

BENCHMARKING STUDY OF EXISTING POSSIBILITIES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL FARMING IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

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Received 15 April 2023, Revised 2 July 2023, Accepted 25 July 2023

Abstract: The paper in the form of short communication deals with the phenomenon of social farming. This is a form of involvement of disadvantaged people in the integration process through agricultural activities. Based on the results of documentary analysis and benchmarking method, we presented experiences from the other European countries. In the Czech Republic, the concept is not widespread, not anchored in legislation and not supported by the public administration. Our proposals were aimed at using existing legislative possibilities, not at proposals that require changes to legal standards or the focus of financial support in the form of subsidies. We propose to use certain tools, namely a social business model or cooperation between a social service provider and a farmer. Furthermore, it is a suitable form of business for public beneficial entities, namely associations and especially institutes. We see suitability in the way of tax optimization.

Keywords: social farming, social farm, agriculture, care farming, care farms, benchmarking, social entrepreneurship, legal forms

1. Introduction

Social farming is a set of activities that use agricultural resources, both animal and plant, to create social services in rural or semi-rural areas, such as rehabilitation, therapy, sheltered jobs, lifelong learning and other activities contributing to social integration. As a concept, social farming originates from traditional rural self-help networks that were well established in rural areas before the modernization of agriculture and the rise of the public welfare system. The European Economic and Social Committee defines social farming as a multifunctional approach to agriculture that combines agriculture with social services/health care at local level. It can help improve social and environmental awareness in line with social and solidarity principles (The European Economic and Social Committee, 2012). Currently, there are four main areas of

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social farming: a) rehabilitation and therapeutic activities b) work inclusion and social integration c) educational activities d) personal support services.

The concept of social farming in its current form came to the Czech Republic mainly thanks to the Multifunctional Agriculture in Europe project, which took place in the period 2011–2014 (Hudcová, 2018). In 2014, the Ministry of Agriculture established an interdepartmental Working Committee for Social farming, composed of representatives of the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, representatives of the academic, for-profit and non-profit sectors (Ujj et al., 2017). The working committee deals with the educational activities such as the inclusion of the subject “Social farming” in the field of multifunctional agriculture, as well as the inclusion of social farming in implemented projects and the presentation of social farming at a number of national and international conferences. The situation of grasping social farming in the country is not defined, the basic framework is not defined.

The subject of our study is, based on the results of a comparative analysis of the environment of social agriculture in selected countries, to present a possible understanding of the concept of social agriculture in the conditions of the Czech Republic.

The aim of our paper is to present the concept from the point of view of foreign experiences and to identify the possibilities of following these experiences within the Czech Republic with regard to the current legislative situation. The findings are based on documentary analysis of relevant professional sources, synthesis of knowledge and resulted in logical conclusions, which were formulated as proposals for the application of existing options. Our process of use in processing this paper was iterative.

2. Theoretical background

Numerous authors agree that the concept of "social agriculture" is very broad and depends on the way it is organized in the given countries, how it is enshrined in legislation, on the method of financing, the profile of the entrepreneur, etc. Social agriculture is partially respected by European policy, but the policy there is not an overarching one (Mammadova et al., 2021). A specific starting point for social agriculture in its current form cannot be easily determined in the European area, due to the diversity not only of the above, but also of the concept of social and health care. As part of the theoretical understanding of the topic, we proceeded to define social agriculture according to the following selected relevant sources.

Social farming is rather difficult to include in agricultural economics, and therefore it is also difficult to create effective political instruments. Similarities can be found in three economic models – Schumpeter's innovation model, Corporate Social Responsibility and the multifunctionality of agriculture (Macri, Perito, 2010), which is supported, for example, by subsidies for organic farming (Redlichová et al., 2021).

According to Schumpeter's model, innovation of agricultural farms is very important. Thanks to innovation, the company can better survive on the market and expand its business. In a capitalist system, the driving force behind the economy is making a profit. Social farming can be interpreted as a product innovation to satisfy a new demand arising from a postmodern society. Profit maximization is still the main driving factor of the economy, however, with the Corporate Responsibility approach, there is a need to limit economic profit and include social and environmental benefits as well. Social farming could be interpreted as a tool to involve social interests in the purposes of economic activities.

