

# SOCIAL WORK IN FARMING: FARMING ENVIRONMENT AS A MEANS OF GUIDING AND SUPPORTING PEOPLE FROM SPECIFIC TARGET GROUPS

## REPORT AND ANALYSIS OF INTERVIEWS AND PARTICIPATORY OBSERVATIONS WITH SOCIAL FARMERS AND SUPERVISORS



Erasmus+

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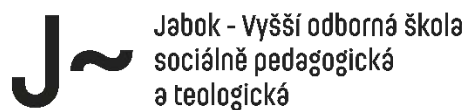
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# INTRODUCTION

Social farms or green work projects offer work for specific target groups. Different target groups make use of these social farms. They often involve people who have a disability or are in a vulnerable phase of their lives. In this report, we use the term 'participants' to describe the people who take part in social farming. Depending on the participants, social farms can offer workplaces where people can find a helpful day-activity, work rehabilitation and training or an informal place in which to improve their sense of well-being in a green environment. In this concept, farms and rural environments are used as a tool for the rehabilitation and work integration of individuals with diverse health or social challenges. The European Economic and Social Committee refers to social farming as "an innovative approach that combines two concepts: multifunctional agriculture and social services/health care at a local level. It contributes to the well-being and social integration of people with needs in the ambit of agricultural production." (European Economic and Social Committee, 2012: 4).

Although this concept is gaining more and more attention and the number of social farms in Europe is growing, there is still no tailored teaching material nor special knowledge about the guidance of participants on social farms. The Erasmus+-project Social Work in Farming (SoFarTEAM) aims to fill this gap and further develop and deepen higher education training material about social farming with a specific focus on participants working on social farms, their needs and how the farm environment can be beneficial for them.

As a basis for the training material, the project partners interviewed social farmers and supervisors and did participatory observations. Before we started the study, we looked at which key target groups use the services on social farms. We selected seven target groups, namely:

- Refugees (and other forcibly displaced people)
- People with intellectual disabilities
- People with mental health challenges
- People with physical disabilities
- Young people at risk
- People in recovery from addiction
- Older people

More than 45 interviews were conducted in the SoFarTEAM partner countries (Czech Republic, Germany, Ireland, and The Netherlands).

Another goal of the SoFarTEAM project was to give teachers, researchers, and policymakers more insight into what happens on social farms. Therefore, one or more staff from each organisation worked on a social farm and conducted participatory observations during this work. Protocols for the interviews and the observations had been drawn up in advance. These protocols can be found in the appendix.

As this report mainly discusses the results of the interviews, we go into a little more detail on how the data from these interviews were processed. The interview protocol consisted of several parts. It began with a general part about the motivation for setting up the social farming project, the background of the social farmer/supervisor and their vision of care. This was followed by a focus on the participants, how they are supervised, the working atmosphere, the relationship between the farmer and the participants and conflict management. The main interest of these questions was in getting knowledge about the motives of people coming to the farm, their learning goals, difficulties in supporting the selected target groups on the social farm, and the necessity to adjust the farm surrounding, tools and machinery. The final part of the questionnaire focused on the valuable or beneficial elements of the farm environment for different target groups.

All interviews were transcribed verbatim in the native languages of the project partner countries. Each partner organisation then coded this raw data using a standard coding framework. Where codes/labels were missing to describe the results, the researchers jointly formulated new codes/labels. The sequence of work was that each

partner organisation coded their interviews in their language. This coded material was translated into English. One researcher further analysed the coded material, with a second researcher checking this analysis. Given the language differences, the consortium tried this way to do as much justice to the data as possible.

This report is a summary of the results found from all interviews held with social farmers and supervisors. To give an idea of the scale of the project, more than 200 pages of transcribed interviews are analysed. Where possible, specific statements on specific target groups have been attempted. When feasible, the original quotations to support the general ideas were used. In this regard, the English language is not always the most proper. However, the practice of social farming shows that the diversity of participants on social farms is large and for this reason, on many points, only general statements can be made.

In some cases, the interview results are supplemented with results from previous studies. Where necessary, we have referred to the relevant study. The bibliography shows which studies and publications it concerns. They are limited to results of Dutch studies. The more relevant scope of literature is used in the next project outputs.

In the text, we use the term social farmer for a farmer (men and women) who manages all the farm work. The term supervisor describes the person who supervises the participants on the social farm.

This report forms the basis for developing the training materials for students and social farming practitioners in the next stage of the SoFarTEAM project and should be read accordingly.

# 1. SOCIAL FARMS AND SOCIAL FARMERS

This chapter describes general findings from the interviews about social farmers, their background, education, motivation in social farming, and personal competencies. This chapter also describes different characters of social farms and their specific features.

## 1.1 BACKGROUND OF SOCIAL FARMERS AND EMPLOYEES ON SOCIAL FARMS

The interviews show that the background of supervisors on social farms is very diverse. We see that in the Czech Republic, the emphasis is **more on social workers with a social work or pedagogical background**. In Ireland, many supervisors with a social work background have farm and agricultural knowledge **and experience**. In Germany, some examples of supervisors had their farm or garden before starting **a social farm** or project. In the Netherlands, we also see this diversity. Interestingly, in this country, two supervisors followed a specific training to become managers of a social farm/organic farm (Warmonderhof vocational training).

In Germany, we also heard some different answers, like supervisors that are equine professionals or landscape architects or started their career with a specific craft like being a carpenter. These experiences form the basis for the guidance of participants on the social farm. In all countries, supervisors supplement their training with specific courses regardless of educational background. Often this is to **supplement their agricultural experience with more knowledge about guiding particular target groups and dealing with specific problems**. Interestingly, **supervisors with a social work background often do not take further training in agriculture but learn this on the job**. In addition to this, respondents often mention that **regardless of the educational background of supervisors, people need to have an affinity with nature and agriculture to supervise participants properly**. For instance, a coordinator on a social farming project for children with autism states:

*“I find it important that supervisors learn how to use nature in supervising the children. That you had some environmental psychology so that you know what effect nature has on people.”*

The table below summarises the background of the social farmers and supervisors interviewed.

Background	Czech Republic	Germany	Ireland	The Netherlands
Agriculture	2	7	1	6
Health Care		2		1
Social Work	6	2	4	4
Pedagogy	2	2		
Horticultural Therapy	3			1
Combination of Agriculture/Social Work	2		1	2
Nature pedagogics				2
Craft		2		
Different	3	3	1	1

**Table 1: The background of the social farmers and supervisors interviewed.**

Social farmers/supervisors sometimes have a background other than agriculture, care or social work, social pedagogy, or therapy. We see that some social farmers/supervisors started working in social farming because they were introduced to social farming and liked the concept. We also see that some social farmers/supervisors got involved in social farming because they have a family member with a disability. They then opened their farm. Also,

there are social farmers with a background in counselling, art therapy, art teaching, carpenter, theology or law. To conclude, **the experience and education of social farmers/supervisors are highly diverse**.

### Working with trainees and interns

In the Netherlands, where social farms are large, they also often **work with interns**. From the interviews, it becomes clear that properly embedding these interns in a social farm organisation is important. An experienced coordinator of a social farm indicates that she prefers students with a social work background with an affinity for agriculture. She thinks it is more difficult for students with agricultural knowledge because they need to learn social work methods.

She finds it essential that interns get the opportunity to get to know the different participants on the farm. Every participant reacts differently regardless of their disability. At the start of their internship, the interns need to learn more about the behaviour and personality of the participants. The coordinator believes the trainees get to know the participants best by working with them. Trainees must also have a regular supervisor they can turn to with questions or problems and with whom they engage in daily reflection. Working with trainees was not discussed in any detail in the other interviews but the above information is still interesting to mention, especially for social farms where the number of participants and supervisors is large.

## 1.2 KEY COMPETENCIES, ATTRIBUTES AND CHARACTERISTICS OF SOCIAL FARMERS AND EMPLOYEES

When asked what competencies and skills are important in guiding participants, many examples are given. It is clear from the answers that **empathy** and **patience** are the qualities that social farmers consider most important.

It is also interesting that, particularly in the Netherlands and Germany, social farmers consider **basic agricultural skills** necessary. Social farms in the Netherlands and Germany often have supervisors with a social work background. Therefore, social farmers consider it important to have some agricultural knowledge when supervising people on a farm. Furthermore, it is essential that a supervisor on a social farm is interested in people, has an open mindset, is flexible and self-reflective, is stable and knows their limits, and is authentic and assertive. Below, we use quotes to explain why social farmers and supervisors consider specific competencies necessary.

The list of social farmers' and support workers' skills and competencies is lengthy. These competencies relate to the personality of the farmers as well as their expertise. If every farmer were to have them, they would have to be a superhuman or risk burning out very quickly. Many respondents emphasise the illusion to think that one person can have all listed competencies. Most importantly, a **team of supervisors on a social farm complement each other** in qualities. In a way that they can **help** each other but also **learn from each other**. It is equally important that different supervisors with their qualities can ensure that participants always find a match with one of the supervisors.

*"It is not only about the individual competencies of a supervisor, but you need a diverse team and in that way, you complement each other and you can consult each other. I don't think there is such a thing as a supervisor with all the right qualities."*

The interviews also show that not everyone can supervise every target group.

Below the different competences mentioned in the interviews according to their prevalence are presented. The most often mentioned competencies arise first.

- **Empathy**

With any target group, it is crucial to be able **to empathise**. Empathy is easier with some target groups than with others. If we look at supervising refugees, it is sometimes difficult to understand their side of the story because supervisors have not often been in situations of war and violence. Respondents also talk about being open to participants working with refugees. It would help to be open to their story and not directly think we do things differently here. This essential attitude cannot be trained, although some respondents noted that it helps to have more life experience or to have children.



*“Humanity and empathy are among the core competencies of the manager in our two operations”* (persons with medium and severe intellectual disability)

*“It is far more important to be empathetic and to be communicative than educated.”* (youth)

- **Patience**

Having **patience** as a supervisor is very important but can be challenging, especially when working with people with learning difficulties. Being patient in working with the target group is essential so people can take their time to learn new things and skills.

*“One of the main competencies that we are good at when managing our clients in the workplace is patience, and patience again.”* (people with intellectual disabilities)

*“Otherwise bring much, much love and patience.”* (youth)

In the Netherlands, supervisors speak of the 3 R's, which stand for Rust, Reinheid en Regelmaat, and could be translated as **peace, cleanliness, and regularity** as one tells:

*“To be able to deal properly with these different target groups, you need to have tranquillity, regularity and cleanliness. Tranquillity enables you to keep an overview and to recognise when there are too many stimuli. Regularity provides structure, and cleanliness makes you clear.”*

*“Patience, kindness, gentleness. You are not trying to shape anybody into what they aren't. Intuition is very important. You have to work with the elements, different weather, etc.”* (people with intellectual disabilities)

- **Mental resilience and stability**

The workers must be able to handle higher levels of pressure and stress. It is essential to be persistent and stable. Otherwise, you will soon run into difficulties, as some respondents indicated.

*“When they start as a supervisor in child and youth care, they are young and not always stable personalities perse. As soon as they meet someone who challenges them and triggers something, they are overwhelmed.”* (young people with behavioural problems)

*“The environment in which the child comes in must be stable; it must first function. So, you have to talk to each other. If something happens, you must stand like a wall. So that the child realises it works that way.”* (youth)

*“You have to ground yourself and the participants.”* (people with mental health challenges)

- **Authenticity and self-reflection**

**Authenticity** is essential in working with every target group, but according to the respondent, especially when working with youth. As one of the respondents says:

*“Young people often have the feeling that they are stupid. And maybe they are from time to time, but we all are at some point. Then I take away their fear [ed. by showing that I myself do not have a perfect life].”* (youth)

*“I am authentic with all my life experiences, as I stand here, with all my weaknesses and strengths, with all my stories. And I don't mince words. Do you want me to talk to them in some way? That is life as it is lived.”* (youth)

Authenticity also means the willingness to be transparent and open.

*“You have to be grounded in yourself first of all. If people are coming, if you have things on your mind, park them. You have to be as present as you can be. Just be very aware. Is there anything lying around, like a rake, that could hurt someone? But after that, be yourself and let them be themselves as much as possible.”* (people with intellectual disabilities)

- **Open mind**

An open mind is very important: an open mind toward participants and new ideas and plans. An open mind is also related to flexibility. These quotes from a range of social farmers all highlight the value of this quality:

*“As a supervisor, you must be open to any behaviour. We have a lot of trainees here, and especially at the beginning of their traineeship, they don’t know all of the backgrounds of the participants. Therefore, it’s good when you can react flexibly to unexpected behaviour. We explained to the trainees that at the end of the day, they should discuss with their supervisor what happened that day and how they reacted. In time, they will get a better grip on the participants’ behaviour.”*

*“The farmers who would like to convert their farm must, above all, be open. They must be open to new ideas and new concepts and also be prepared to take the steps. And these steps are not easy. There are many requirements to fulfil and a lot to organise. We have had many farmers here on the farm who are interested in a farm for the elderly because it would also be an option for them. And there are many things to implement to get the approvals as a residential community.” (older people)*

*“In any case, you have to be very open to other cultures. And of course, you have to understand that there are sometimes conflicts.” (refugees)*

*“Open-mindedness is the fundamental thing. Some might have cognitive disabilities, but they still have 40 or 50 years on the earth, and they can tell when someone genuinely sees them as an equal or doesn’t. You develop trust based on that; the lads will be quite good at reading people; they’ve seen all sides of humanity, the good and the bad.” (people with intellectual disabilities)*

- **Flexibility**

Respondents who work with people with mental health problems indicate that **flexibility** is an important characteristic. As one respondent mentions:

*“Flexibility in the sense that I can’t expect something. Every day is different because a person feels different. Therefore, I always have to have a plan B. I can’t standardise anything. And what is working now can fail the next time.”*

- **Being present**

Some respondents talk about the importance of **‘presence’ or being present**. Presence is a problematic and abstract concept, and respondents often mean different things by this. For example, presence is about standing beside the participants and being there for them completely. It also requires that you can be there without judgement. One of the respondents gives the example of the importance of having free capacity when a participant comes to the farm for the first time so they can have a good start.

*“It is important to remember that you are your own instrument. If you don’t take good care of yourself, you can’t do anything for anyone else.”*

Being present also means trying to respond to everyone personally.

*“You need a certain amount of time to get to know every person, and you have to be able to get into contact with them.” (people with intellectual disabilities)*

Being present is an essential competence for being present for yourself. It is also important to check with yourself as a supervisor: how do I feel today? Because how you think also influences how you deal with others and react to situations. This also affects the participants.

*“If I’m not in a good mood myself, if I’m not well sorted, that’s transmitted; they notice that. It’s very subtle.”*

*“You have to enjoy it and be interested in these people. Yes, otherwise it quickly becomes a nuisance.” (people with mental health challenges)*

*“It’s the effortlessness and being in the present that gets results. It’s that sense of connection that you get with people, and that can only happen if you are reasonably relaxed and grounded.” (people with mental health challenges)*

- **Professional distance**

**Professional distance** is mentioned several times but in different ways. On the one hand, respondents say that a certain professional distance is essential and that they also learn this during their training.

