

## CHAPTER 11

### FARMING FOR HEALTH IN FINLAND

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**Abstract.** In Finland Farming for Health is a relatively new phenomenon. Information concerning the number of farms for health and related projects is missing. The current situation in Finland can only be described through case studies. Riding therapy is the best known form of farming-for-health activity and the local and national authorities have already recognized the need for it. Riding therapy is well organized in Finland with its recognized status, association and financial background. Although there is only one educational establishment for riding therapy in our country at the moment, it seems to guarantee the further existence of the profession. Among private entrepreneurs, there are a hospital and a college for disabled persons that use the method in their work.

Other animal-assisted therapy methods are expanding all the time; they are not supported to a great extent however. Social-pedagogic rehabilitation can be studied in courses of the University of Kuopio. There are some farms and centres for disabled persons that provide rehabilitation to their average customers and special groups. The financial structures have to be clarified in the immediate future in order to develop the working methods further.

Garden therapy is not recognized as an official therapy method and the Social Insurance Institution of Finland does, in principle, not finance it. The educational possibilities are still modest and rare but there have been some possibilities to receive education related to Farming for Health in Finland. The therapy method is, anyhow, widely used in old people's homes, prisons and institutions for mental health. In this field of therapy there is still a lot of research and planning to do.

**Keywords:** ancillary enterprises; animal husbandry; disabled persons; endemic breeds; health policy; horse farms; indigenous breeds; landraces; livestock industry; mental health; public health; vocational rehabilitation

#### INTRODUCTION

In Finland Farming for Health (FH) as an intentional activity is a relatively new phenomenon. Farming is still considered as primary production of food and fibre, although the contribution of farming to the rural landscape, to biodiversity and as producer of a recreational environment has been acknowledged, and policy measures addressed to these issues have been developed and implemented during the past decade. Although the meaning of farming as a therapeutic activity or service has not been recognized, it can be found and exploited in several enterprises and public institutions, for example in prisons. Educational and research activities related to animal-assisted therapy have also emerged during the past decade. Still,

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the institutional basis, organizational structures, education, financial measures and institutional structures are not very sophisticated.

In the Agrifood Research Centre, Environmental Research, we started a project in April 2004 in which the therapeutic use of cattle and sheep is explored. The focus is on the endemic breeds, which are threatened to become extinct. These animals are characterized as calm, gentle, low-productivity, healthy, and they could be considered especially appropriate for therapeutic use. Native sheep and cattle are bred in two prisons, and the experiences with keeping these animals have been encouraging. In this project we are aiming at exploring the socio-cultural and economic basis of the activity and we are making proposals for developing policy measures.

Due to the fact that FH is a relatively new issue in Finland, it has not been mapped in full detail, e.g., we have no exact data of the number of farms for health and related projects. Another problem is the broad scope of farming-for-health activities, from more or less recreational activities and hobbies to therapeutic activities. In this article we deal with animal-assisted activities and garden therapy.

For these reasons, we will describe the current situation in Finland primarily through case studies. The article is based on interviews with experts (researchers, entrepreneurs and authorities) and available literature concerning the issue. We will first approach the situation through the case studies and then summarize current policies, research, educational activities and projects dealing with FH. This chapter will not concern itself with garden therapy, although it is used in Finnish old people's homes, hospitals etc. Our focus will be on animals and their utilization in therapeutic activities.

## THE MAIN FIELDS OF FARMING FOR HEALTH IN FINLAND

### *Riding therapy*

Riding therapy is the best known form of farming-for-health activity in Finland. The rehabilitation riding-therapy lessons are supported by the Social Insurance Institution of Finland (Kansaneläkelaitos, Kela). The riding therapist must be qualified for giving the therapy. The lessons should be included in the patient's individual rehabilitation plan and the gained results should be monitored and reported. The local social services may also finance the riding therapy as well as some associations for disabled persons (Nina Hyvätti, pers. comm.).