Thanks to social farming, externalities are increased that contribute to the improvement of life in the countryside and thus, act as a prevention tool against the depopulation of rural areas. In the case of innovation, the public administration has the task of promoting free competition, which creates a competitive environment for farm development. From the point of view of joint responsibility of companies, the problem is information asymmetry, when one party has more or better information than the others. This unfair situation results in an imbalance in the market that can even result in market failure. In the context of the multifunctionality of social farming, it is necessary to support the production of positive externalities and public goods in the form of social well-being and cohesion (Macri, Perito,

2010). The trend of transformation of the agricultural economy in Europe was first noted in Great Britain (Ilbery, Bowler, 1998) and he called the new forms of the economy post-productivism or multifunctional agricultural regime. Post-productivism can be considered the opposite of productivism and essentially changed part of the agricultural operation in three aspects: from intensification to extensification, from concentration to diversification, from specialization to diversification (Wilson, 2002).

Social innovation is also mentioned by Elsen (2019), who conceives social farming as a process of social innovation that mobilizes the resources of rural agricultural areas in response to local social needs that the state and the market are unable to satisfy. The concept of social farming has developed primarily as a result of the transformation in the agricultural sector, from productive to multifunctional, and the transformation of health and social services, from institutionalized to community care (DeKrom, Dessein, 2013). According to Soo Lim (2017), social farming is considered as an innovative approach to solving social needs. Social farming refers to all activities that use agricultural resources including plants, animals and the countryside to provide various social services such as therapy, rehabilitation, employment, education and local development.

Also according to other authors (García-Llorente et al., 2016), social farming has the potential to draw on the connection between human well-being and nature. Contact with nature has a positive effect on health indicators by reducing stress, facilitating social contact and providing opportunities for personal development. As found by connecting economic actors, local communities and public authorities, social farming can offer innovative solutions for the provision of social and ecosystem services in rural and peri-urban areas.

Macri and Perito (2010) make a comparison where, in contrast to agritourism, social farming deals with the use of natural resources for social services, believing that the natural cycles and rhythm of the countryside have a therapeutic effect. Furthermore, e.g., Tulla et al (2014) perceives social farming as a process of integration and empowerment of groups at risk of social exclusion through their participation in agricultural activities and food processing. Integration includes job creation or vocational training, together with therapeutic measures.

Adding further concepts to the topic is a study by Elings et al. (2022). He mentions terms such as "Green care", "Care farming" or "Green care in agriculture". The fundamental difference between social farming, "Green care in agriculture" and "Care farming" is that the latter two terms provide the promotion of health through therapeutic approaches that are in contact with animals, plants and nature in general. These approaches are characterized by the fact that they provide services that the beneficiaries often pay for themselves. In contrast, social farming is a sector of the social economy that focuses primarily on the social and work integration of people and the commercial production of quality food with the aim of creating viable business projects through product marketing and supporting the social role of these projects.

In the case of the concept of social farming, we can talk about a retro-innovative solution, and at the same time, the overall organization of procedures according to the social security model differs in each country. This form of farming is discussed in the fields of social sciences, health or agricultural and socio-economic sciences. There are social farming projects and practices around the world that have different organizational structures and outcomes. One can encounter procedures firmly anchored in precisely defined rules of social care. However, procedures based on active community participation are also very common. Practices arise according to specific cultural and regulatory scenarios, the most important being the organization of social security at the national level. Agricultural resources such as plants or animals are pooled at the farm level to provide social and health services to people in need in an informal setting. In this case, great importance is placed on diversification on farms, where they try to overcome the decline in the economic value of produced commodities with other activities. In rural communities, we can encounter practices that can also be considered social farming. These are self-help and mutually supportive social practices that use natural and agricultural resources (Francesco Di Iacovo, 2020).

Social farms are typically found in rural areas. Mitchell et al. (2021), however, pointed out the health benefits of social farming in their work and came up with the idea of bringing it closer to cities and

the urban population. According to the authors, social farming could help healthcare and especially social facilities manage the onslaught of the Earth's population growth and at the same time, the aging of the population (especially in developed countries). Above all, the urban population is exposed to pollution and faces respiratory, cardiovascular and other diseases to a much greater extent as a result. However, social farms that would benefit them are beyond their reach. Mitchell et al. (2021) therefore advocated the building of community gardens and urban farms, which should provide a therapeutic service to older people with mental and other illnesses, help integrate them into the community, provide them with support and a sense of belonging.