*“They (staff) must also be able to keep a certain distance from the employees, especially in the sense of being a leader in the workplace for them and not a specialist in psychosocial support, psychology or psychiatry. They should be a person who enjoys high authority and respect from the staff.”*

And that on the other hand, everyone must experience for themselves where this professional distance lies:

*“I learned at university that you should always keep a professional distance. Always. And now I’ve realised that it doesn’t work. I looked for myself: where are my limits? [...] If there is always a professional distance, never talking about your personal life, never showing your life, then someone never gets to know you. And how then to work properly with young people?”*

*“Friendships between staff and residents develop. In this case, you have to be careful about the professionalism of the care, that you still maintain a certain distance, a professional distance, despite everything.”*

*“As a supervisor, you stand beside the participant, not above. You can always learn from each other. For example, my husband’s brother has Down syndrome, and it is always nice to see him so relaxed. I can learn from that.”*

Lastly, professional distance can be important in terms of long-term self-sustainability, care and the provision of quality companionship and care. The distance is thus essential if workers want to avoid letting themselves be absorbed by all the problems and crises of the participants.

*“Overall, you need a certain distance. Otherwise, you won’t last long.”* (people in recovery from drug addiction)

- **Affinity with nature and agriculture and technical skills in agriculture**

It is also interesting that, particularly in the Netherlands and Germany, social farmers consider **basic agricultural skills necessary**. Respondents regularly mention the importance of **affinity with nature and agriculture** as an attribute. They emphasise that a supervisor does not need to know all the ins and outs but that this affinity or some understanding of the subject is essential in guiding people. For example, they learn how to gear activities to specific target groups or be able to switch gears if the weather suddenly changes and they need to adjust their plans. Respondents contradict each other in this respect, what is more important: knowledge about agriculture or education in social work? Interviews in this study with social farmers in the Netherlands indicate that social farmers with a social work background prefer knowledge of social work methodologies over knowledge of agriculture. Conversely, supervisors with an agricultural or green background emphasise the importance of farming experience. As the following quotes show:

*“The supervisors need the technical skills in their work areas. Of course, a certain educational and social competence is part of it, but they usually bring it because they decided to work in the workshop”.*

*“You do not have to be a natural professional, but you must be able to motivate clients. That affinity with green is the basis for making participants enthusiastic.”*

*“You need to love working with youth, and you need to love farming.”* (youth)

Or, as a supervisor in a residential home for the elderly says:

*“The caregivers who work for us don’t necessarily have to have ties to agriculture. But of course, it’s nice if they also have experience in farming. But it’s not a deciding factor. They have to get involved in bringing people together with the animals. And then maybe a round of ludo can be put on a bad weather day when the weather is good, and we can do something together with the animals. And that’s what care and social workers must get involved with.”* (older people)

- **Seeing the individual**

The importance of considering and treating everyone as an individual first and foremost emerged as a key determinant in connecting with and successfully supporting participants. Included in this is the ability to reflect on and understand the participant’s biography and background well. Respondents indicated that this is not always easy.

How can you put yourself in the shoes of a refugee who has been through a war? In the case of refugees, there is also often a cultural difference. It is essential to gain insight into what someone has been through and from what culture they come.

*“Having the knowledge about the needs and clients’ life situation, especially their drug pathway, including what is usually associated with it, for example, the loss of values, the loss of some quite fundamental values in life.” (people in recovery from addiction)*

*“That took a lot of time. First, we talked a lot about Syria. We also looked at where he lived. What was it like? I had to find myself again and again in this role: What’s it like? I dealt a lot with the culture, with Islam, etc. And then you also understand why people are like that. And then it’s okay. So that was really a big difference. All these basic cultural differences.” (refugees)*

*“What is the reason for young people to be here? Violence in the family, abuse. You can kind of imagine that. What it’s like to live in a war zone, with the fear of dying, you can’t. I think that’s something to keep in mind. You need a certain amount of time and a certain amount of empathy and, of course, a strength to accept that. If the young person then has no possibility to talk about it without breaking down and falling away from faith in humanity, then you can’t provide much help.” (refugees)*

- **Humour and an optimistic worldview**

Some respondents indicated that **humour or a positive attitude** toward the world is essential in working with people.

*“Oh, and one more thing: humour! Very important topic. So, without humour, everything is shit. And somewhere, I must still be able to joke about myself. Not to take me so seriously, or all the people not too seriously, and that only goes about setting an example on my own.” (refugees)*

*“I think a positive worldview is the most important foundation. To stay positive in the face of all the difficulties that come. And difficulties do come; there’s no need to beat about the bush. But how do you deal with them? Do you now take them as seriously and say, ‘Oh, I can’t overcome this at all?’ Or do you say, ‘OK, a problem recognised, now find a solution!’ (refugees)*

*“You have to enjoy people and want to have fun with them. You can’t be doing it for the money as your prime motivation.” (people with intellectual disabilities)*

### **1.3 ROLE TOWARD PARTICIPANTS**

In the interviews, we asked the social farmers and supervisors about their roles towards the participants. The results showed that respondents have different perceptions. We will describe these perceptions in the paragraph below.

- **Professional relationship with participants**

In summary, about half of the supervisors discuss a **professional relationship** with the participants. A professional relationship is a broad concept. One respondent said:

*“In professional addiction work, one goes over to the German ‘Sie’, the formal salutation. You do not necessarily have to create closeness through the informal ‘du’.”*

But in most cases, the concept of professional relationship is best summarised in the following quotes:

*“Of course, you always try to keep a professional distance. You learn that, too, because in the beginning, we sometimes gave out our private phone numbers, and then people would start to WhatsApp you in the evenings. You have to ensure that work and private life are kept separate and that you remain the professional supervisor who is not always available.”*

*“It is an informal but professional relationship, so all supervisors know where the line is. It stops after working hours.”*

*“I tried to have more distance between the participants and me. That took a while [...] we are not friends. There is no hierarchy, we discuss things together, but in the end, I take the final decision.”*

- **Role tailored according to the needs of the participants**

Several supervisors indicate that they **tailor the relationship to the participant**. Sometimes this has to do with the target group, but sometimes it also depends on the individual participant. Some participants like a classical boss-employee relationship, while others like a more informal relationship. In some of the interviews, supervisors seem to be flexible in this, by having a more informal relationship with one participant and seeing him/her outside the farm. In contrast, this relationship is more formal with another participant. Some supervisors like to keep more distance, and others like to talk to participants outside work or on social media. In this way, it is very similar to the ordinary workplace, where you have more in common with one colleague than another. Depending on the situation, they indicate they use their authority when things get out of hand.

*“Some would rather appreciate a boss-employee relationship or a clear leadership role. In these cases, I give very clear instructions, and I am the boss. But there are others that communicate in a completely different way. So with some, I have a kind of father-son relationship. With some, you talk a lot about their private life. It’s a very intense and intimate relationship. You get close to each other. It’s really something special. So, it’s not just an employment relationship [...].”*

The role of the facilitator also depends on the situation. One respondent said:

*“It depends on what role is needed. For example, a young person just broke up with his girlfriend. Then you don’t need a pedagogue who stands up and explains that this is a difficult phase. He needs a buddy to listen to; let him cry on your shoulder and say: ‘it’s okay’. And then it’s not about the fact that he hasn’t cleaned the dishes or that his room looks like a pig stable.”*

It is important to add that the roles are dynamic and change constantly.

*“And the role is also changing. It’s a very dynamic role. I would never see the role as static. And that’s also the art, in the constellation of people, depending on what can come out of it. That’s what makes it alive.” (youth)*

- **Role tailored according to the type of care offered**

In some cases, **it is also related to the type of care offered**. For example, some supervisors say they do not speak about caretakers because they live with the participants 7 days, 24 hours a week, so they live with each other. Also, some participants have lived there so long, often longer than the supervisors, that it would be strange to stand above them in terms of authority. A supervisor also indicates the difference between some workplaces. At one workplace, it is more therapeutic; at another, it is more about gaining work experience and structure. In this last example, a boss-employee relationship is more applicable.

*“I see a difference between the target groups. The group with a low level often needs more guidance, and you really have to put them to work. Then it is handy if you, as a supervisor, work with them together. The high-level group that comes for occupational therapy starts working on their own, and with them, with them, you go more into depth, and you can reflect with them on what they encounter at work and the link with their own development.” (people with mental health challenges)*

- **Boss-employee relationship**

Also, some respondents see their relationship with the participants as a **boss-employee relationship**. We see that this relationship mainly occurs with people with learning difficulties.

*“The farmer is the leader of the group. Because our target group (people with learning difficulties) only are able to create a weekly structure, we guide them in this. And then the group-leader-employee relationship arises after all. But the other supervisors are more like colleagues.”*

*“The relationships between the employees are informal, but with me, it’s form-employee. When I left the relationship too friendly in the past, conflicts were more difficult to resolve.”*

- **Familial and/or friendship-based relationship with participants**

Some supervisors speak of a **family**, of a **community** based on **equality**. In this respect, we see a difference between the various projects and target groups. The **supervisors of young people sometimes talk about a parent-child relationship**, but in the end, the supervisors are responsible. Others talk about a family or a community where parental involvement is less important, but that is often linked to the target group, such as the elderly. These nuances are fascinating, and one has to find the way as a supervisor.

*"It is very important for us that people feel at home in a family-like setting. So yes, for some people, it feels like family because they often have no one to share it with."*

*"There is a relationship with some employees at eye level, like friends. It's like that because you open up a lot, talk about a lot of private things, and hear a lot about what's going on in their private life. It's a very intense and intimate relationship. You get close to each other. It's really something special. So it's not just an employment relationship where you speak nice sentences with colleagues and says hello. It's much more than that."* (people with intellectual disabilities)

*"I would describe the role relationship as a big family because it is a community. The community organises itself with our support."* (older people)

*"It is a supportive relationship, not a dependent relationship. We can always leave. The bottom line is that we are partners with the young people."* (youth)

*"We are partners, but we are also dependent on the young person, and the young person is dependent on us. I would call it companions."* (youth)

In Ireland, a farmer indicates that he finds contact with the participant essential to give one-on-one guidance. In that way, he thinks the relationship can be more informal.

And in some cases, **the guidance goes beyond the social farm, and social farmers find themselves in the role of parent or pedagogue**. This role plays a particular role in supervising refugees and young people.

*"It's a wonderful continuing education program [...] I have had weaknesses and problems in my life. You have to. How did we deal with them? Where can we learn from each other? Where do young people have role models and have the opportunity to experience a variety of people who also do things they do with love and pleasure? [...] This role is dynamic because you work with people."*

*"Son - mom, definitely. So, Ibrahim asked a lot of questions. We wrote almost 100 applications with Ibrahim because we tried to support him to get an education somewhere. We called everybody."* (refugees)

- **Role dependent on the size of a social farm**

**The role of the farmer as a supervisor also depends on the size and management of a social farm**. A social farmer said that when she started 16 years ago, she had more of the role of a coach standing next to the participant. Since then, the social farm has grown enormously and now has 30 employees on the payroll, and when she comes in for coffee, she is the boss.

It is important to know that your role as coordinator or manager of the care farm changes as your care farm grows. **The bigger the farm, the more you'll be the manager rather than the supervisor** and be there to direct others rather than guide them.

- **Participants as business partners**

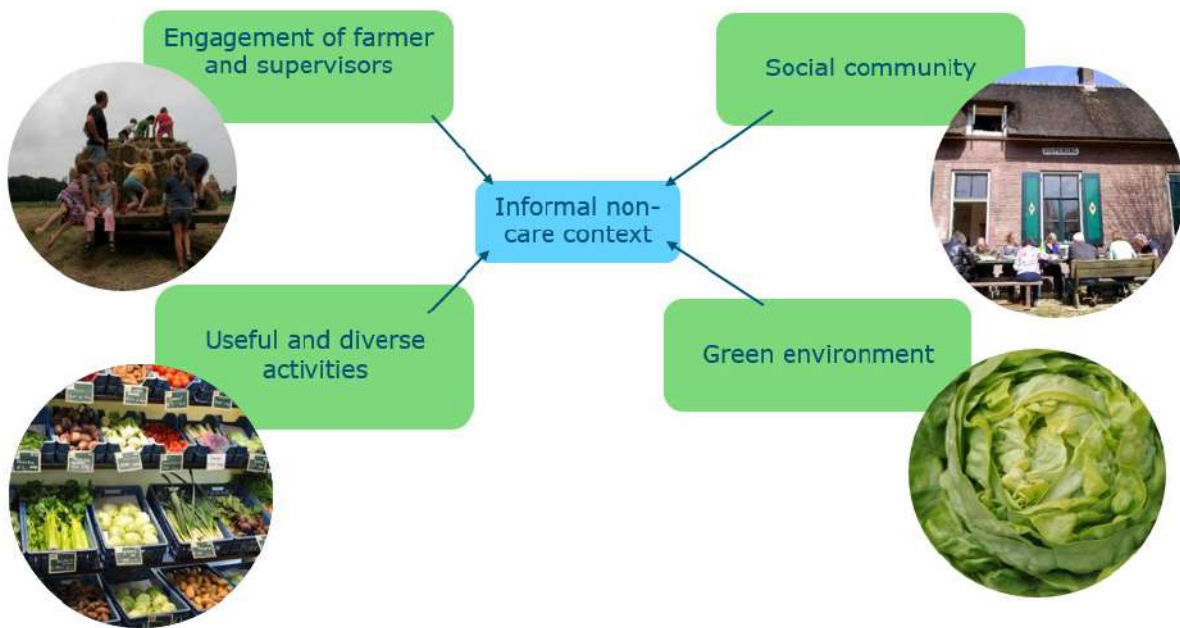
A last small category of social farmers sees their **clients as business partners** because clients can choose their care. Supervisors indicate that the participants depend on them, but this is also true the other way around: farmers are also reliant on the participants. But the nuance is sometimes just different. In some cases, it's about business. In other instances, supervisors say that they can learn from each other and that they depend on each other.