The Equine College of Ypäjä (Ypäjän hevosopisto) aims to educate equestrian professionals of every sphere. The college provides education in all equine sectors and has approximately 250 students each year. After taking the basic second level exam the students can continue their studies in further professional education courses. One of these courses is meant for persons who are interested in riding therapy. The college is the only educational establishment in Finland where one can become a qualified riding therapist. The Finnish qualified, professional riding therapists usually have the basic education of a physiotherapist (<http://www.hevosopisto.fi>).

The education consists of three modules dealing with riding therapy: the first one is about horses in general, the second about riding therapy in support of upbringing, and the third about riding therapy in support of motor coordination. Characteristic for the education is its supplementary nature: it is basically about updating career training or about further education, which the riding therapists may adapt to their work according to their own interests. The riding therapists may emphasize motoric, pedagogic or psychological goals and methods in their work. The education or the supplementary course consists of approximately 60 credits under the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS; <http://www.suomenratsastusterapeutit.net>).

Qualified, professional riding therapists are members of the Association of Finnish Riding Therapists (Suomen Ratsastusterapeutit ry). The association has approximately one hundred members. The Association of Finnish Riding Therapists was founded in 2000 and its main purpose is to look after the riding therapists' interests. It also works as a link between its members, looks after the general and common interests in the field of riding therapy, develops the knowledge and skills of its members and improves the general conditions and circumstances. The association controls the quality and realization of riding therapy in Finland. Furthermore it takes care of the domestic and international cooperation (<http://www.suomenratsastusterapeutit.net>).

The *Paloniemi* hospital is specialized in treatment of psychiatric patients. All patients accompanied by referrals come to the hospital from six municipalities that also own the hospital. Besides the normal hospital care, important methods of treatment are family and network accounts and various therapies, including riding therapy (<http://www.hus.fi>).

The *Lehtimäki Special College* was founded in 1971. It aims to support the lifelong learning, intellectual growth and individuality of disabled persons. It also puts emphasis on the disabled person's abilities to act as an equal citizen in society. In order to achieve these goals, the college arranges all-round educational and vocational courses as well as tuition in independent living and spontaneous studying. The college is first and foremost intended for severely disabled and multihandicapped persons (<http://www.lehtimaki.fi/opisto>).

The college organizes courses in riding therapy for both disabled children and youngsters and their families. The aim of the riding-therapy courses is to familiarize the participants with the riding therapy as a versatile method of rehabilitation, to give a chance to gain experience by working with horses, to strengthen one's social skills by teamwork and to give a stimulus to continue riding back home (<http://www.lehtimaki.fi/opisto>).

The idea of organizing riding-therapy courses is also to give a versatile, intensive episode of riding to severely disabled persons, for whom riding is one of the rare physical exercises they are able to take (<http://www.lehtimaki.fi/opisto>).

#### *Horse-assisted social pedagogic rehabilitation*

Horse-assisted social pedagogic rehabilitation has a more holistic approach to horses and riding as a therapy. The main idea of horse-assisted social pedagogic

rehabilitation is that a good atmosphere in the stable together with the presence of the horses has a positive effect on the prevention of social exclusion of youngsters and children and on the solution of already existing problems (Nina Hyvätti, pers. comm.).

The University of Kuopio has a horse-assisted syllabus for social pedagogy. The syllabus is meant for professional people in the areas of education, social work and health care in view of the fact that working methods of horse-assisted social pedagogy can best be adopted in these professions. The education deepens the participants' knowledge of the reasons for social exclusion and prepares them to use both the cooperation between horse and man and the surrounding community as a method in order to help youngsters and children in solving problems of social exclusion. The education aims to create new social pedagogic education methods to support the social development and health of youngsters and children. In 2001, the Equestrian Federation of Finland (Suomen Ratsastajainliitto ry), in cooperation with the Department of Social Sciences of the University of Kuopio, started a project that aims to develop the working methods and education of horse-assisted social pedagogy (<http://www.kkk.uku.fi>).