An interesting perspective on the concept of social agriculture is offered by authors such as Parr (2007) and Leck (2013), who pointed to erroneous arguments about cheap labour and the possible "exploitation" of clients working on farms. They emphasized the necessity of perceiving the considerable added value that arises for the participants and, above all, the fact that by providing support to the client on the part of the farmer, on the contrary, profitability may decrease rather than increase.

It is also necessary to mention that there are also different labels for social agriculture, e.g., care farming (Hine et al., 2008), farming for health (Hassink and Van Dijk, 2006; Farstad et al., 2021).

Based on a summary of different approaches, social farming is generally considered as a set of experiences that uses local agricultural and natural resources to improve and promote health, education, social and labour inclusion and to empower groups at risk of social exclusion (Jarábková et al., 2022, Elings et al., 2022). It is intended for people with specific work needs, e.g., people with disabilities, long-term unemployed, people living in poverty or people who have been released from prison. Furthermore, people who need therapy or rehabilitation (people with mental illness, victims of violence or people suffering from addictions) or children with special educational needs.

3. Methodology

In order to fulfil the objective, it was necessary to carry out, in the first step, a comparative study of selected countries of the European Union, namely Germany, Spain, France, the Netherlands, Ireland, Italy, Belgium, Austria, Slovakia, Poland and Hungary. In the second step, we synthesized the results of the analysis and conclusions were formulated based on these results. We justify the selection of countries on the one hand by being part of the so-called Visegrad Four (Slovakia, Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic), and then by countries where we can consider the concept of social agriculture to be established (found out according to the results of the subsequent analyses). In the countries of the European Union that we did not list as researched, we did not find enough information in the WoS and Scopus databases for a relevant analysis.

Professional publications on the topic of social agriculture from the WoS and Scopus databases were used as sources of information for the development of a comparative analysis. In order to increase the explanatory power of the results and increase the clarity of the text, the summary report was incorporated into the summary table.

4. Results of analysis

Although research on aspects of social agriculture has been carried out since around the turn of the millennium, there is still no data available, both at the level of the EU and states or regions. The data is thus inconsistent, fragmented and even outdated without the possibility to form a clear picture of the industry (Briers et al., 2021).

In the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, social entrepreneurship currently represents a negligible part of national economies. The social integration of disadvantaged groups represents a complex challenge at the national and international level in Europe and the world. In the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, i.e., also in the Czech Republic, there is a need to deepen knowledge about social farming, as it concerns the complex transformation of agriculture and rural areas to provide socially and ecologically sustainable models. Compared to what results under the dominant agribusiness model, farms

can serve as convenient sites and centres for social activities that are desirable for a wide range of participants who can benefit from both farm work and social interaction (Chovanec et al., 2022). In this way, we offer a look at countries that are well established on the social farming market, so that we can identify opportunities for the Czech Republic in the field of social farming.

Experience from Germany:

As in other countries, in Germany as well, institutions were created to respond to the growing number of people in need of care. Among the most famous are the so-called "protected workshops. Monotonous assembly line work was not viewed positively, while outdoor and agricultural activities were seen as beneficial. The integration of people with specific needs into agricultural production processes, as a means of enabling social participation, appeared as a political and social phenomenon that combines diverse potentials. (Hemingway et al., 2016).

Social farming in Germany is anchored in the social welfare system (Landwirtschaftskammer NRW, 2015; DASoL, 2021).

According to Diconne and Hassler, (2020): Social farms are registered more in the former so-called West Germany than in the then East. The reason lies in the historical development, namely that in the former German Democratic Republic, there were rather larger cooperatives and small farms were rather exceptions, these farms were then the basis for the future anchoring of the principles of social farming (Schöne, 2005). The so-called courtyards (die Höfe) were abundantly distributed in the former Germany and their owners were characterized by closeness to nature, social integration of people, and self-sufficiency. These formed a natural transition to the idea of social farming.

In terms of legislative anchoring, there is a support system for farmers within the framework of social agriculture in Germany. In Germany, there are three degrees of "institutionalization" of farms. Farms that do not fall under the social welfare system, i.e., they do not have professionally trained staff, they are considered more of an alternative, they receive only a small part of support in the form of care allowances or social benefits, and their financing is mainly based on the sale of food and agricultural products. Their financing is approximately 60–100% from the sale of their own products. The next level is the so-called cooperatives with relatively professionally educated personnel, and the employment of socially disadvantaged persons is covered either as rent or subsidies from the state from social insurance. In this case, the financing is about 50% through the sale of their products and 50% from the state. In the event that a social farm has the appropriate status, it is a so-called incorporated enterprise, then by employing so-called excluded or disabled socially disadvantaged persons, the farms are entitled to support, which includes allowances for accommodation and wages. The amount of support amounts to 100–300 euros and is provided to a social farm. These farms of social institutions are financed by 72 to 90% of care contributions from the state. These are often e.g., Diakonia, nursing homes, etc. It must be said that not all social farms have this status. (Diconne and Hassler, 2020).

