Social Agriculture – Alternative Type of Production

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Abstract: Social farming combines care of the land with care of people. The utilisation of agriculture farms as an elements of healthcare, social rehabilitation could be a solution for farm diversification. Working with animals and close to nature has long been considered as having a therapeutic value. Social farming is based on this therapeutic value and provides activities on agriculture farms to persons with special needs and offers an alternative to the more traditional health and care services. This report is a description and more an overview cost-benefit analysis of social farming. Such type of analysis is beyond the scope of this article, which serves to inform on the benefits and the related costs of providing supports by way of social agriculture.

Key words: Social agriculture · green care · diversification of farming · economic valuation

JEL Classification: Q28

1 Introduction

Social agriculture is known as a social farming, green care, farming for health. It's a form of partnership between farmer and several communities concerning social, health and education. The agriculture production supply lot of activities which could support social handicapped person with the own importance. The dependence of animals and plants on the mans care could create very important feeling. This feeling could very helpful especially for young people with behaviour disturbance. Agriculture is a regular activity with very tight connection with nature. Such type of regularly work could be used as a proper basis for improving of mental and physical health. Very important is also the use of specific types of animals like horses, sheep, dogs. This animals cloud positively reacts on proper care and treatment and could arrange proper sensitive feedback. Social Farming utilises farming and agriculture as a therapeutic tool to provide health, social or educational care services. With respect to society social agriculture could be potential investment in the future.

Who is coming to social farm

Clients of services span a range of vulnerable groups including people suffering with mental health problems, physical disabilities, learning disabilities and drug/alcohol addition as well as adults and young people on probation. In the over-technical civilisation are lot of high educated and positioned people looking for escape from the daily stress. The responsible work with animals and plants, where you can identify directly the reaction and you result could be very often used as a healing means (SoFar 2007).

Very important for the providing of the social services is also communication and collaboration with specialised medical personnel ad necessary type of visitors. At the same time we could identify visitors from the education The educational activities are in socialising process very important.

In much cases is the social agriculture connected with religious organisations. They can support the whole social program and also provide the selection of clients. Very often are farmers themselves tight connected with the Church.

Benefits of social agriculture

In the Europe a wide range of people avail of social agriculture services including people with several health difficulties and people with disabilities like older people, children, people availing of drug/alcohol rehabilitation. However, the role of agriculture in social system is often neither understood nor recognized and as a result not scientifically quantified. Appropriate quantifying the benefits of social agriculture is necessary aim for the research. Hine et al. (2007) highlighted the shortage of economic data to accurately estimate the cost implications and total savings for social and healthcare from social agriculture (Kinsella 2014).

Nevertheless, much of the focus is placed on the health and social benefits for possible clients and also the economic and non-economic benefits for farm families who provide the services. Dessein and Bock (2010) in the report on ‘The Economics of Green Care in Agriculture’ examine the monetary and non-monetary benefits (and costs) of
green care (social farming) from the perspectives of multifunctional agriculture, public health and social inclusion. Some of the crucial benefits include: containing health costs or providing more extended care contributing to the viability of farms, creating employment and benefiting the rural areas, contribution to new alternatives in health care and treatment, contribution to work training and capacity development to individuals, and enhanced social inclusion, self esteem and quality of life for service users (Kinsella 2014).

**Benefits to common society**

Social agriculture supports may provide for more efficient use of public finances and lead to a higher net social value for health care services through lower costs and higher benefits (Dessein and Bock, 2010).

Social agriculture can bring positive contribution to whole society by providing a wider range of health care opportunities to service users and greater access to the therapeutic qualities of nature. It is recognized that social farming can contribute to the fostering of a more inclusive and people focused society which benefits everyone. Social farming takes place in the open and engagement in these activities allows individuals with specific needs to demonstrate to the general public their abilities, which can lead to a greater understanding by the public of their needs and capabilities (Di lacovo and O’Connor, 2009). At an economic level, there are benefits to the rural economy from more diversified farm incomes and new employment opportunities. The involvement of clients/service users in activities on farms reduces the isolation for farmers and provides them with work companions in the daily farm activities. Experience gained in social farming enhances the employability of participants and increases their potential availability to participate in the general workforce (Dessein and Bock, 2010).

**2 Methods**

One of the important indicators for measuring efficiency of social agriculture could be the Social Return on Investment (SROI). It is an innovative way to measure and account for the value you create with your work. The methodology is relatively new, but it is attracting considerable interest from third sector organizations, government, funders, investors and commissioners because of its ability to tell a compelling story of change. This results in a ratio of total benefits (asum of all the outcomes) to total investments (Miller and Hall 2012).

Very important is to establish a framework of valuation indicators to evaluate an economic value of such social services. Such valuation will be a matter our future studies.

**3 Research results**

As you can see from the above showed chart, the social agriculture is mostly developed in Holland and Italy. Other countries just start with developing of the structure.

![Figure 1 Social farming in Czech republic](source: UCD Dublin)
In the Czech Republic we can find at present in pioneer status of Social farming matters. There are going few separate projects joining activities from social and agriculture parts. it mostly happens with very weak acceptance of official authorities and low either financial or methodical support. Common expression “Social farming” is almost unknown in the country, and you can only find some websites linked with our NGO and the agriculture authorities starts already the common discussion concerning the matter. There exist already same separate projects. Sometimes providers of Social programs know each other, but only in non-formal way – they spontaneously create unofficial community. Social farming is not still quite recognized as a distinctive topic to write articles or publications of it. Possible central governmental financial support of Employment office causes, that usual clients of Social farming programme are mostly persons with physical handicap. Target group is created by those the employer gets financial support for. Then these clients are described as disabled persons and must be so recognized by authorized physician. These persons are first trained in to at least get a job in open market of jobs and then assisted to keep it. The support is organized and fully covered by Employment office and lasts up to 24 months. It is rather matter of employment than social issue.

4 Conclusions

The evidence from other European countries confirms the potential for social farming from the perspectives of service provision. However, the future of social farming in Czech Republic requires a greater acceptance by all stakeholders - farmers, policy makers, service users, service providers/agencies and health authorities of the role it has to play in supporting individuals with specific needs. Social agriculture seems to be a potential possibility of agriculture farm development. Obviously additional economic resources for supporting individuals to engage in social agriculture are not available at present and require a change in state budget allocations and at firs in their priorities.

References