*"I have a relatively large distance with some employees. I don't talk to them about personal things. They just want to know from me: What work is on today? What's the job of today?"*



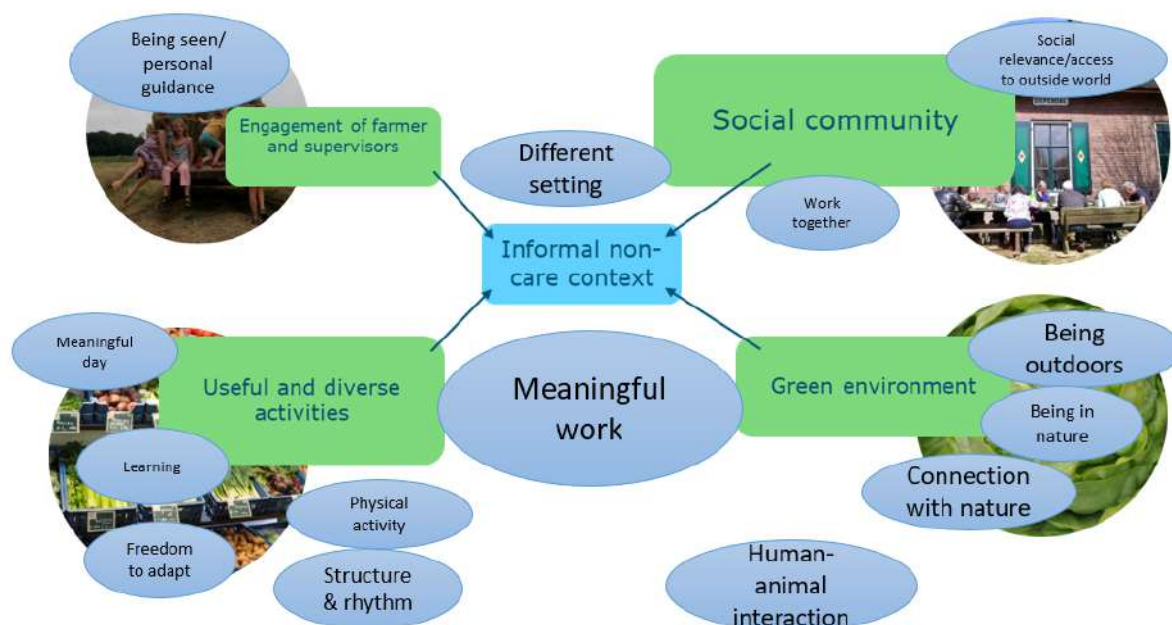
## 2. VALUABLE ELEMENTS

Social farmers and supervisors were asked which elements on the farm were essential to participants. Because the farm environment varies, the interviewees' answers were also very diverse. However, we also see many similarities. We tried to bundle the interviewees' responses to structure the rich material. We compared these results with a framework often used in the Netherlands to describe the core qualities of social farms. Figure 2 shows this framework.



**Figure 1: Key qualities of social farms. Source: Adapted from Hassing et al., 2011. Photos: Thedingsweert, Hoeve Klein Mariendaal and Elings.**

This comparison shows that the answers given by the care farmers and supervisors in this study correspond mainly with the core elements of this framework. Therefore, we have supplemented the original framework with the details that have emerged from this study. Figure 3 shows this result. The elements most often mentioned by care farmers and supervisors are shown in the largest size. Below, we describe and explain the different aspects from the general point of view, and then we will specify the valuable elements for the specific target groups.



**Figure 2: Valuable elements according to the SoFarTEAM interviews. The more significant bullet, the more often social farmers and supervisors discussed this element. Source: Hassing et al., 2011 and supplemented by the outcomes of the SoFarTEAM project.**

Social farmers think doing **meaningful work** on the farm is one of the most important elements. It is about making things, for example, growing vegetables and using them to make a meal. The farm activities create a chain of related activities. As a participant, you feed the chickens. The chickens lay an egg, and you pick the eggs and make an omelette for lunch from that egg. In this way, the activities are connected, and there is also logic for participants. The activities are always helpful on the farm, and no activities need to be invented. This work gives meaning to the participants. In turn, the participants are proud of what they achieve and do on the farm.

*“The best thing about our work is that we see growth. We see our daily success whether we are hoeing or planting seeds.”*

*“The food element is very important. When I started first in services, one of the striking things was it was so institutionalized, people were served food on metal plates, and they never saw food being cooked [...] on the farm, to see the potatoes going in and then to weed them and harvest them and bring them inside the kitchen and cook them, it’s a totally different experience.”*

*“People may have really active lives outside of their service but real, meaningful work; there is so much to gain from that. People can see the reason for what they’re doing and can see the result. Something like feeding the animals, they need to eat, and the participants help with that.”*

**Social value** or **social relevance** is linked to having meaningful work. Or, as the following quote nicely illustrates:

*“The shop visibly displays a piece of social relevance. That completes the circle for the clients.”*

Social relevance involves doing useful activities and being part of a community or a group of colleagues that are expecting you. Social farmers say that working on the farm gives participants access to the outside world. This is of particular importance for those participants who live in healthcare facilities.



*“Access to the outside world, especially those in residential services. Some of them without family involved get experience with family life and build their self-esteem and social skills.”*

*“People can also go home with a different story. Because there is always something happening on the farm.”*

*“Being part of society, of a group. Being meaningful, being missed when you don't come. Being seen is very important.”*

*“[...] social relevance, working together and doing something bigger than my immediate needs and satisfaction.”*

The above quotes illustrate that the different elements are strongly linked. The valuable element **‘meaningful day’** is about having a meaningful working day and **feeling useful**.

*“[...] having a working day. You leave the facility early in the morning, go to work and then return later [...] you have something to tell.”*

These activities are done in a **different setting** than participants are used to or in which they live. It is a setting that is different from regular healthcare facilities and in which the focus is not on their problems or disabilities but on what they can do and what they would like to do. In this setting there is freedom for the participants to choose the activities or work they want and what they need. If you need to talk to a supervisor this is possible, but you can also go and work alone on the field.

*“The unique selling point is that I work in a non-psychiatric context that I don't see the deficit or the mental illness but the person.”*

*“That you focus on something positive, something outside yourself instead of on things that go wrong or that they have problems with.”*

In this setting, the farmer and supervisors have an important role. The social farm is often not a large setting, so the farmer and supervisors are often the same persons, and with this, the participants have fixed contact persons every time they come to the farm. Therefore, there is a plenty of time to get to know each other, and there is personal attention. Or, as some of the respondents say, participants are **being seen**.

*“[...] being seen, being allowed to be there. The bit about guarding boundaries and stretching them. And the part about not having to do it all by yourself. We do it together. If you don't manage to feed the rabbits today, okay. Besides, we have a lot of time here, days, months, and years. Time to look back, time to heal.”*

It also corresponds to one of the most frequently mentioned elements: **being part of a community**. Social farmers and supervisors talk about being part of a family, having relationships and learning from each other. With community, they speak about the people on a farm with the farmer, their family, and their colleagues. The community also means people outside the farm, like the village or other people that come to the farm. For instance, they mention the farm shop not only as a place for participants to meet other people but also as a meeting place for people in general. So the social farm, in this way, also has an added value for the whole community.

For the participants, the social farm is a community in a non-medical setting where you meet people with nothing to do with health care. The social farm is often close to where participants live, and in this way, it contributes to work and care in the neighbourhood. On some social farms, participants can also live with the farmer's family or in their unit.

Being part of a group and being accepted and allowed to be yourself is an important positive element on social farms.

*“What I like about the farm is that they feel like belonging to a social community because often they don’t have anyone at home.”*

*“Quite a few people are involved in the social farm and vice versa. For example, when a marathon is held in the village, we are there with a water table. This way, the participants also get to know the village.”*

*“Group portrait of diversity. It is wonderful that each person brings a story from highly educated to less educated, from religious to non-religious. Together, you can write books about what we experience here.”*

Social farmers and supervisors say that for some target groups like refugees or people with mental-ill health working on the farm or garden helps them to open. This opening up is both literal and figurative, because the work ensures that they are grounded. And because of the range of activities, people also have topics to talk about. If you don’t know the language, it is easier to communicate or learn the language through activities in the moment. Working on the farm is also a way of getting to know the neighbourhood and integrating into society.

*“For both refugees as people with mental ill health, gardening is the most grounded way to arrive for people.”*

*“If someone arrives here and is not so talkative, this changes when they start working in the garden because then they have a theme to discuss and make the first contact here.”*

According to social farmers and supervisors, one of the most valuable elements of a social farm is the **diverse and useful activities**. Because there are so many activities in a farm environment, participants can train in and develop many different skills and competencies. Working on a farm gives them new experiences and knowledge and gives them insight into what they can do and would like to do in the future. The participants are always **learning**. Also, for the social farmers and supervisors, the farm environment makes them flexible because there is always an activity that suits the interest and possibilities of a participant.

*“And that’s the beauty of agriculture. You have a huge variety of fields of work and encounters with yourself and the world. The art is to see where someone appeals to and how you can use that to motivate them and to use that in life.”*

*“[...] it’s never boring with us, it’s so varied. That’s why you have the possibility to find something suitable for every competence [...] everyone could find something to do, which is something I see much less in, for instance, an office job.”*

*“Connection with each other as well as with the environment. There are so many different small and large elements in the group and place that there is something for everyone.”*

Working in a farm environment with different activities and working with colleagues gives freedom to choose activities one likes and allows the farmer and supervisor to balance **work pressure** if needed. Of course, work pressure varies among social farms.

*“The big advantage is that we don’t require any special performance from clients in the beginning. The total amount of work on the farm is not very substantial, so we can afford to have occasional work stoppages.”*

*“They can do their own thing and develop themselves. When things are not going well, they can cuddle a goat or a horse. It is not only hard work but also relaxing and having fun together.”*

The farm life and environment are, for a large part, a predictable environment that has a recognisable structure. Farmers and supervisors say that the farm and nature give participants **structure and rhythm**.

*“Of course, the animals also need clarity, and the animals themselves provide the opportunity for structure. Not every day is the same, but we often do the same things.”*

*“We used to live much more with the seasons. Nowadays, summers are as long as winters because we have light and central heating. So we miss the rhythm of the seasons, like, for instance, retreating in winter. The vineyard helps participants to get back into this rhythm.”*

Finally, social farmers and supervisors mention elements related to the **green environment**. The **interaction between humans and animals**, specifically horses, is often mentioned.

*“[...] and they were really proud to stand next to the cattle which have big horns.”*

*“The horse was really popular among our clients. It was truly like a kind of therapy. We had a client who used to warm herself up while leaning to the horse.”*

*“An animal does not judge.”*

In addition, working on a farm involves being mostly outdoors. **Being outside** and having **space** is considered necessary by farmers and supervisors. Because there is physically enough space on a farm, participants can also choose to seek out this space, for example, when they want to work alone for a while. Working outdoors in green spaces also ensures that participants are **physically active**. Working outdoors is different from sitting indoors at a computer.

*“They need the outdoor work, the exercise. They don’t want to stay in the room and always sit and do the same work for weeks and months. They want to have a change.”*

*“Actually, working outdoors, I think it’s becoming increasingly important for a lot of people. For instance, I have a lot of former IT employees who got crazy from looking at their screens all the time.”*

Farmers and supervisors also describe how the farm allows participants to have **connection with nature**. The connection with nature has a different meaning for different target groups. For example, farmers and caretakers say that for older adults with dementia, working with nature can bring back memories of the past.

*“Seasons-related activities to evoke memories of what respondents did during their lives, such as transplanting houseplants during the winter.”*

Working in nature can offer a reflection or serve as a metaphor for people with mental ill health. A support worker says:

*“When people are too much in their heads, I say: go and weed with your hands instead of with the hoe because then you are closer to the soil.”*

*“A participant who was bouncing with energy, I gave the job to weed the tall weeds, while for a participant who was anxious, I gave the job to weed the small weeds because that movement is smaller.”*

For children, nature can be a playground. There are so many things to discover, and the good thing about the nature is that children can have more freedom to do as they please: the farm environment is one where everything is not neatly raked up.

**Being in nature** also allows participants to the possibility to disconnect from society's fast life.

To conclude, the above-mentioned shows that farmers and supervisors talk about different elements on the farm that are important to participants. They talk about physical features such as the presence of animals and the importance of the farmers and their family. However, they also talk about less tangible factors, such as working on the farm, making participants feel part of society or appreciated. The Dutch social farmers and supervisors emphasise the less tangible elements.

It is interesting to hear that the importance of some aspects of the farm environment can differ for each participant. Cultural background can play a role in this. One farmer said:

*“He told us that horse riding is only for the rich in Syria. So in Syria, only rich people can afford to ride a horse. And that was something really great for him.”*

What is also mentioned in particular is that for some participants, the farm environment offers something they cannot get elsewhere. Often, workshops for people with intellectual disabilities are too structured, and there is little opportunity for them to move around or be outside. On the farm, this is possible.

Interestingly, in contrast to other facilities, farmers and supervisors mention that there may be more time for learning and development on a farm, but this depends on how care is organised and financed.

Farmers and supervisors are unclear about which elements are important for which target groups. Still, sometimes social farmers describe activities they carry out specifically with certain target groups, which they know from experience have a positive impact on the participants. If farmers or supervisors presented any differences, we highlighted this in the text above. Below we touch some specific remarks that are made and in Chapter 5 we will discuss more extensively which elements and activities are appropriate for which target groups.

Farmers and supervisors indicate that it is important for children that the farm environment is not too tidy and is biodiverse so that they have enough freedom and opportunities to play. Supervisors who work with children with autism indicate that working in nature and agriculture is a relief for the children and that, for the first time, they find a place where they experience fewer stimuli. The fact that there is a lot of physical space means the children can work alone or find a quiet spot. On one of the social farms in this study, they also make sure that the supervisors pick up the children individually so that they can catch up with them beforehand to see how they are doing. On this farm the children make a fire together when they have finished their work. The fire is like an incentive for the children to do their best and end the day together positively.

### 3. EFFECTS OF WORKING ON SOCIAL FARMS ON PARTICIPANTS

In the next chapter, we will look more closely at what effects social farmers and supervisors see of working on social farms on participants. Farmers and supervisors were asked what effects they saw on participants' physical, mental, social and spiritual well-being in the interviews. Where possible, we will break down the results per target group or discuss interesting cases per target group.

#### 3.1 EFFECTS ON PHYSICAL WELLBEING

We asked the social farmers and supervisors how much working on the farm affects the participants' physical well-being. The answers given by the farmers are so diverse that it is impossible to cluster the answers or indicate which response occurs most often. Therefore, we will discuss the different answers in random order below.

Working on a farm requires **physical activity** and effort. Physical activity is relevant to all target groups. Of course, one target group may show more physical activity than another. Especially for the target group of **older people** or people with a **physical disability**, some activities can be more difficult. Social farmers indicate that the scale of farm activities can be adapted so that there is something for every participant. A social farmer also shows that they have designed the farm so that a senior participant can easily walk around the farmyard because benches are everywhere. An older participant can move around the farm, sit down occasionally, and experience the farm. This adaptation makes the older participants **feel free to move** around at their own pace. Social farmers indicate that the farm environment keeps **older people** mobile and allows them to exercise their muscles spontaneously. The farm environment takes care of this without needing to organise specific activities.