Experience from Spain:

The area where social agriculture is establishing itself in the network of the Spanish economy is Catalonia. In recent years, numerous social farming initiatives have emerged, creating ever larger and denser networks of cooperation.

We are based on the study by Tulla et al. (2018). In Catalonia, where the study was conducted, the number of agricultural holdings and livestock farms decreased, from 68,944 (1997) to 59,097 (2013), with small businesses disappearing and large ones expanding. However, this situation contrasts with the agricultural multifunctionality of some rural and suburban areas, where local agro-ecological development, social innovation and the development of quality products are encouraged. Of the investigated 161 subjects dedicated to social farming, 46% were focused on the social and professional involvement of disadvantaged people and 45% were focused on so-called social gardens (garden centre projects), whose existence responds to social insecurity and emergency situations caused by the crisis. The least frequent services are therapy or social rehabilitation (5%) and so-called vocational training (4%) for young people

who left school early and are being prepared for employment. The most common group using the concept of social farming are people with disabilities or mental illnesses, people suffering from poverty and the unemployed, abused women, the homeless, etc. Currently, there is an expansion for the elderly, as thanks to a change in legislation, it was possible to create "community gardens" for pensioners. The most common legal form that provides social farming is agencies supported by the state administration (37%) and non-profit organizations (37%). Private companies then make up 14%. All projects involve cooperation between the public and private sectors. The model in which the principles of social farming are most often applied are the so-called Special Employment Centres (31%) where paid work is provided to persons with disabilities and their integration into a protected working environment is guaranteed. Sheltered workplaces represent 13% of the total number of entities and they focus primarily on the social and work integration of disadvantaged people and prepare them for the labour market. 27% are social service projects established by local public administration bodies, which linked the employment of disadvantaged people to the garden centre. In Spain, the support of social farming activities is enshrined in legislation.

Experience from France:

In France, social agriculture is also called a part of the so-called social and solidarity economy, and it is legislatively anchored in the Law on Social and Solidarity Economy from 2014. This law anchors and expands the form of social business in France, through which social agriculture is legislated. It was adopted primarily in order to facilitate access to financing and public contracts for the actors of the "social and solidarity economy". Social agriculture is linked to solidarity, education and the involvement of various disadvantaged people in the economy. In France, there is an extensive horticultural and fruit and vegetable tradition that has helped alleviate the living conditions of the disadvantaged since the 19th century. This activity is oriented more as a support than as a profitable business plan. However, this does not preclude its orientation towards self-sufficiency and less dependence on subsidies. A characteristic feature is that most of the products are produced ecologically and are sold directly to final consumers, at weekly fairs and markets or through shopping carts regularly carried out by beneficiaries and association members (Forga and Valiente, 2015). Workers are hired with the support of public funds. In France, there are extensive national and regional networks mainly concerned with projects of "gardens" ("jardins" in French, which are social farming facilities devoted mainly to fruit and vegetable, aromatic, medicinal and ornamental plantations) and educational farms.

In France, projects are emerging precisely for the support and development of social farming, but also for them to share all their experience with public institutions. In France, especially agro/ecotourism is often associated with social farming. (Šťastná et al, 2022; McIntyre, 2018) Agrotourism is understood as an activity where two sectors in the professional, organizational or economic field are combined. More than tourism, it is associated with agriculture. For example, in France, a great example of agritourism is the Auvergne region, where regional institutions tried to increase employment and income of local farmers (Marsat et al, 2013).

Experience from Poland:

Poland has been promoting a policy of sustainable development of agriculture and rural areas for years. Through a bottom-up approach led by local action groups, operations and investments were aimed at improving access to public services and the inclusion of residents living in disadvantaged areas and improving the availability of public services, especially care services. The model of social farms is therefore one of the ways to realize political goals. There is a slow but visible popularization of the multifunctional farm model, especially among the small business group. Subsistence businesses mostly operate activities such as: agritourism, artisanal production, food processing, and agricultural contracting, while aquaculture, renewable energy generation, and direct marketing were more popular among commodity businesses. One of the most important challenges in Poland is the unfavourable demographic development, which indicates a significant increase in the share of older people in society (Ujj et al., 2017).

