquiring skills and job prospects

Social farming is also an instrument of re-appropriation by the individual of its social role from a professional perspective, since one of the purposes is to facilitate the reintegration of those involved in the labor market through the acquisition of agricultural techniques and practices.



# A dynamic reality made by women and youth

The dynamism of this reality is evidenced by the massive presence of young people and women with high levels of education, even from non-agricultural sectors. In fact, the most common agri-social practices are characterised by typically highly labor-intensive farming: they practice the direct sale or through G.A.S., always preferring the short chain.

There is considerable diversification of business: mix of complementary activities as catering, agri-tourism, teaching along with environmental protection.





# Social farms: culture and solidarity

Social farms are farms that combine agriculture and a project with a social background, organizing cultural, educational and training activities intended primarily for people in difficult situations.





# Farmers serving society

Social farms, while maintaining their entrepreneurial nature, spend a part of their activities to the collaboration with schools, organizations and associations to organize valid paths in the therapeutic and rehabilitative field.



# Production, fun and rehabilitation

Some activities of social farms:

- involving people marginalized or unemployed in typical production;
- organizing recreational and educational workshops dedicated to social services users;
- organizing specific animal assisted therapy paths;
  - organizing sports programs.



Standards of social farms:

- covered environments, equipped for groups reception and entertainment, also with rest areas;
- facilities and equipment for recreational or therapeutic activities through the use of animals or agricultural productions;
- services in which guests feel active and involved to get physical, mental, social and psychological benefits, through the growth of self-esteem.

## Basic requirements of a social Farm



# CONCLUSIONS

This kind of Agriculture combines social ethics of production and social functions.

It includes a plurality of experiences not attributable to an unitary model, the type of organization, activities carried out, recipients, funding sources, but the experiences are characterised by the integration of social health activities, education, training and employment, recreation, directed particularly to the disadvantaged population or people at marginalization risk.