*"We do have a stair lift but not an elevator. Most of the time, it's quick to take the elevator in a large facility. That gets you from floor to floor. Here I think: do I need to take the stair lift, which goes totally slow, or do I pull myself together and make an effort and take the stairs, then I'm faster than the stair lift?"*

For **people with learning difficulties** and **youth and children**, social farmers indicate that physical activity gives them exercise and, in this way, burns calories and prevents excessive weight gain. For children with behavioural problems and people with mental ill health especially, it's often about getting in motion again.

*"Some of them really get into motion. They come from a situation where they sit behind a screen all day in their rooms. Here it starts with a walk uphill to the vineyard. Then you've already had quite a physical effort. That's just the start of the day. [...] the vineyard makes them experience the seasons again."*

The activities on the farm give **children with behavioural problems** the possibility to get back in their rhythm.

People with mental ill health get physically exhausted positively. They feel tired and therefore sleep better and may need fewer sleeping medications.

For people with learning difficulties, children and youth, social farmers see that these target groups can learn from physical activities, and from using tools and therefore improve their motor skills. Also, they are more aware of their body posture.

*"[...] improve their hand-eye coordination when picking the grapes."*

*"The physical work was all new to them, but they noticed at the end of the ten weeks their concentration and ability to work had really improved."*

*"It can play a role in building fitness and strength. The kids who came out were very unfit in fairness."*

Being aware of body posture is also mentioned for **people with mental ill health** but in a different way. With this target group is about awareness and getting out of their head and into their body.

*"Awareness of body and how you are standing. Stand still for a moment every fifteen minutes or every ten plants you're planted. How do I feel? Connecting with yourself."*

Lastly, social farmers and supervisors say that eating and preparing dinner together with healthy food from their garden has an essential positive effect for **people recovering from an addiction or mental health problems**. Being on the farm, growing vegetables and having good food gets them to think about their own diet.

### 3.2 EFFECTS ON SOCIAL WELLBEING

The interviews with the social farmers and supervisors show that if we ask them about what effect working on the farm has on the social well-being of participants, they have many examples. All answers concern the fact that working on a social farm causes participants to make more new social contacts. Most social farmers speak about **being part of a community, family or social structure** that is very important for the participants. This community-making counts for all target groups. We asked farmers: what would this picture look like if you could take a picture of a place or an element on the farm that is important to participants? Often the farmers would take a picture of the canteen, where they have lunch or a fireplace where everyone comes together.

*“They feel that they are not alone in their problems or in their lives and that they are surrounded by the environment of our gardens and the presence of other clients and employees.”*

*“Standard if someone is not there then he is missed [...] we will call: what is going on? Why do we miss you? Short lines and see how we can help someone.”*

*“So we live and work in a kind of family setting. Eating together, celebrating the weekend together, watching TV together. They see me in my work clothes but also in decent clothes. As it is with a mother.”*

Having personal contact with others and meeting people is crucial for all target groups. Often participants live alone or in a residential home, and by meeting other people, they learn to **build new personal relationships**. As farmers say, meeting people on a farm is easy because you need to work together and learn to **cooperate**. It's about making friends and being able to share your story.

*“Thanks to work in the garden, good client relationships are supported. This also encourages cooperation.”*

*“Group portrait with all its diversity, I love that. From highly educated to less educated, from religious to non-believers, each person brings a story, and together you could write books about what you experience.”*

*“For many, it's essential that they can talk to someone here and not just to their respective caregivers at home.”*

*“It has been our experience that in a rural setting, our employees also visit each other during non-working days [...] This can also increase their quality of life.”*

*“Some animals also function as a low-threshold friendship for clients. The clients then dare to share things they find important in life, for example.”*

*“[...] and of course friendship! It's a community where you get to know people and where friendship forms. Some of them met here. They spend a lot of time together. They do everything together. And friendship develops not only among the residents but also among staff and residents.”*

On the farm, it is about work and plenty of **informal moments** where you can have fun, drink coffee and tea, eat, or celebrate together.

*“Fun activities around the holidays, just having fun together. I think for participants. It adds value to their lives. Their world is generally small. They interact with the public here and get to know more people.”*

It is more than just the farm community with whom the participants interact. They are also **part of broader society**, such as people from the village or visitors that come to the farm or the farmer and participants may take part in activities with and in the village. Social farmers from Ireland, the Netherlands, and the Czech Republic often mention this.

*“The wider community aspect is very important. We'll have neighbours call at all times. A local man works on the farm with me, and I always make sure he is there when the lads come.”*

*“They get to know the farmer, but also the farmer knows the local community. So, it opens their network.”*



*"Because it is a village, everyone knows the farm, and they know the clients. If they think someone is in danger, they call us. [...] I think people also find it important that they belong to something, not only the farm but also outside."*

It's not only about being part of society but also **contributing to society, having a real job** and gaining real work experience.

*"[...] the fact that it is a running company gives you real working experience. The clients have contact with customers and other visitors."*

*"For the clients, working on a care farm means contributing to something greater. Everything they do has a meaning. It makes them feel important, useful, and needed."*

The social farmers indicate that the social farm is a unique, **safe environment** where participants can come **without judgement** and will not be judged for their limitations. A place where people feel welcome. This is especially important for people recovering from mental health problems or addiction, people with learning difficulties, youth and children with autism.

*"I would take a picture of the place where we always meet. The children who come here have always had a hard time at school. They have difficulty establishing relationships. If you have a place here to do things together, that is very important."*

*"I had a client who benefited greatly from our social farm because he felt socially excluded. It was probably also like that. It did him good to have unbiased encounters."*

*"For clients, it's an environment where they can feel safe, where their limitations are respected."*

Social farmers also tell us that participants **learn from each other**. This learning competence is reinforced by the fact that different target groups often work on social farms. This way, participants with various disabilities can learn from or help each other.

*"It is quite good when people with different impairments in a group and different people meet each other. People with different problems must get used to each other and learn from each other. [...] And everybody can take something away from themselves by having a diverse group. If they play cards together or make fun of something, talk about movies [...]"*

*"What I really like is that there is a lot of respect for the reason that someone comes here and needs help. We are a very diverse group, from people with intellectual disabilities to those with depression. The two would not meet in private, but here it is a good combination."*

*"Social contact is often a goal for children. How do I learn to set limits, for example? As a supervisor, you also have to keep an eye on that [...] By playing together, and in playing, children naturally learn to deal with each other."*

### 3.3 EFFECTS ON MENTAL WELLBEING

When people are non-verbal or very quiet you can judge the impact on their well-being by how they laugh, if they seem happy, if they come early and/or if they always want to come.

The occupational therapists and supervisors often comment that the participants talk about things on the farm that they never hear them talking about, like their background, their family, etc. People have something to look forward to and talk about with others.

*"It is giving people a sense of control and accomplishment and building their self-esteem. They achieve. It is as simple as that."*

Social farming improves the mental well-being of youth. It makes them proud of themselves. People have something positive to tell their families and their peers.

Social farming *"Gave them confidence. [...]. Comradeship is very important, working together. We are all people at the end of the day."*

*“Very quickly, they just went ahead and did jobs themselves without being told. They were very keen to help, asking, ‘will I run down and get this’ or that kind of thing. They went from standing over your shoulder looking at you to being really proactive.”*

*“It’s seeing them go from being unable to do something to mastering it. That’s so good for them.”*

*“The work is essential in taking people out of themselves and helping them forget their troubles.”* (people in recovery from addiction)

*“They just have trouble sleeping at night. They can’t think of anything but this horrible scene in the homeland. And then they need eight hours a day, sometimes only 6, 10, or 9, whatever, where they can be comfortable. So, they can physically relieve themselves.”* (refugees)

*“Here, I take the foundation theoretically from agriculture and transfer it to the soul’s life. And so I have quite a lot of connections and synergy. Where I see: That is logical. Life has certain regularities, which I cannot uncouple just because I think economically efficient because we are all so triggered, but it is about something completely different. And the soul needs time. It simply needs time and space to mature. And that’s what almost all the young people here are doing. They are maturing.”* (youth)

### 3.4 EFFECTS ON SPIRITUAL WELLBEING

And finally, working on the farm also affects participants' spiritual well-being. Spiritual aspects involve participants being amazed by nature, how plants grow, or how beautiful the behaviour of animals can be. It is about feeling more connected to nature and experiencing the seasons more than they do when they live and work in the city. And that because they experience nature, that they also feel part of a bigger picture. On the one hand, this is about the fact that as a person, they are important in this whole and that they matter, and that they can make a difference: for example that they are important for the farmer, animals and plants. But on the other hand, it is also about putting things into perspective: that despite everything, for example, worries, quarrels and problems, nature will take its own course and it will be summer, autumn and winter, which can also be a metaphor for people not to worry too much because things will eventually turn out all right.

*“To see the small beauties in nature, for instance, a beautiful bird and to name that too. Even though the world is very dark at the moment, people can still wonder.”* (people with mental health challenges)

*“The contact with nature and what effect that has on your worldview. You have to take care of nature, and it is nice there. You lay a foundation for that. We also do nature and environmental education here, and you do create ownership with that.”* (people with mental health challenges)

Social farmers and supervisors say participants speak about an increased sense of purpose and meaning and an opportunity to care for others, like animals and crops. Farmers also say that nature is transcendent and that the same counts for human connection.

*“It gives a sense of place, this is an exceptionally relaxing place, and I hope people feel the same way and can relax here. You get away from mechanical noise.”*

*“Just being out there and being quiet and taking in the beautiful view, that’s mindfulness.”* (people in recovery from addiction)

*“There is something meditative about the kind of work involved on a farm”* (people in recovery from addiction)

*“For some, it’s like a fairytale, the green grass and the views, compared to the environment they are used to.”* (people in recovery from addiction)

*“Our employees are free to meet spiritual needs. They have a church where they can attend or actively participate in various events related to spiritual life.”*

*“For me, social farming is the fulfilment of life. Until then, I felt that my life was useless. On my way, I meet people who are in favour of faith. We talk about God almost daily. Every day we realise that what is built on God cannot be wrong.”*



*"All of our employees (including the two of us) have deepened their relationship with ecology and the related relationship with soil, plants, animals - and especially better food. There is a lot of talk about God and the meaning of life, but I don't know if anyone is taking anything away from it."*

Some social farms have a specific religion, e.g. a Christian background. The farm activities, therefore, reflect this religion in having a prayer at the start of the day or celebrating Easter or Christmas.

*"A closer relationship with God exists in our house. People notice it because we also have a chaplain in the house who regularly calls in for church services that take place in the house. And he knows most of the residents personally, regardless of what religion they belong to or whether they are no longer involved in any religion at all, and he always has an open ear for the seniors."* (older people)

*"A wonderful prayer room and place where one of the guys wrote a very good sura about life in a foreign country. It describes that you should be glad you are alive, and of course, you should not give up hope. In the Bible, we find it in John, "a light shines in the darkness." In their faith, as Muslims, they also have these passages. It was important for them, especially."* (refugees)

## 4. SPECIFIC ELEMENTS PER TARGET GROUP

This chapter will focus on which elements on the farm or in a green environment are important for different target groups. The information comes from interviews with different social farmers and supervisors from the SoFarTEAM partner countries. In addition, the project partners also worked with the participants and social farmers on various farms and conducted participatory observations. This data is also included. In case of some target groups we also used results and citations found from previous research. These studies are cited in the literature list. It is worth mentioning that this information is not exhaustive. Still, we hope the information below can give social farmers and supervisors insight into how they can best use their green or farm environment to support the target groups on their farms.

### 4.1 REFUGEES

As a social farmer/supervisor, knowing that refugees might be traumatised is essential. They have fled injustice and war in their own countries. Therefore, it is important they feel welcome on the farm, that they feel safe and accepted. They need to feel **part of a family or community** on the farm.

*“This social structure [...] is fundamental. That I have this common social basis, and everything is based on this everyday basis, profession and everything that is built around it, like social empathy, having fun working with plants, fun with natural stones and also fun with concrete construction stones.”*

Social farmers and supervisors say they see that the farm environment ensures that refugees are **exposed to the culture and customs of a country**. Knowing new cultures and traditions happens just while working, but it is precious for refugees to integrate into a country's culture, customs, and community. In the process, social farms are in the middle of society but simultaneously provide a safe learning environment for the refugees. Within this safe setting, refugees learn about a country's special rituals, festivals and customs but also learn to get used to different landscapes and weather conditions.

*“So, if you didn't know, you would have thought he had been riding for years. He told us that in Syria, this is something that is only for the rich. So, in Syria, only rich people can afford a horse and ride a horse. And that was something really, really great for him.”*

*“In the beginning, he found it difficult to understand our culture. We are all like one big family here. And, of course, the girls rushed up to him and hugged him. And Ibrahim first stood there like a wall and thought: ‘Why are these women hugging me?’ But that changed over the course of time. And then he really accepted it totally well and felt absolutely comfortable here. He was also able to accept this. I would say he was able to break with his culture. Well, in Ibrahim's home country, it was definitely not the case that the women approached the men or something. He didn't know that from home.”*

*“The big differences were, at least with this man, he had a very, very different cultural background. And that was also an entirely new field for me. In the Islamic-influenced world, there are completely different roles that you get. And he had, for example, this role of the firstborn. The firstborn man has a completely different status. And his whole life, it was already very contrary to what we do here. For him, it was a big issue: how do I get here in this culture? Where is my identity from my old culture, and how can I relate to those without totally questioning my existence?”*

*“A young refugee has a double identity crisis. The youth identity crisis and the cultural identity crisis. Do I belong here? Do I have a mission here? Why and how is that? It's individual, how they are and what resources they bring with them. What can I freely commit myself to?”*

Another not-insignificant opportunity on the farm is **to learn the language**. Learning the language happens gradually on a social farm. You understand it through conversations at the kitchen table but also by being able to point things out while working. In this way, refugees actively learn the language. Active and practical learning is very different from sitting in a classroom.

*“The farm provides an opportunity to learn English in a very natural setting, pick up words from seeing things, pointing to things. And in terms of language acquisition, it’s certainly my preference to learn in a classroom. For learning language, it’s so much easier to see and smell it in terms of learning.”*

*“Ibrahim definitely had starting difficulties. As I said, he often did not understand when we made jokes. Suppose we dissed each other in a funny way or something. He just couldn’t deal with that. But then he understood that it was quite normal and that it was just part of the good tone of the farm.”*

As a social farmer, it is crucial to think about the **accessibility of your farm**. Many refugees do live in the city and do not yet have transport. They often depend on public transport or **transport** that the farm provides. It is also good to let them get used to the social farm slowly, not to increase the pressure immediately but to slowly get used to the place.

Refugees' **food and drinking habits** often differ because they come from different countries and cultures. It is important to take this into account. For example, Muslims do not eat pork or products containing gelatine and do not drink alcohol.