Changes in the economic, demographic and social spheres have a great influence on the Polish countryside. Considerable complications are also observed in the field of sustainability, which are directly related to the environment. It is precisely the issue of agriculture in rural Poland that affects not only the economy, but also social and environmental policy areas (Czapiewska, 2020). A common type of social farming found in Poland is farm care. Breeding animals or growing any crops is the basis for fulfilling the meaning of therapy (so-called agrotherapy). Patients are involved in all the work both in the field and in the activities required for raising farm animals. Help in the production of subsequent products is also an essential part. For patients, this has both an impact on their psychological health and an improvement in their physical well-being. They can also experience traditional activities, crafts and rituals that are characteristic of the region. Farms offer various social services and activities that are directly related to the development of the given agricultural area. The variety of positions, professions and work on social farms can be seen across Poland.

In particular, Poland found inspiration in the practice of social farming in the Netherlands. During the years 2016–2018, a pilot project was developed in the Kuyavian-Pomeranian Voivodeship called Green care – care farms in the Kuyavian-Pomeranian Voivodeship. Ensuring care for 225 people with disabilities and improving the powers of agricultural enterprises in the social area was the basic goal of the entire trial project. More than half of the actors were elderly, so it was necessary to provide activities especially for seniors. This situation shows the issue of population aging and the necessity of providing social services for senior citizens. In 2018, the previous project was followed up by another called Care in the yard – care farms in the Kuyavian-Pomeranian Voivodeship. The basic goal was to expand social services on farms for people with disabilities and also to ensure the availability of social agricultural enterprises (Czapiewska, 2020). The concept of a care farm in Poland assumes that social care and services are provided on the basis of the farm's infrastructure and are linked to agricultural activity (the farm should have animals and agricultural crops). A care farm must be established according to existing legal regulations (Ujj et al., 2017).

Experience from Hungary:

In Hungary, the first social farms began to appear after 2000. In 2003, a government program was launched to support the establishment of farms that provided support to autistic patients and their family members, and this led to the creation of about 15 men with autism, specific services and employment programs. With dwindling financial resources, the growth and development of such autistic settlements stagnated (Jakubinyi, 2015). From 2005 to 2015, several social farm initiatives were launched independently with different focus on target communities, including: community farm development programs for unemployed Roma, farm education programs for schoolchildren and social farms for the disabled with agricultural production, processing and ecotourism activities. (Ujj et al., 2017).

According to Ujj et al. (2017), the Hungarian government recognized the potential of social farms in around 2015. However, no comprehensive development strategy regarding social farms is foreseen. Administrative barriers still remain and the absence of formal training programs and/or curricula on social farming that could prepare future farmers to work with disadvantaged groups remains a problem. In order to support the social function of agriculture and at the same time the dependence of disadvantaged people, the Hungarian legislation needs to be completed. Currently, there is a lack of a legislative definition of social farming, the social service provided by social farms is not yet recognized. Rather, there are initiatives on farms related to the care of vulnerable groups. (Ujj, 2022). In addition, the community of small producers of rehabilitation farms has not yet been recognized as a legal entity, and the use of land by communities of rehabilitation farms has not yet been defined. In 2016, the Ministry of Agriculture established a Social Farm Working Group within the Interdepartmental Committee for Disability.

The situation in Slovakia:

Not long ago, the idea of social agriculture was rarely implemented here rather in the form of agrotherapy at entities providing social services (Jakubinyi, 2015). However, in 2018, the Act on Social Economy and

Social Business was adopted and this enabled the possibility of an institutionalized approach to the concept of social agriculture. In Slovakia, social farming entities can thus register as social enterprises. At present, there are approximately 153 enterprises registered in this way, which report activities within the framework of social agriculture. (Chrenková and Kováčik, 2023).

Experiences from other European countries:

Elings et al. (2022) published a market analysis of the most advanced players in the social farming market. These are the Netherlands, Belgium, Italy, Ireland and Austria, and briefly, we only give an overview:

The Netherlands: The provider of social farming is mainly private family farms. The main sources of funding are municipalities and the state. Municipalities pay for youth care and less intensive forms of support for adults through the general health care budget. More intensive forms of support for adults are paid for nationally under the Long-Term Care Act.