*“Some of our food was a disaster for them: sauerkraut, red cabbage, Brussels sprouts. All things that gave them gas. The fear of having pork in it, we completely accept that also because we don’t eat pork ourselves [...].”*

*“And he didn’t drink anything (because of Ramadan). Whereby I then said to him: ‘That’s not possible. You have to drink a sip of water now. We are outside the whole day at 30 degrees. That’s not possible. You have to drink a bit of water,’ which he did. But he has his cultural things, and we respect them. He always got food from us that had nothing to do with pork. We cooked specially for him. We always respected that. And there was no stress at all. It wasn’t anything abnormal. It was just as if there was someone there who had a different attitude.”*

There may also be challenges relating to **gender roles** in the case of people from the Islamic community. Some men would find it difficult to take instruction or be asked to do things by a woman (i.e. a female social farmer or supervisor). The experience is also that many refugee women are of childbearing age. They often have small children at home, and it is not very common in their culture for their husbands to take over their caregiving duties. We also see that more 'feminine' activities on the social farm often better suit female refugees.

*“If I was to bring a woman to a social farming project and she would spend half a day on her own on the farm with the male farmer or potentially with another man, her husband would not agree to something like that. Also, with children after school hours, women would be expected to do 90% of the homework, cooking, and cleaning, so they just wouldn’t be available. Women have a huge potential, but there is a patriarchal structure that takes time to change.”*

Working at the social farm allows refugees to **escape from the refugee accommodation** and be in a totally different environment for a while. Interviews with social farmers show that refugees appreciate this.

*“To have this nature around and to be for themselves for a short time, to really take a breath, to breathe deeply.”*

*“The work here is used as a method of opening up and getting to know each other and somehow coming to terms with the war experiences that people have had in their country of origin. I think that’s very important, and sometimes it’s easier to get into conversation through the work.”*

Contact with animals, plants and other people daily is significant.

*“So psychologically and socially, I think animals, plants, people, this daily contact is absolutely important.”*

On the social farm, the workload and pressure are also lower. This is an excellent way for many refugees to catch their breath after a period when they have experienced a lot of stress.

*“I think this diverse mix of people. I think many people like that, too. And simply this low threshold without this high demand for results, that you can just say: ‘I’m working here in the field now, and I’ll manage as much as I can, and when I’m done, I can look at it, and it’s okay the way it is’. It’s different than in normal company contexts, where you’re under much more time pressure [...].”*

## Tips for activities

Several activities were mentioned by social farmers/supervisors that they think could be of value for this target group. The description and quotes below need to be seen as inspiration or ideas on what to do on a social farm.

*“I think gardening is the most profound, grounded in the truest sense of the word, and therefore also the best medium for people who want to arrive. It doesn't matter if they're coming from a mental health facility and trying to get their feet back on the ground or if they're coming from another country. It's a good medium to arrive. And then in conjunction with people having lunch together and so on. It's definitely a great opportunity for refugees and for the other people who work here.”*

*“[...] and they were harvesting strawberries when the strawberry flood came up. That was very clear to them. Many of them also had experience in simple helping activities. Harvesting berries, harvesting grapes, harvesting apricots, on the run, it was all there.”*

Activities that were mentioned by social farmers/supervisors: waste separation, collecting rubbish, working with wood, apple harvest, building insect hotels, gardening (digging up of potatoes, weeding, general tidy up), cutting and stacking of firewood, clearing up branches and timber from the paddock, moving/herding cattle, pruning apple orchard, fencing, cleared out polytunnel at the end of the year, horticultural activities and gardening tasks.

## Learning goals

If we look at the learning objectives of the target group of refugees, we see at the top that they need to master the language and culture of the country. To become well embedded in a country, gaining social contacts and feeling part of society is also important. Finally, this target group needs to gain work experience and regain structure and rhythm to re-enter the normal labour process in the future.

*“Social farming is a fantastic opportunity for learning the language in an informal way. Language barriers are one of the main challenges while working with people from other countries. Learning the language of the country, they are escaping to is an important goal for most refugees. Social farming is an amazing way of learning the language of the new home country informally. A person can learn a language in a natural setting to pick up words from seeing things or pointing at things.”*

*“Earning money / having a paid job is of huge importance for many refugees. This factor is of such high importance that social farming should pay more attention to it. Work in social farming is also meaningful because it leads to new skills and competencies. This might generally be learning about the soil or organic agriculture or specifically riding a horse, or it might be an informal way of learning mathematics or the language of the receiving country. Learning can happen step by step and with less pressure than in ordinary vocational training. Ideally, it leads to paid work as a result.”*

*“Cultural exchange is something both sides (the farmer as well as the person from another country that comes to the farm) benefit from. It is an important part of the social aspect of social farming.”*

## Specific challenges

As described above, specific challenges for this target group lie mainly in cultural differences. In addition, problems can arise around gender issues, diet and cultural habits. In addition, it is sometimes difficult for this target group to logistically get to the farm because their accommodation is, e.g. in the city, and there is insufficient public transport in rural areas.

*“I also taught them that 3 p.m. in Germany means 3 p.m. and not 3.15 p.m. and also, ‘I still have to go to the toilet’ or whatever. 3 p.m. you have to be there in Germany, then it's 3 p.m., and we start at 3 p.m. Of course, sometimes we built a bridge and sent someone already on time to make tea because we saw that the others weren't on time, and we didn't say anything. But doing something together on time was always the recipe for success for “Made in Germany”. “Made in Germany” used to be linked to the fact that we have a sense of punctuality. They always appreciated the punctual train at the station. I always say: it's also punctual.”*

As a social farmer/supervisor, it is crucial to understand a participant's background and past. What country are they from, and what events have they experienced?

*"We really had people with difficult backgrounds here, and they simply needed help. So they first have to arrive. And the longer the refugees were with us, very good and intensive cooperation developed."*

*"He had not been given a chance to integrate. I thought that was just terrible. I would have liked to have kept him here. But we couldn't do that either. We would have hired him here too. But that was not possible. Nothing was possible. [...] They are not allowed to work because they don't have residence status yet, but they are supposed to work to get residence status. That is incomprehensible to us. How is that supposed to work? As with many other things, the government has failed again at the whole level. But that is another issue. But this is an absolute failure. How are the people who really want it supposed to be able to integrate if thousands of obstacles are put in their way? Yes, how depressing must it be when you write 100 applications and get 100 rejections?"*

## Conflict management

There are not many specific issues around conflict management for this target group other than in every workplace. Depending on the country (e.g. Germany), being on time can still be an issue. In addition, some male refugees find it difficult to receive orders from female social farmers or supervisors.

*"I set up a scheme that I always have certain times every week to talk to everyone. For example, I must exchange at least two sentences daily with each trainee. Mandatory. And then the foremen are not affected by this because this is transferred, I would say if the overall structure is right."*

*"Only Ramadan, that's a thing. Boah, when it comes to religion, then many things become difficult. That's how it is for the locals! It's the same for everyone. It's a subject that affects you extremely."*

## 4.2 PEOPLE WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES

As described earlier in this report, the various elements of the farm environment are all important for people with intellectual disabilities. Social farms also reveal other qualities listed in previous parts and here again, focusing on people with intellectual disabilities.

The presence of a 'real farmer' appears to be of great importance. They are the boss on the farm and have the knowledge and expertise about what needs to be done. They have a **role model** for participants. The expertise is significant in unexpected situations, for example, if the weather turns. They can, therefore, quickly come up with a creative solution. In doing so, the farmer is also an entrepreneur, and one of the most important traits of being an entrepreneur is being able to adapt (Elings, 2004). For example, it can be essential to adapt elements on your farm to the participants so they can still do certain activities.

Real agricultural production adds significant value to this target group. Productivity, sales, and **meaningful work** are substantial for those with high-level intellectual disabilities. Doing necessary and valuable work gives the participants appreciation and satisfaction (Elings, 2004). They work with the farmer and supervisors on a quality product. In this way, they come into contact with all aspects of the farm. For some participants, this can be a stepping stone to a regular job on a farm or green environment (Elings, 2004).

*"Perhaps what our clients value most is that they can grow their vegetables or anything else here that they directly consume, or it is a situation where they take the produce to the department and show it off, either to the staff or to other clients."*

On most social farms, especially in Ireland, the Czech Republic and the Netherlands, the number of participants working on the farm daily is limited. Participants, therefore, experience a lot of personal attention. The individual approach is enabled thanks to **small-scale** agriculture and usually the limited size of a social farm.

Participants connect with different people on the social farm and broaden their **social network** generally but the contact with the farmer's family is especially important. The work is usually done together, which creates a sense of belonging. For people with intellectual disabilities living in an institution, working on the farm offers a different setting. It brings them into contact with other people, taking them away from the institution and their residential housemates (Elings, 2004).

*“A big part of the day is to have the meal together, if possible, outside. We had a music session every time people came here with some singing, and I played the guitar.”*

**Participants are addressed on their capabilities** to motivate them to do what they can do rather than their disabilities. In connection with this, the importance is put on the knowledge of agriculture and greenery in guiding participants. The knowledge ensures that they can match the work to the capabilities of the participants with disabilities as well as possible. The expertise is also important to respond flexibly to unexpected circumstances.

In addition to the above points, interviews indicated that this target group must be **physically active**. It is known from research that people with intellectual disabilities often suffer from obesity and other poor health outcomes. By nature, most activities on the farm require physical activity, but it is good to choose especially those activities that challenge the physical fitness of the participants.

Furthermore, social farmers say it is good for **health and safety**. Sometimes it is helpful to arrange the physical infrastructure: for example, improve paths, having a nice shed with facilities for eating, tea and coffee etc. It is recommended to keep the medicine in a locked cupboard and to have a set of rules, e.g., that nobody can go near the bees and be careful when working with some tools or machinery.

## Tips for activities

The knowledge about the participants, their preferences and capabilities are essential to assess at the beginning.

Regular basic farming jobs are suitable, such as checking the life stock should remain central. The tasks should be very simple for a start. Everyone understands that some things need to be done but it is always necessary to assess what participants like to do individually and tailor the work to their needs. Some people are hard-working, while others are happier just looking on.

*“The pace can be adapted to some older men in particular. You can’t be running and racing. When someone says, ‘have we time for a cup of tea?’ you have to be aware that this quality of life is very important to them.”*

*“Of course, some jobs must be done, but you take it at their pace, even if it takes 2 or 3 times longer.”*

## Learning goals

First, of course, the learning goals of this target group depend heavily on the individual. In addition, the degree of intellectual disability also plays a role. A high-level participant can often handle more complex jobs or work more independently than a low-level participant. Also, people with a learning difficulty regularly suffer from other physical and neurological disabilities or conditions such as spasms, autism or physical impairment. Thus, it is necessary to tailor the work to the participant. The social farmers and supervisors indicated in the interviews that this is also the strength of the farm environment and that there are always activities that match the wishes and possibilities of participants.

*“Vince just wants to get out in the fresh air, get away from the house, the freedom of it. He likes to bring home tomatoes or maybe rhubarb, and then he gets someone to make it for him, and it’s his tart.”*

*“Many people’s goals would just be to be out in nature and on a farm. If people have a goal or something specific that is great, you can work with them. But I think the ultimate goal is to build relationships, be it with the animals or the farmer or the farmer’s family, and that’s why I like this concept of enduring placements.”*

*“Within our operation, we want our clients to gradually learn the individual sub-activities that we consider quite natural because we are in the environment of a former farmstead, and we believe that this type of activity (farming) belongs to the natural part of man.”*

*“In our activities, we try as much as possible to lead our clients to independence in individual activities that are quite common on the farm. It is common to find that we help and practically guide the clients in their daily activities or we try to motivate them to develop gradually, which is very limiting with the diagnoses we work with here. Basically, we*



*are trying to develop the clients' existing abilities, skills or work competencies or, on the other hand, we are trying to prevent their decline and to keep them at least at the current level of work competencies they have."*

## **Specific challenges**

People with intellectual disabilities can have quick shifts in mood and behaviour. It is important to be patient and able to handle this. Motivating people to take responsibility for doing a job for their own sake is crucial. Fine motor skills can sometimes be problematic when working with people with learning difficulties.

Often, social farmers and supervisors mentioned slow progress in competencies and abilities. Patience is thus the real challenge when working with people with intellectual disabilities.

*"Shortness of some placements: you start from this very small place or a low level of ability or challenging behaviour, and it can take a long time to build them up. It probably took almost ten years to get the self-confidence and comfort of getting to a goal with the person I am supporting at another farm. It is a discovery process of " what can this guy do."*

*"Unfortunately, with our clients, it is not possible to plan their future very well, as they are generally unable to think beyond a week or a month into the future due to their intellectual disability. Rather, at the farm, we try to improve their current life and functioning, so their well-being is improving."*

## **Conflict management**

Of course, in working with this target group, conflicts sometimes happen. According to the social farmers and supervisors, it is crucial to remain calm, explain the basis of their decision, and take the lead. Participants with learning difficulties sometimes do not see the long-term or what a specific behaviour does to the other person. These challenges are needed to be explained to participants and their surroundings.

*"Most of our clients and staff have a diminished capacity to resolve some conflict. Most of the time, we encounter typical conflict situations like in other workplaces. Still, in our operations, we try to prevent these situations and moments where the good atmosphere in the workplace can be disrupted in the first place. In general, we avoid stressful situations, so we do not put any high pressure on employees to be productive. As a result, we generally try to resolve all conflicts immediately or in cooperation with other professional staff. Throughout the operation of both sides, we strive to make the authority of the managers as natural as possible and to build respect for these employees among our clients and employees from the target group."*

*"In agriculture, I have rarely witnessed real conflicts. As a rule, however, a slightly different tone prevails there. Every industry has its own tone. In a production group led by an employee who started here as a curative education nurse, the tone is clearly different from that in our slaughterhouse, in our agriculture or in our kitchen. In agriculture, by nature, the tone is already a bit rougher in the industry. That's just the way it is. And the employees who get used to it can live with it and deal with it. Then they work there, or they don't work there. But you won't be able to get the tone out of certain industries."*

*"Not everyone can always do what he wants. Often a lot of manual work is necessary, which is not fun for anyone. Potato beetles to collect, for example, or weeding and so on. Then I always try to put together a troop that harmonises. That is a crucial factor here. The biggest challenge is to get the people involved so that they enjoy the work to some extent. That doesn't always work."*

*"It is important to form small groups, sometimes only groups of two, sometimes groups of three, sometimes groups of four that harmonise with each other. I can't combine everyone with everyone. It does not work. If people don't harmonize with each other and then there's conflict again. I have to recognise that and partly correct it if it doesn't work and then rearrange it again. That's an important thing that I have to pay attention to."*

*"You have to keep setting goals, setting intermediate goals. For example, the row is finished, or the bed is finished. Or if I notice that two people have to work on a too large area where they can't see an end, then I have to assign more people to work on the spot. If possible, you always have to offer different jobs."*

*“And what you always have to keep in any case is calm, even if a situation escalates. If you then become hectic, that isn’t good. So even in a situation like that, you have to try to remain as calm as possible.”*

### 4.3 PEOPLE WITH MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES

Being present and well-connected to the participants is essential for this target group. It is important to know the background of the participants but, on the other hand, to quickly forget this background in day-to-day work.