Belgium: Providers of social farming are primarily private family farms. Professional farmers providing social farming services and cooperating with a social organization receive a subsidy of up to EUR 40/day from the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, regardless of the number of participants.

Italy: The providers of social farming are mainly private family farms. If the participants live on a farm, the farmers receive money from health care, otherwise the state pays people with disabilities to work on the farm. RDP funding (from Rural Development Programme) supports the development of new public-private partnerships that can revitalize, develop and implement new on-farm practices. It does not apply to the farm or the participant.

Ireland: Shift from predominantly institutional farms to the emergence of private farms providing social agricultural activities. Farmers are often paid by contracting organisations.

Austria: Providers of social farming are mainly private family farms. Farmers receive money from participants. Most potential social farming participants receive public health and social insurance budgets/contributions that they can use to pay for social farming activities.

Situation in the Czech Republic:

Domestic agriculture is characterized by an extraordinary concentration of ownership of cultivated land, agricultural and food production. The anomaly of the domestic situation is highlighted by a European comparison. While the average size of agricultural holdings in the EU according to cultivated area is 16 hectares, the Czech Republic has by far the highest average area of 133 hectares per holding. They are no exception to land with an area of up to ten hectares. This results in the smallest share of family farms, as a lasting legacy of the liquidation of the peasantry in the 1950s. The consequences of forced collectivization on the Soviet model, which took place most harshly in this country in the former Soviet bloc, are partially manifested even after the fall of communism, i.e., after 1989. This is possible because the undertakers of socialist unified agricultural cooperatives started doing business after 1989 and are still doing business to this day, so-called "agromonopolies" at the expense of family farms, dominating for example in Austria or Poland. Another blow to family farms was the subsidy favouring of large enterprises during the government of the political movement called ANO, i.e., the years 2017–2021.

During the period from 1945 to about 1990, the intensification of agricultural production in combination with technological development and the transition to large-scale farms led to a significant reduction in the need for direct human labour and thus also a limitation of employment opportunities for disadvantaged persons. In addition to the elimination of opportunities for a number of target groups of current social farming from agricultural work, intensification and automation are other factors that have caused the outflow of rural residents to cities. In the 1990s, there were further changes with a positive impact on the possible potential of social farming, when alternative methods of farming began to appear again, the return of part of the agricultural land to the original owners and the restoration of the tradition of family farms, which emphasized non-production components. Agrotourism, organic agriculture and social farming began to develop only after the transformation and stabilization of agriculture at the turn of the millennium.

The concept of social farming in its current form came to the Czech Republic mainly thanks to the Multifunctional Agriculture in Europe project, which took place in the period 2011–2014. In 2014, the Ministry of Agriculture established an interdepartmental Working Commission for Social Farming, composed of representatives of the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, representatives of the academic, profit and non-profit sectors. The working committee deals with educational activities such as the inclusion of the subject “Social farming” in the field of Multifunctional Agriculture, as well as the inclusion of social farming in implemented projects and the presentation of social farming at a number of national and international conferences. In 2017, the National Association of Social farming was established as a platform for the connection and cooperation of its members.

Currently, 36 entities are registered on the Map of Social Farms (<http://www.socialni-zemedelstvi.cz/>), three of which no longer exist. Based on the analysis of these entities, it was found that 21 entities have the character of social services with the addition of "agriculture", which we can rather call agrotherapy than social farming, and 13 entities have the character of agricultural production with aspects of social farming – i.e., integration of disadvantaged persons. We can observe that the concept of social farming is not possible to use the entire structure of agricultural production. It is necessary to exclude the cultivation of large-volume crops, as there is a limiting use of agricultural mechanization and thus limited involvement of clients. On the contrary, suitable application is, for example, in fruit growing, vegetable growing, viticulture, i.e., those activities where there is still a large proportion of manual work. From the point of view of the involvement of clients of social farming in animal production, it seems optimal to keep smaller animals (sheep, goats, rabbits, poultry), or to keep bees. However, their involvement is also possible when breeding cattle, pigs or horses.

From this point of view, one of the suitable solutions could also be a connection with organic agriculture (Svobodová et al., 2022).