*“You must know about people’s issues and then forget them.”*

These participants often get too caught up in their mental-health problems: focusing on farm work helps these participants get out of their own heads. A social farmer targeting young people with autism says the green environment is already very different for many young people. They are often at home and come from a situation where they spend much time in their room and behind a screen.

*“We see young people coming back to their rhythm here. Participants regain momentum here. Their starting situation often sits at home in their room behind the screen. Here, the day starts with a walk to the vineyard. For many, that is already quite a physical training.”*

Social farmers working with people with mental health challenges suggest breaking tasks down into different parts so that participants stay motivated and keep an overview. The **rhythm, routine and finishing of their duties** are fundamental. Building the self-confidence and self-worth of participants is also key. If people don’t manage to finish a job, the social farmer may do it themselves, but that is actually counterproductive in motivating participants.

Some activities are demotivating for this target group (or perhaps everyone), for example, large fields with many weeds and where participants do not have a good overview. As a social farmer states:

*“We used to do a lot of hoeing, but nowadays, we also often drive the machines through the rows of crops. What we can do mechanically, we do. That way, we reduce the workload and keep things orderly. If you have already milled paths, you know where to walk, and the end is in sight. It is twofold: we see that staff are more inclined to work with machines and, secondly, we do not burden the participants with boring work. When the weeds are growing over your head, that’s not nice.”*

The same social farmer also indicates that depending on the participant's character, you can assign different activities.

*“Last, there was a participant who was totally bouncing with energy. With this participant, I said: you go and weed the tall weeds, have a good time, while with another participant who was very anxious, I gave the assignment to remove the small weeds between the crops. With this task, the movement to be performed was smaller and therefore more appropriate.”*

Language and how you convey it verbally also play a role in coaching participants. For instance:

*“If people are too much in their heads, it is better to say: go weed with your hands instead of the hoe because then you are closer to the soil. And I adapt my language to this. I consciously talk about ‘using hands’.”*

It can work well to give people a bit of space and step out of the picture to let the participants interact among themselves.

It is also important not to condescend to people and to set appropriate expectations of how they conduct themselves in the farm setting.

*“You have to accept that things will not be done perfectly or that things might happen like people stepping on beds but knowing when to say ‘that’s not ok’ and this is what we need to do. It’s about respecting them enough as human beings. You’re not allowing them to walk all over the place. It would be patronising to do so.”*



## Tips for activities

Motivation is an important issue for this target group. For people with mental health problems, getting out of bed early in the morning and getting to the farm on time is often daunting. Therefore, it is good to pay attention to activities where the amount of work is manageable so that the participants stay motivated.

*"[...] Like now we have to pick a lot of beans, then you see them thinking: picking beans again!!! Then you try to alternate it with other jobs or limit it."*

Activities can and should be adapted to a participant's mood. As indicated in an earlier example, a participant with anxiety disorder shouldn't be left to weed alone in a large field but should be facilitated to work in a group in a private space. The place where people work and the atmosphere should be well matched to them and how they feel on that day.

There can also be a difference in capacity in this target group. For example, one social farmer says that with some participants, she must better explain what they will do. She splits the tasks into small subtasks, or they do them together with the group.

*"For participants with less capacity, I give very clear and small instructions. For example, we are now going to weed that row, and when you are done, you come back to me. For other participants, I say: go and weed the cabbages."*

## Learning goals

The advantage of social farm activities is their practical outcome. There is no need to invent work.

*"It is meaningful work that needs to be done. We are not making it up, and it's not contrived. And unlike other work experience, we aim for full participation."*

*"People get to see and be part of the full cycle of things, from planting to weeding, to harvesting to eating."*

People often want the experience of some farming work. They want to leave the house, learn something new, and socialise with others.

*"They realise the value of being out in the fresh air, which is so good for the soul, to keep busy, to have a feeling at the end of a day well spent."*

*"We want our employees to be integrated into the society and community that surrounds our local environment, be it the local community, school, nursery, neighbours etc."*

*"We strive to make sure that each of our clients has a relevant job and has that time filled in a meaningful and as rational way as possible."*

## Specific challenges

With this group, mood and energy levels can vary from week to week or over the course of a day. It is very important to work at the right pace and in a quiet atmosphere and to observe the changes in the rhythm of work well.

*"Slow down. Break the time and work into sections. There is no rush. You have to pull people into the task."*

*"You observe people all the time and see their body language. We are very aware of some of that from the canoeing because you are always meeting people and gently instructing them. So you can intuit when they are tired, or you need to switch to something else."*

Social farmers and supervisors experienced in working with this target group how to push people and to what extent. The animals are an excellent means of getting people out of their comfort zone. Often, people can do so much more than they have been doing. Doing things alongside other people in the real world is very valuable.

*"There is a tendency towards **over-protectiveness** in services. There is always this tension in some ways between challenging people so that they have a meaningful experience and keeping them safe."*

***“Motivation can be an issue. Sometimes someone goes to pick people with mental health challenges up, and they’re not ready, but it’s a function of their challenges in life.”***

***“Lack of physical fitness and agility can be a problem. You have to lower your expectations about what can be done.”***

***“If people are disengaged, it is very hard. Sometimes you have almost to accept that, emphasise the positive, what has been achieved, reinforcing the person's qualities.”***

***“We have occasionally had hygiene issues with participants, where the standards wouldn’t be what we would like.”***

***“For a boy with bipolar disorder, it was very difficult to tell the difference between laziness and failure of the regime due to illness.”***

It is also important to use the different places and elements on the farm for the well-being of participants.

***“Place is very decisive. You should not let people with anxiety weed on a huge field alone, for example, in the greenhouse or a group but not alone.”***

***“The animals are a great means of getting people out of their comfort zone. Oftentimes, people are capable of so much more than they have been doing. The doing things alongside other people, in the real world is very valuable.”***

## **Conflict management**

Some social farmers have training in conflict management. Some facilities use social field experts, such as social workers or therapists. Some participants are accompanied by their key social workers from residential facilities.

Social farmers say it often also depends on which target group you have on your farm. For example, one social farmer says that the capacity level of participants on their care farm has changed, and the atmosphere has also changed.

In working together, it is also important to pay close attention to how you combine participants in carrying out tasks. Some characters suit each other better than others. One social farmer explains this experience:

***“You also look at the combination of people and whether certain characters get along well. That way, they can also motivate each other. Or you put an intern or work supervisor with them, which often works well for motivation. You know that by knowing people and trial and error. Sometimes you also know that the boys don’t feel like it and will snap out of it. Then I put them closer to the pitch so I could keep an eye on them. You can also appeal to them for independence and responsibility: you can do this, you can do that because you are so good at it, and appeal to talents. Or even better: would you teach that to someone?”***

In preventing conflicts, knowledge of participants is key. That way, you know when someone is on the verge of an outburst or are not having a good day.

***“Some participants are also familiar with certain behaviours. For example, there is a participant who curses at the Lord and God once in a while. The protocol then is: to walk away and go out on the field for a while. That way, it doesn’t bother other participants.”***

A key feature of the farm environment is that it offers enough physical space allowing participants to run wild or take a break and be alone for a while.

***“Giving space. If someone is angry because the world is miserable, we send them a long way up the path to rage. For low-level participants, we use traffic lights. Then, for example, someone says: ‘I’m in the red’, and then as a work supervisor, you know that you shouldn’t apply pressure then.”***

It is also sometimes subtle. Participants may be annoyed with each other or have had arguments, but as a social farmer or supervisor, you don’t see everything either. Therefore, if you sense tensions, it is important to discuss them immediately so things don’t get out of hand and harm the working atmosphere. As a social farmer puts it:

*“Sometimes you notice that something is going on, but they are afraid to say it. You then try to make it discussable. For example, you can take them aside for a while. Sometimes participants are also angry with work supervisors. In that case, we usually send them on to the company manager, who then resolves it. Or you play good cop and bad cop with your colleagues.”*

#### **4.4 PEOPLE WITH PHYSICAL DISABILITY**

People with physical disability Before people with physical disabilities join the social farm, it is good to check whether the person has the opportunity to carry out activities there. Can they move around enough on the farm and the yard, or do adjustments need to be made? But above all, what activities **can** the person do? And what **is possible**?

*“When we use raised beds, we have specially adapted places for relaxation and rest of our clients and employees. These are mainly places for meeting together, for resting together or in case of bad weather.”*

*“We built a ramp for wheelchairs. We built toilets, and we expanded the alleys. We adjusted the stables of the animals, so it’s more comfortable for the people with disabilities.”*

*“If someone is diagnosed with a severe spinal injury, we are not naturally motivated to give them physically demanding jobs. So, one source of information for us is the medical records and the objective causes of their ability to work or inability to manage certain activities. Most often, we see restrictions on heavy lifting, and clients are on the job for shortened periods.”*

As in previous cases, an individual approach has long proven successful, mainly due to the specific diagnoses and the real abilities and skills of clients or employees. Further support is also in the amount of work concerning their real skills and abilities. Sometimes the group where a person with a disability works and the adapted work tasks is also important.

*“Sometimes we find that an employee is not actually able to work in a team, so we try to find a more suitable assignment for them or a more suitable type of work within our different groups of employees. That’s probably the most important thing we deal with here, where just the mood states of the moment or the general character of a particular employee is one of the most common issues we deal with here.”*

Being outdoors has a positive effect on people with physical disabilities. The activities allow them to become physically fitter. In some partner countries, we see that people with physical disabilities are used to staying in residential homes, which sometimes makes them less part of society. Working on the social farm makes them part of a community and society.

*“I listen to them, I tell my opinion, and we plan the work. They can trust me because I’m not part of their family, doctor, or therapist. I see their world from a different perspective.”*

*“The important thing is that a person with a disability when he has the opportunity to work, not only clings to his disability, they can still give something to society. They do not just close themselves to their illness but devote themselves to something other than their illness. They can partially recover. By going to work, their illness has stabilised.”*

*“In the past, employees often felt victims of their lives. The farmer encourages them to take responsibility for their lives.”*

#### **Tips for activities**

All activities can be done if they are tailored and possible to the participant's physical disability. In some cases, the activity has to be adapted, for example, if someone is in a wheelchair. In particular, it strongly depends on the severity of a participant's physical disability to what extent they can do activities. What we often see on social farms is that a lot is possible, that through trial and error, it can be seen what a participant can do, and that through the entrepreneurial spirit of farmers, it is often possible to adapt things. Simple activities in which participants feel confident should form the core of their time on the farm. It is important that people enjoy the work they do and that what they do is useful:

*“It is important for boys in a wheelchair that they can chop wood with an axe and feel like “normal” guys.”*

*“We have an employee who needs a walker. He uses a rollator. He does activities that he can do sitting down: planting tomatoes in the greenhouse. He does the work sitting down in the greenhouse.”*

## Learning goals

People with physical disabilities often come to the farm from a care or home setting. It is then important to first find out what someone can do, what activities they are interested in, and what activities they can undertake. They also need to familiarise themselves with the social farm situation. After getting acquainted, you can draw up a personal plan with a participant and see their learning goals.

*“People do what they can. Something has to be done, but if I do not push for performance, in the end, everything will work out.”*

## Specific challenges

There are specific challenges of working on a farm depending on the severity of the physical disability. In the interviews, social farmers mentioned several examples of adapting their farm environment to the participants. Often the farmer makes adjustments such as raising the work surface so that someone in a wheelchair can also repot plants. But adaptations can also be made in tools, for example. At many social farms, for instance, we see that they work with wheelbarrows with two wheels to be more stable to handle. The yard's design or a vegetable garden can also be adapted to make it easier to access for people in wheelchairs. Examples include paving parts of the yard, widening paths between crops, or enlarging the animals' accommodation.

*“We also adapt work tasks. I have a framework, but I try to adapt it to the character traits of an employed person with a physical disability.”*

## Conflict management

There are no specific issues from the interviews regarding conflict management for this target group. For any target group, it is good when new participants join the social farm to look carefully at how they fit into the group. Some social farmers also have a try-out period so that they can evaluate how someone fits into the group. At some farms, participants often work for years. Therefore, the arrival of a new participant should also feel good for the other participants and the group dynamics.

*“In general, our clients have a problem with working under pressure and stress, and any deviation towards stress or pressures makes them uncomfortable at work and reduces their concentration and motivation. We definitely consider the openness of both parties as the main source for a positive atmosphere, where the client, of course, has the opportunity to share their current state, their worries, problems, etc., which may affect their work performance and generally their way of functioning in the workplace. If we know about such a problem, we can take it into account and help the employee in some way, both in his professional life/workplace and in his personal life, which we consider a very important advantage, especially for the employee.”*

*“Team composition is important. There is always a discussion about who they will let into the group.” “Employees are friends, writing messages to each other, solving their own conflicts.”*

## 4.5 YOUNG PEOPLE AT RISK

Youth from disadvantaged social conditions without solid family bonds, sufficient education, employment, or training is a fragile social group that must be approached very carefully. The farmer needs to **understand the challenges** some of these children face at home such as alcoholism, drug addiction, unstable family environment etc.. They might have **low self-esteem** and are **not used to having positive results**. On the farm, social farmers often see these young people blossom by bringing things to success and thus developing self-confidence to take up other things as well.

*"We see the children getting back into their rhythm. They often come from a situation where they spend a lot of time in their room and behind a screen. They really get moving here, physically they get better from that and mentally eventually, too."*

This group needs time to understand the demands and their place in life. Young people also need to **trust** the farmer, and the farmers has to **respect** them.

*"Trust, I would put right at the top. You have to dig deep right into their life."*

*"The farmer needs to know that the young people will have to be shown how to do things. Understanding won't be automatic."*

*"You go in with the basic attitude: you are good. That's already creating a very different framework rather than, 'oh God, you're a highly traumatised, disturbed teenager whom I have to pay attention to.'"*

*"Lack of initiative may be due to shyness, not lack of interest."*

*"One thing I notice about young people these days is that they are afraid to talk. They are afraid to start that conversation with an adult because they are so used to texting and snapping, and they tend to stay in their little virtual world. So I was conscious when they went out of mixing them or maybe putting too quiet and shy ones with two outgoing ones, and they developed a real bond. One of the biggest problems these young people are facing is isolation. That word 'social' is significant in social farming."*

Young people without much opportunity and experience are often shy. They may have a history of trauma that is difficult to share. They may have been hurt, bullied, or underachieved relative to their peers. Being on the farm is an opportunity to prove that they can do something and are an integral part of society.

In this kind of work, the roles should be kept quite strict. The farmer must be aware of their position. They are not parents, teachers or even friends. They are somewhere between those and must find their way in this.

*"Asking them and giving them a choice as to what to do sometimes. It is up to the adult to try and pull the conversation out of them."*

The farmer/supervisor also needs to beware of prejudices and judgments of the past.

*"I didn't know any background. I had no preconceived notions. As far as I was concerned, they were just children, each with their own personality. I think that's a good way of doing it."*

*"It's about listening and building people's confidence. I truly believe everyone has a story to tell, and they want to tell their story."*

Young people need a routine that gives a sense of **responsibility** regardless of what happens. The routine helps them improve the understanding of discipline they can take to their own lives.

*"Having a project worked very well. With the group of young people, we focused on making the farm safe and accessible for the group coming next who was going to be less physically able."*

*"We also see it as an essential part of our therapy that it is in the agricultural processes that clients are in a natural environment, where for example, in activities like planting, they are able to perceive something from the beginning to the very end. When a seedling is planted, after a certain amount of time, with a certain level of care, the plant grows, the fruit is harvested, and then whatever is cooked from it, etc. The same with animal husbandry."*

## Tips for activities

Having a **job and setting a routine** that needs to be **followed every day** is important. It must be real work and sometimes hard work in which they are encouraged to stretch themselves and to contribute regardless of what is going on in their head.

*"It doesn't matter how you feel if you feel bad or sad or happy, these jobs must be done, regardless of what else is happening in life. These set routines are really important for your own way of going."*

Some social farmers indicate that working with animals can interest these young people. It allows young people to interact safely without feeling that someone is judging them.

Several social farmers also indicate that it is crucial to do the real work first. Then, there is always room in the afternoon to do other recreational things like playing or lighting fires.

*"With the young people, you would have a set amount of tasks to do in the morning that has to be done, and then you'd go and do whatever jobs that need doing."*

*"An important element here on the social farm is the fire pit. The fire pit is really important to most children. It is a kind of reward for their work, and they find it super fun to light it and make soup over it, for example."*

*"In the arrival phase, you can offer more physical work. Especially for young men: physical work, simple physical work where you can see direct results: chopping wood, tearing something out, lifting something, clearing something, building something, anything where you can see something happening."*

*"Some seek out responsible tasks all by themselves. Most of the people here feed the animals. I think that's great. Or the one continues now at building the fence. They then try it all by themselves, and to give them freedom in this without saying you must, but only you could, that's important."*

Real contact with green spaces is also mentioned as necessary. Specifically for children and young people, the environment mustn't be too tidy or perfect. Children enjoy places with biodiverse characters, with lots of variety, where they can play hide-and-seek or have space for fantasy games, for example.

*"Contact with greenery and experiencing wild nature and being able to look further from there. This vineyard fits in nicely. Places with a biodiversity character are good for these children."*

If you work with children on a social farm, it is good to know that young children cannot and do not want to work all the time. For young children, playing is also very important. As one supervisor put it:

*"Young children can't be made to work all the time, relaxation is also important, and the concentration span is not very high. Here at the vineyard, we then have fire-making as a reward."*

## Learning goals

Often, the first learning goal for children and young people when they arrive at the social farm, is to regain their structure and rhythm. Many young people come from a situation where they usually sit at home, do not have many responsibilities, and their time is quite unstructured. Supervisors indicate that many youngsters typically spend a lot of time on screens and are therefore not used to being outside or physically active.

*"We used to live much more with the seasons. Now summers are as long as winters because you can turn on the lights and stove at home. With that, you miss the rhythm of the seasons, for example, retiring in winter. The vineyard gets the children back into their rhythm."*

*"We see children returning to their rhythm here. The social farm takes care of that but also experiences the seasons better again. They come out of a situation of their room and screen."*

Young people learn discipline on the farm. They learn to take care of animals and plants and learn more about farming. They understand what is needed in what season. They also learn to respect each other, achieve and complete tasks and gain more self-confidence. They learn to communicate better.

Learning to care for animals and plants is very interesting for many children and young people. The care also gives a different perspective.

*"And with that, of course, all target groups come here on the farm to take care of the animals, the garden and others instead of always being that others take care of you. That does something to people."*

But the basis remains that children and young people can unwind and regain self-confidence, which forms the basis for their further development.



## Specific challenges

Social farmers indicate that there are several things to look out for in mentoring children and young people on social farms:

*"What often works less well is large differences in IQ between children. Then they often have less connection with each other, and that creates quarrels."*

*"Don't patronise them, don't talk down to them, don't be a teacher in the conservative, traditional sense."*

*"Talk to them as young adults. They're not toddlers. Some of them are living very adult lives."*

*"You can't lecture to them, you work from the basis that they can do something, and then they can. You have to be aware that they may never ever have done something like that and that it'd be the same for me the first time I tried something. It's all about learning."*

*"The young people we received were out in therapy. No one wanted them anymore. For them, it was the last option. That was not nice for the young people or us either. As a social farmer, I have also not studied pedagogy, so sometimes it isn't easy to guide these young people. In that respect, it would be nice not to receive only the worst cases."*

*"It can be hard to step back and see them making mistakes, but it was like with my own father. He didn't watch over my shoulder the whole time. You were shown once or twice, and then you were free to do it yourself. I took the same approach with them."*

*"Monotonous work is difficult over a long period of time. I also think that in a large vegetable farm, where you really have to harvest your beans every morning, and you do that with the young people for a few weeks - forget it."*

*"Everything is foreign, foreign people, foreign homes, foreign customs, foreign cultures. It's all completely new at first. That's why you first invite the young person in and don't demand so much. The difficulty, of course, is also separating yourself from your old habits because everyone brings their habitual patterns with them. This is a general problem for us humans. The question is: Where do I create a framework where you can keep parts of your habits? So that you feel secure. That changes over time. Shift slowly, don't shock abruptly in such a rocket fashion. I give young people the space first. They need their time, with most unfortunately, with their media."*

## Conflict management

As a social farmer, you must be forward-looking and flexible to avoid conflict, especially if you work with youngsters entering puberty or having behavioural problems.

*"The bottom line is that it's a lot about making arrangements and making them together. Are the agreements still up to date? They need to be adjusted if they are no longer up to date. Something like a weekly schedule is also dynamic, of course. Sometimes you realise after a while, 'Okay, we actually need time after breakfast. You're always in the mood for another cigarette, and I actually want to get started. Then let's plan for you to smoke a cigarette after breakfast. Then I won't have the urge, I'll have to go, and we'll avoid seven minutes of conflict, and then you'll go smoke.'"*

*"Conflict situations are primarily conflicts of interest. It's a common problem in youth welfare, especially with under-18s: They have to be housed somehow. They are used to having decisions made about them all the time. Here, for the first time, they have a space where they are free, where a lot is possible. And then, of course, they want a lot."*

*"We focus on personal responsibility. 'You can have a lot of freedoms if we feel you can carry them. And if we feel that, we get freedom in return. Freedom for us means freedom for you. If we have the feeling that you manage to plan your everyday life yourself, get up in the morning, be there on time, and participate, then, of course, you can have your cell phone and Wi-Fi all day.'"*

Social farmers and supervisors indicate that it is also important to be self-reflective. What does conflict do to me? And the better you can look at the situation calmly, the better you can control the conflict or make sure it does not get out of hand.

*“And above all, in conflicts: Where do I professionally manage to perceive my emotions and have them under control as a pedagogue? I don’t want to overtax the young person and put them in a difficult situation by overlooking my emotions and being massively overwhelmed by them. I have to look repeatedly: How do I develop objective empathy and still look: What is happening right now? And what tools do I have? How do I manage conflicts? You develop these skills when you have learned to deal with conflicts in your life. You must know that conflicts are normal without feeling personally triggered.”*

*“Conflicts can only be resolved through experience. And the more you’ve experienced, the more confident you are about it, and the less it bothers me. “*

It is also important to be clear in your rules to explain why those rules are so important. And to set your boundaries clearly in that as well.

*“And to have the ability, as a social worker, always mentally to anticipate and make it clear to him: If you act like this, I am forced to act like this. Your actions decide what happens. Because if you set the place on fire, I have to act in such a way. And if you do such and such, then it will happen.”*

*“And then I always tell him up front, ‘think carefully about what you’re doing now.’ I once had a boy who wanted to smash a bottle on my head, so I said, ‘Think thoroughly about what happens then. You can do it now. Then I’ll have a head injury, and you’ll be locked up in the mental hospital. Think carefully about why you’re doing this.’”*

*“I have to be just as clear about that: Where is my limit, and where do I also say: We can’t do that? I’m sorry, we can’t live together like this. That’s not possible. You have to be clear about that and not have the feeling that you have failed.”*

On the other hand, many social farmers and supervisors say you should work on the basis of equality and in an informal way.

*“We are beside the children and not above them. We try to work from equality, but the young person should also not run off with you. If that happens, you have to be more authoritarian. After all, the safety of yourself and others does come first. You also build something from the trust with the client.”*

*“It is an informal but professional relationship so all supervisors know where the line is drawn. After working hours, for example, it stops.”*

Conflict management is often mainly about preventing conflict and thinking well ahead.

*“The bottom line is that a lot of work is also prevention work: discussing together: Where are we going. Making a plan together: What is important now? Also, recheck priorities. If you feel really bad today, we don’t have to stick to this daily plan. Let me know if you can’t do it anymore.”*

*“We pick up children from home early in the morning. We do this on a one-to-one basis. This is also due to the severity of the problems and the supervision that is needed. You also use the time in the car to talk to each other. This is a nice way of talking because you sit next to each other in the car. That way, you also hear in advance how they feel that day.”*

Finally, social farmers indicate that the place where counselling takes place, or the design of this place can also play an important role in conflict prevention. For children with autism, this might include an area that does not have too many stimuli or, for young people with behavioural problems, opportunities to have a moment alone or so-called ‘time-out spots’.

*“We see that a location like the Monastery Garden, where other people also sometimes visit, provides more positive stimuli than the vineyard and, as a result, fewer conflicts arise.”*



## 4.6 PEOPLE IN RECOVERY FROM ADDICTION

For people with an alcohol and drug addiction history, taking tiny steps to avoid the risk of relapse is always necessary. Routine and a daily structure are essential.

*“First and foremost, the structured daily routine: getting up, getting dressed, and not becoming grumpy or lonely. We promote and support so that the people here can pursue their own goals. Their goal can be, for example, sorting a 25 kg sack of potatoes and weighing them on your own, determining the varieties on your own and then going with the farmer to the market.”*

It is essential to know the diagnosis and medical history of the participants to assess which of them can be integrated into which activities and tasks.

*“There is preliminary information about the participants and then preliminary interviews, a job interview. We classify the participants according to their illnesses and determine personal inclinations. All newcomers should get a taste of all work areas.”*

The farm and **family environment** are the thing that brings sense to their lives and the hope that they belong somewhere. All family members can have an essential role in their lives. Also, the fact that the participant is welcome on the farm and that the farmer and his family open their farm to him or her positively impacts the participants' self-esteem (Elings et al., 2011). These participants often come from a situation where they have been viewed negatively by others and society.

*“For this group, a huge factor is being trusted within a family or home environment.”*

*“It works very well when C [spouse] and the children are around, the whole family environment. Especially the relationship one of the participants has with my own daughter. They have the same kind of interests in art and things like that. I think she prefers spending time with her than me!”*

*“The fact that the farmer is not a professional is very important. The farmer wasn't hiding things from him for fear that he was going to rob it. The domestic setting is key.”*

*“Make the time to talk, be interested in their lives and their life stories if they want to share things.”*

It is not only the homely atmosphere that attracts this target group to the farm but also because it is a **different environment** from that of the healthcare institution they are used to (Elings et al., 2011). According to this study, male participants from addiction care indicated that the offer on social farms has allowed them to have more choices in daytime activities. In former days the day care centres were mainly focused on making art or hobby-like activities that were not necessarily compatible with the preferences or interests of men accessing addiction services.

*“It's a nice day out and something completely different to what people are used to doing. It's a feeling of freedom. You're away from the city. It's relaxing if you want a bit of time for yourself, there is enough space to do so.”*

Participants feel less **judged by their past** and how they look.

*“He used to be judged because of his addictions and visible tattoos. And here was someone who didn't judge him and who accepted him. He had done nine residential; this was the best he had ever done, and he got the most from it.”*

From the interviews with social farmers and an effect study by Elings et al. (2011), participants say that the activities on the farm make them physically tired. Fatigue ensures that participants sleep better and require less sleep medication.

It is **important to motivate participants**. Sometimes it is difficult to recognise if the participants are tired or have a lack of motivation to work. Elings et al. (2011) found that fellow participants encourage each other to come to the farm. For example, they send text messages to each other not to forget to come along on the bus to the social farm.

*“At first, there is a lot of confusion. The participants usually have a totally disturbed rhythm, such as sleep-wake. Overall, all vital functions are completely out of balance.”*

### Tips for activities

The most important thing about working on the social farm is that the participants can enjoy physical activity. That physical aspect is there on the farm anyway. In addition, being busy during the day distracts the participants from

their craving for alcohol and drugs. Activities that contribute to structure, rhythm and distraction during the day suit this target group best.

## Learning goals

The primary learning goal for this target group is to regain structure and rhythm in their lives. This aim is the basis by which peace of mind is created, and they can potentially better manage their addiction issues. For many participants from this target group, staying clean is difficult, so having something to do during the day distracts them from the craving for alcohol and drugs.

Another learning goal may be breaking from their old network and the negative influence of the scene they were in. The social farm can help participants make new contacts. In addition, the effect study by Elings et al. (2011) shows that it also provides a legitimate excuse not to meet up with old social contacts, e.g. 'I cannot meet you now because I have to go to bed early and work on the farm again tomorrow'.

*"We call ourselves reintegration, but that's utopia, an idea. Maybe 5% will make it back to work. The improvement is due to not getting worse. Sometimes you have to bake small rolls."*

*"In my experience, the participants stabilise the longer they are here and feel more self-confident about their work."*

*"In my experience, for example, participants with Korsakov's syndrome need the same work over and over again, such as routine work in the agricultural sector. This is stabilising for this group of participants, as Korsakov sufferers have major problems with memory, especially with short-term memory."*

## Specific challenges

During interviews Elings et al. (2011) had with participants and social farmers for their study, it emerged that getting to the social farm and being there on time can be challenging for this target group. Therefore, fellow participants must encourage each other to come to the social farm. Peer encouragement works best in this. The interviews also show that time management becomes less of an issue once participants have found their rhythm and worked for a long time.

The same study suggests that mixing participants with an addiction background with other target groups can be beneficial. Participants from addiction care can be rowdy. If the group is too large, this can sometimes lead to unsocial behaviour because these are often men used to tough behaviour anyway.

In many cases, participants from this target group have had tough lives. Their addiction has often impacted their physical well-being, and, as a result, their bodies will have to get used to physical labour, especially in the beginning.

As a social farmer/supervisor, you need to think carefully about what you allow on your farm. For example, are participants allowed to use alcohol or drugs outside the farm, or must they be completely clean? Or are there still phases when participants are in their detox and are allowed to drink or use methadone, for example, before coming to the farm?