As a form of summary information, we present table 1. It includes all the above-mentioned countries, and for better clarity, we present the following determinants:

- legislative framework of social agriculture: we evaluated whether the concept of social agriculture is in any way anchored in national legislation,
- direct financing – whether the state pays directly to farmers,
- indirect funding – state funding through a social service provider,
- involvement of mainly the private sector,
- involvement of mainly the public sector.

5. How to use the current legislative situation in the context of the distribution of subjects in domestic agriculture?

Based on the description of situations from European countries that were not part of the so-called Eastern Bloc, it is possible to draw the conclusion that social farming is institutionalized here and respected by the public administration. We can see that the providers are mostly private family farms and these farms are then recipients of support for disadvantaged people. Programs are created specifically for social farms. The system is set up in a pro-solidarity manner and is functional.

Social farming is diversified as follows: Italy, France – Work integration provided by community organizations, e.g., Germany and Ireland – health and social care organizations provide community care services on care farms or the Netherlands, Norway and Belgium are private family farms that are linked to social care – financing by social contributions.

In the Czech Republic (CR), the concept of social farming is not very widespread. It cannot even be expanded, as the CR does not have a base of a sufficient number of family farms in the country, as follows from the above-mentioned historical description of the context of the development of the state of agriculture in the Czech Republic. Our stated opinions are identified with the conclusions of the prominent Czech scientist, Prof. Šťastná, mentioned in the text *Social Farming in Czechia, Actors and Barriers* (2022). It states, among other things, that social farming is not considered legislatively as an innovative approach

to agriculture and social inclusion in rural areas is still not a priority. Another obstacle is the insufficient financial evaluation of people working with medical or social disabilities. As stated by Štastná (2022), support from the public administration, education and awareness is needed. All this takes time. Our recommendation for improving the situation does not lead to the formulation of a recommendation to change the legislation, following a foreign model, but to the identification of existing options, i.e., how to use the currently valid legislation and forms of financial support.

In the Czech Republic, there are supports for so-called disadvantaged and transition regions, but these are conceived as support for local governments, e.g., for building infrastructure, school reconstruction, etc., not for creating sheltered workplaces. These supports flow from the Ministry for Regional Development. Another manifestation of looseness is that social farming belongs to the Ministry of Agriculture, but also to the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. At the regional level, the issue is rather addressed as support for social enterprises.

In the Czech Republic, however, we can also use certain tools, namely the model of social entrepreneurship or cooperation between a social service provider and a farmer. The law on social entrepreneurship is still not adopted. Formally, these services are provided in accordance with Act No. 108/2006 Coll., on social services, which can only be provided by a registered provider of social services. This form most often works in cooperation between a registered provider and a farm, which becomes the background for these services. However, obtaining authorization as a registered social service provider is a very demanding process that a farmer will certainly not undergo.

However, we consider the so-called Polish way to be the most suitable solution, applied to the current situation with the current legal framework. Add a farm to existing or newly created nursing homes, where the organization can not only become partially self-sufficient in food, but also strengthen the therapeutic effects arising from the involvement of clients in agricultural activities. Nursing homes can take the form of a public entity such as a contribution organization or the form of a private legal entity. As a form of business for the field of social farming, it is appropriate to use, for example, a legal entity – an institute or a social enterprise. The form of an association could be considered rather marginal and not very suitable, as well as a limited liability company. The Institute is a new form of legal entity that only came into being with the new Civil Code in 2014, established for the purpose of running a socially or economically useful activity using its personal and property component (Civil Code, 2012). The Institute is therefore a suitable form especially for providers of social and other various types of public benefit services. Here, we can see the certain suitability for social farming.

We do not recommend the form of a limited liability company, or a natural person running a business, for the reason of more appropriate tax optimization for so-called public benefit taxpayers (associations and institutions). It is possible to reduce the tax base by up to 300 thousand CZK, but a maximum of one million CZK. However, these funds must be used to fulfil a publicly beneficial goal (Income Tax Act, 1992). An association is less suitable, as it is a community of persons aiming at public benefit – as the main activity. As a secondary activity, or we can also call it economic, they can have entrepreneurial activities, in our case agriculture. However, social farming is primarily an agricultural activity with aspects of integration of disadvantaged people. In the same way, we can see limitations for contributory organizations. These are established only by the local government or the state. However, taxation is the same as for public benefit taxpayers.