In some cultures, it is sometimes somewhat unusual to work in agriculture or participants have a negative image of working on a farm. It is good to consider this and allowing participants to get used to the new environment and work situation.

*"Some people are a bit unsure, having no farming experience, but once I bring them out to the farm, that changes. People can put on this bravado, macho thing of 'oh, I'm not going to do slave labour', 'oh, I'm not going to be near cows'. They can see barriers between themselves and the farmer and would ask questions like, 'what would the farmer know about me? Like to do they know that I have an addiction? But that gets broken down when they see what it's like.'"*

*"It is a bit challenging for the farmer. It's just a bit of planning and having alternatives. I like to keep people busy while they are here; if something is not very interesting, you can switch to something else. It's good to have a few options. What you think might be interesting for people might not be."*

*"Another problem at the beginning is the setting with medication so the participants can cope with everyday life. The medication setting is also very important so that, for example, the residents have the same sleeping and working hours and do not disturb each other's rhythms. In the beginning, it's all about rhythm."*

## Conflict management

Participants in addiction care are predominately male. The world they come from is usually harsh, often characterised by an overwhelming focus on acquiring drugs and alcohol. Supervisors say they see a different atmosphere on social farms than, for instance, in the user rooms in addiction care facilities (Elings et al., 2011). But it is useful to know that this behaviour and background can quickly lead to a kind of 'joke culture' on the farm that not everyone feels comfortable with.

*"They sure are a bunch of farmers together. Things do get a bit rough around here. That has to do with the target group and the participants, but often also with the staff here. [...] On some days, for example, psychologists are also walking around here, and then there is a different atmosphere at lunch than when only the work supervisors/farmers are there."*

One of the social farmers also points out a difference in atmosphere and how you coach the participants depending on their level.

*"We noticed that the atmosphere changed when we got a different target group. The level is lower now, and we noticed that with this group, the interest level they have in each other is also a bit lower. It is also harder to get them to work independently."*

## 4.7 OLDER PEOPLE

Older people, whether they are in residential care or at home, still want to feel useful. Due to retirement or health problems associated with old age, structure, rhythm and contacts at work have often been lost. These are elements that older people can find again on the social farm (Elings, 2011). At the farm, they see the result of their work for instance in the products they grow and sell in the farm shop.

*"For the elderly, it is imperative that they feel essential. For example, we see older people here who are still completely up to date but are in a wheelchair. An older adult then pushes them with dementia. And then when they play Rummikub [board game], the elderly person in the wheelchair helps the elderly person with dementia in return."*

We see older men visiting the social farm. They often have an agricultural background or have been farmers themselves, making them feel good to be of value and to use their skills and talents again. Looking at the possibilities for day care for the elderly, we often see what is offered are more female-oriented activities such as knitting, crafts or making flower arrangements which often appeal less to men. Being physically active suits men better, and they are happy that this option exists.

During the activities, people get to know each other they talk about their youth experiences and can exchange them. On the farm, the elderly experience different things than they would experience at home, which gives people something in common to talk about. It offers a different conversation than sitting together in a residential living room.

*"Often, when a new participant comes to this place that is not so talkative or involved, this changes when they start working in the garden. Then they have a common theme to discuss and make contacts easier."*

*"The aim is to bring clients to other ideas thanks to working in the garden, especially to go directly to individual activities. The change is recorded mainly at the moment "when these people touch the ground"."*

Thanks to the involvement in agriculture, the garden or the animals' participants come up with new ideas and are less likely to think about their illnesses or limitations.

“Clients often say that they thought about it in the room after the end of the horticultural session and that they would like to do something new next time. It can be seen that they think about these things even after finishing. They do not immediately think about diseases and other health-related problems.”

*“The goal of this type of care is to give the seniors the possibility to live independently as long as possible, to be well cared for and to know: I am not alone.”*

“Participants often participate so that they are not alone in the room. They want to talk about something and to be involved more actively - they move, they want to try something, some of them participate passively and observe.”

## Tips for activities

With older people, it is important to put fun first. They are already retired and come to the social farm for a pleasant day-activity. That is the primary goal. A specific target group are older people with dementia and for this target group, it is particularly important to realise that they are often on the farm for the experience. They do not need to perform x number of tasks every day but are included in every day's work. The scale of the job can be agricultural work, but it could also be more domestic tasks like peeling potatoes or putting flowers in a vase (Elings, 2011).

Seasonal activities are particularly valuable for this target group, evoking memories of what respondents did during their lives, such as transplanting houseplants in the winter or spring, planting plants and sowing seeds. Many activities are around keeping the household and doing the things they participated in the past when they were at their homes.

*“We no longer do what is necessary, but we do what is possible.”*

*“Of course, the hard work in the stables may not be possible, but people can have fun seeing others do the work or sitting on the tractor.”*

“There is an effort to have a friendly atmosphere. Clients talk about their experiences and share their memories [...]”

*“It's not that people can only move in here if they're still physically able to perform tasks. Everything is possible, we look at what people like to do, but they don't have to because seniors, because of their age and medical conditions, also have days when they're not feeling well. Where they say, ‘No, not today.’ And then the concept is structured so that there are always people who can take over the agricultural tasks.”*

## Learning goals

Of course, the target group of older people also learns new things on the social farm. However, explicitly learning new things is not necessarily the main focus. As indicated earlier, it is mainly about the experience. For many older people, however, it is crucial to keep moving. Movement keeps their muscles trained and thus keeps them physically fit, which can be preventive in many age-related diseases.

“The activities are interconnected - first, participants talk about things (how the plum blossomed in their garden), then they look at the orchard and watch the flowering trees and bees flying. When the plums ripen, they collect them together and share experiences. They also arrange a recipe for a cake, which they then bake together and consume at another joint meeting. It is this interconnectedness of individual activities that is positively evaluated.”

De Bruin's research (2009) suggests that, specifically for elderly people with dementia, preventing weight loss can be an important goal. Older people with dementia often suffer from limited intake of food and drink, which can lead to malnutrition. It is good to pay attention to the social farm, for example, on communal eating because these moments ensure that elderly people with dementia get enough food more naturally. As the Dutch saying goes: seeing other people eat makes one eat.

## Specific challenges

Particularly with the target group of older people, the yard must be easily walkable and barrier-free because they fall more easily. After all, psychological limitations and the consequences of falling can be severe. It may also be interesting

to adjust certain activities. For example, raising the worktop so that the elderly person can pot plants while sitting rather than sitting on his or her knees.

“We have paved parts of the yard so the elderly can safely walk around the farm. In doing so, we pay very close attention to whether there are any loose stones or mud anywhere that could cause them to fall. With the elderly, we think that safety is very important.”

*“For example, we have a stair lift, not an elevator. Most of the time, it's quick to take the elevator in a large facility. There we get from floor to floor. I can think, ‘Do I take the stair lift, which goes totally slow?’ That's obviously good for the people who can't do it anymore. ‘Or do I pull myself together, make an effort, and take the stairs, then I'm faster than the stair lift?’ That keeps people mobile longer.”*

*“The chickens used to be there, but a simple wooden gate was in front of it. And this glass door was created so that seniors who, for example, are in wheelchairs and can no longer enter the chicken coop, can still see the chickens and can see them.”*

Specifically, in the case of older adults with dementia, it is important to communicate well with the partner, informal caretaker or other family members. Because the older person with dementia cannot always remember what agreements were made or how things went, including family members in this communication is also good. A social farmer explains how they manage this on their social farm:

“We use a notebook, which is important in communication with the family/partner. For example, it sometimes happens that an older adult with dementia comes home with a strange story. We then tell the partner they can always call to check what happened. This is important. We also apply this strategy with children that come to our social farm. Children sometimes play together in the yard, and we don't always see everything happening. It is then good to check together what exactly happened.”

## **Conflict management**

Not so many conflicts arise in supporting older people on the social farm. As mentioned above, with older people with dementia, it is important to have short lines of communication with their partner or family to avoid misunderstandings. Of course, as in any workplace, things clash occasionally.

*“We try to resolve conflict situations in the circle of those affected and communicate it together. At the same time, we supervise our psychosocial worker regularly.”*

*“Often, some residents have their rituals, like taking the geese out to pasture in the morning or bringing them back in the evening. That's their ritual. And, of course, we have residents who also like to get involved. And you have to manage the balancing act when there's a conflict, along the lines of: ‘This is my area. I'm responsible for the geese; you cannot do that. I've been doing that for years. You've only lived here for half a year, and I won't let you interfere.’ And that's where conflicts arise that can actually be solved well by finding a compromise in an open exchange, so that, for example, one person gives up one day and says, ‘Okay, I'll take someone with me, or I'll guide the person so that he can do it on his own.’ And then you try to find compromises, just as you do in a family.”*

## CONCLUSION

This report contains the analysis of interviews conducted with social farmers and supervisors on social farms as part of the project “Social Work in Farming (SoFarTEAM)”. The purpose of the report is to present and analyse the raw data from the interviews led by all project partners in their countries (Ireland, Germany, The Czech Republic, and The Netherlands). The interviews were supplemented by the participatory observations on social farms, during which the observers stayed for at least three days on a social farm, working alongside farmers and participants. In turn, the outcomes of this report will be used as input for the development of both academic teaching materials and for farmer training materials on working with specific target groups.

The interviews and observations were collected due to a knowledge gap of detailed information about beneficial elements of social farms for different target groups. We also wanted to get more insights into the approaches of social farmers and supervisors, their values, characteristics, and methods of working. In describing the specific needs of the participants, we divided the text into two sections: one that gives a general overview of the data found and the second that deals specifically with the different target groups that come to the social farm. In doing so, we discuss which elements, activities and learning objectives are important for each target group and describe the challenges that may arise and how to manage them.

This report serves as the basis for two other project outputs. One of them is the training material for teachers and students who want to develop and foster their knowledge of social farming, particularly how to work with different target groups on social farms. The results presented in this report are supplemented with additional literature. A second output consists of communicating this report's found data and information in the most usable form to social farmers and related practitioners.

All project outputs aim to strengthen the social farming sector in Europe and beyond and will use the knowledge from research, experiences of practitioners and the outcomes of this project to train the social farmers of the future.



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# APPENDIX

## INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

### Introduction

- SoFarTEAM-project
- Aim is to better understand what elements social farming has to bring different target groups
- The information from the interviews will lead to training materials for students in social work and agronomy
- Ask permission to record this conversation. Did the respondent fill in the informed consent?

### General

- How and for what reason did you start this social farming project?

(Introduction and getting to know each other: background of the respondent, education, what kind of farm, experience in health care, motivation.)

### Vision of care and activities

- What kind of care or guidance is given on this social farm?
- What kind of relationship do you have with the participants on this social farm? What role do you have towards participants and in general as part of this social farm?

(How does the farmer/social worker see him or herself concerning the farm and participants? Is there a hierarchy? If yes, does this positively or negatively affect participants?)

- Can you describe the activities of the participants? Is the work tailored to the participants? Do participants work in all the branches/activities of the social farm?
- Can you describe the working atmosphere? (Between participants and between participants and supervisors) How do you recognise situations in which participants feel uncomfortable or under pressure? How are conflicts solved in the past?

### Target groups

- Which target groups come to your social farm? How do they find your social farm? (Why to this farm and not to some other care institution, with what motivations, expectations, and other possibilities)
- With what kind of learning goals/aim do the participants come to your social farm? (Specify per target group or get a feeling if these goals are universal or more individual than depending on the target group)
- Which difficulties do participants experience when starting at your social farm? Is there a difference per target group?
- Do you need to pay attention to specific things if you work with specific target groups? (Mention the different target groups that come to that specific farm.)
- Are there any key competencies, attributes or characteristics a farmer or social worker needs to work with this target group?
- Do you adjust the farm environment for the participants? If yes, in what way do you adjust to the farm environment?

- Can you give specific examples of activities suitable for specific target groups?

#### Beneficial elements on the social farm

- What aspects of the social farm do participants value in general?
- What is the added value of a social farm for participants compared to other (day-activity projects)?
- Which aspects or elements of the social farm are essential for specific target groups?
- Which elements are important for the physical well-being of participants? Which is for mental well-being? Which is for social well-being? Which is for spiritual well-being? (Do people experience something transcendent, e.g. friendship, relationship, relationship to something higher – God, but not necessarily to call it God? It can be nature or something else?)
- If the above question is too difficult: Suppose you can take three photos of places, elements or persons on this social farm that are valuable for supporting participants in their development. Which images would you take?
- What does engaging on the farm mean for participants?
- How does working on the care farm help participants make plans for their future or become masters of their own lives?

#### Closing

- Thank you for this interview
- Is there any point you would like to raise attention? Any questions?
- We will update you with the results

## OBSERVATION PROTOCOL

Name of observer:

Duration of stay:

Name and location of the farm:

Kind of farm:

Branches of the industry of the farm (primary production – kind of crop and animal husbandry, processing, sale, catering, other):

Number and kind of participants (a type of CGs):

Type of activities the participants are involved in (gainful employment, occupational rehabilitation, medical rehabilitation, resocialization, occupational therapy, vocational training, daycare, nurture, habitation, education, parenting, leisure opportunities, volunteering, activation, other)

Observe and describe:

- Who stays at the farm and prepares and plans the activities? Who directly assists the participants? (Employees/staff at the farm)
- The type of activities in which the participants are involved? Elaborate on the range of observed activities.
- Is there a daily/weekly list of tasks to be done by participants and staff? Are the works compulsory or voluntary?
- What is the motivation of the participants to get involved?
- Do the participants work in a group or individually? Are there other types of activities next to the farm work? (Psychotherapy, supervision, advisory and other social services, other workplaces)
- The ways of communication between the participants and support workers/farmers.
- In the case of misunderstandings in communication, how are these situations solved?
- The atmosphere on the farm what specific activities, approaches etc., enhance the functioning of the communication at the farm?
- The daily routine and any specific rituals, traditions, and family "kitchen table" at the farm. What do they look like? And what do you think is the effect of these rituals?
- The "language" spoken at the farm (forms of communication, "simple language", formal, non-formal language).
- The position of participants, are they perceived as colleagues, or is there a hierarchy in relationships?
- The forms of transport and accommodation of the participants.
- The forms of funding social farm activities.
- The opportunities and disadvantages of integration at the farm and the wider rural community. In case of experience from other services provided to participants, compare them to farm surrounding.
- The plan and organisation of the farm, which buildings the farm consists of?
- Take photos (Do not forget to let them sign consent forms so that we can use the photos within our teaching material and for dissemination!) of:
  - o Building alterations, e.g. high beds, humps and wheelchair-accessible barns, toilets for people with disabilities, guidance for people with hearing or seeing impairments
  - o Machines and devices that are suitable for specific target groups
  - o Tools that support people with disabilities

- Other modifications of the farm, e.g. break rooms, meeting points, meeting places, location for work plans, etc.
- General photos of the farm and, if possible and appropriate, of the people that work there