However, we consider the form of social enterprise to be the most worthy. The concept of social entrepreneurship defines business activities that benefit society and the environment. It plays an important role in local development and creates job opportunities for people with health, social or cultural disadvantages. With societal changes, the concept of social entrepreneurship is gaining importance and developing in all EU countries and is increasingly being supported. Each country adapts it to its historical roots, tradition and culture. The first information appeared in the Czech Republic from the end of the nineties at the level of cooperative unions, a milestone for the development of the concept of social entrepreneurship was the creation of the National Thematic Network for the Social Economy in 2005 as part of the EQUAL program. In 2011, the main features of a social enterprise were listed under three main principles – social, economic and environmental, which were merged with the local dimension.

The Czech concept is broad and the emphasis is on entrepreneurship, i.e., the profitability of social entrepreneurship. Social enterprises include integrative social enterprises that employ disadvantaged people, but also those enterprises that are ecologically focused and support local development.

The condition for registration of a social enterprise is that minimum 40% of employees from the total number of employees of the social enterprise must come from disadvantaged people. Fixed-term contracts are included, while the minimum amount of fixed-term contracts (employment contract, agreement on work activities) per 1 employee from the target group is 0.4. The taxation of a social enterprise is as follows: In its founding documents, the applicant subscribes to the principles of social enterprise, in which, it is declared that minimum 51% of the profit will be reinvested back into the given company (i.e., a maximum of 49% can be divided between shareholders, partners, members or founders – the exact share can be determined by the applicant himself in his founding documents in the section on applying for the principles of social entrepreneurship)

There is a wide range of support specifically for social entrepreneurship and this could be a route for potential applicants to take. Currently, it can be used, for example: The European Social Fund microfinance instrument offers a subsidy program: Support for social entrepreneurship. There is also a program called the S program that offers loans with zero interest. It is also necessary to mention the Employment plus program, which targets social enterprises.

Finally, the following Table 1 provides the final benchmarking of described countries in the context of social farming and the same time provides a summary of the phenomenon of social farming from the perspective of legislative framework of social farming, funding mainly from the state to farmers for social farms, funding mainly to social service providers for social farms, mainly private sector involvement in social farming, involvement of mainly the public sector in social farming. This benchmarking was inspired by the study of Elings et al. (2022).

Tab 1. Benchmarking of selected European countries in the context of social farming. Source: own processing

Country	Legislative Framework of social farming	Funding mainly from the state to farmers for social farms	Funding mainly to social service providers for social farms	Mainly private sector involvement in social farming	Involvement of mainly the public sector in social farming
Germany	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
Spain	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
France	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
Netherlands	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
Ireland	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
Italy	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
Belgium	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
Austria	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Slovakia	No	No	Yes	Yes	No
Poland	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
Hungary	No	No	Yes	Yes	No
Czech Republic	No	No	Yes	Yes	No

6. Conclusion

The paper deals with the topic of social farming. This is a form of involvement of disadvantaged people in the integration process through agricultural activities. Based on the results of documentary analysis, we presented experiences from abroad. Based on the description of situations from European countries that were not part of the so-called Eastern Bloc, it is possible to draw the conclusion that social farming is institutionalized here and respected by the public administration. We can see that the providers are mostly private family farms and these farms are then recipients of support for disadvantaged people. Programs are created specifically for social farms. The system is set up in a pro-solidarity manner and is functional. Social farming is diversified as follows: Italy, France – Work integration provided by community organizations; Germany and Ireland – health and social care organizations provide community care services on care farms; the Netherlands, Norway and Belgium are private family farms that are linked to social care – financing by social contributions. In the Czech Republic, the concept is not widespread, it is not legally anchored and it is not supported by the public administration, even though the foundations for development were laid in 2014 with the establishment of the Working Commission for Social farming.

Our proposals were aimed at using existing legislative possibilities, not at proposals that require changes to legal standards or the focus of financial support in the form of subsidies. We propose to use certain tools, namely a social business model or cooperation between a social service provider and a farmer. Furthermore, it is a suitable form of business for public beneficial entities, namely associations and especially institutes. We can see suitability in the way of tax optimization. As a very interesting solution is the model that is applied in Poland, namely to build a farm near nursing homes (homes for the elderly), which will not only increase food self-sufficiency, but above all can serve as a form of therapy for the clients there. Given the very interesting concept that social farming is, we would like to contribute to its development in the Czech Republic, even though we are aware of its certain limitations.

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