*Metsäkylä Horse Stable*, close to the city of Turku, rehabilitates children and youngsters who are in danger of social exclusion and related problems. The place is also intended for average customers and the children and youngsters working there are not divided into groups according to the reason why they come to the stable. The stable was founded in 1992 and the owner Mrs. Nina Hyvätti took part in the social-pedagogic education programme of the University of Kuopio in 2001. In an interview on 28 September 2004 she provided the information for this section of this chapter.

There are two different social pedagogic rehabilitation activities at the stable. Many young people come to ride there as a hobby. This group includes, e.g., children and adolescents with diagnosed autism or a disturbance in focused attentiveness. They are sent to the stables by the local social services of the city or municipality.

Another large group consists of the adolescents, who work as trainees at the *Metsäkylä Stable* in order to try to gain control of their own life. The youngest trainees are 16 years of age, typically drop-outs with many problems, without any interests or control of life. Some of them may have mental problems or are drug addicts. The local social services send the adolescents to the stable if they seem to have some interest in horses or have had such interests in childhood. The stable cannot receive many youngsters and children at the same time and there are no specialized group activities available at the moment. Some adults come to the stable as well: it is usually a question of mental-health patients who want to see, touch and feed the horses, although they do not necessarily ride them.

First of all the stable personnel tries to create a good atmosphere at the horse stable: they discuss different basic matters with the youngsters and try to make the atmosphere educational in order to support the adolescents' healthy mental growth. The older ones take care of the younger ones and everybody learns to take care of the horses. All this is related to the youngsters' hobbies and provides a solid foundation for receiving mental, physical and social support for a healthy life.

Among other things, such as the role of the horse stable as an educational community, the horses are an important part of the rehabilitation. The horse needs regular timetables, exercise and food. The youngsters know that the horses need them and that they wait for them. Furthermore, the herd instincts and behaviour of the horses help to develop the youngsters' empathy: it is easier for the adolescents to empathize with the weakest animal of the herd. This can make them realize that the same rules and feelings are valid in swarms and hordes, too. The manager of the Metsäkylä stable is studying the effects of horse-assisted social pedagogy on young people with social problems in her Master's thesis.

The municipality or city may support the horse-assisted socio-pedagogic activities. The local social service pays for the normal riding lessons as a supported hobby and for the traineeship as a normal training period. Some associations for disabled persons may also finance the horse-assisted social pedagogic rehabilitation. The Social Insurance Institution of Finland (Kansaneläkelaitos, Kela) finances this activity on the condition that the trainer must be a qualified, professional riding therapist with the basic education as, e.g., a physiotherapist.

According to the experts, the problem is that the funds are too small to provide a long-lasting rehabilitation, which would gain better results among children and adolescents. This particular sphere of animal-assisted work needs networks to be able to function properly. One possibility could for example be that the youngsters who do not need riding therapy yet or do not need it anymore, could take part in the social-pedagogic animal-assisted rehabilitation. There are already some entrepreneurs in the field of social-pedagogic rehabilitation who rent their horses to qualified riding therapists. A lot of research is needed in this field to be able to give any recommendations.

#### *Examples of some other animal-assisted rehabilitation activities*

##### *NeuroCity*

There are some other forms of animal-assisted rehabilitation in Finland. The Finnish Foundation for Rehabilitation and Development (Suomen Kuntoutus- ja Kehityssäätiö) was founded to improve the position of children and adolescents who require support due to various speech, communication or functional problems, or for such reasons in their families. The Foundation's purpose is to advance research into and knowledge of neurological disorders and to improve the possibilities for the target group to lead an independent and productive life. The Foundation develops various forms of rehabilitation, training and support services. In their various forms they are directed at the child's or adolescent's entire support group: family, close relatives and friends, teachers and nursing staff. Training, publicizing information and counselling are important parts of the Foundation's functions (<http://www.neurocity.fi>).

The Foundation implements and develops its purposes via the national functional model *NeuroCity*. At the moment there is a project that aims to develop animal-assisted therapy and to show the meaning of animals in the development of one's abilities in interaction and communication. The foundation has hired a student of

psychology to work in the NeuroCity Functional Centre and to write her Master's thesis about the questions of animal-assisted therapy. In an interview on 28 September 2004 Mr. David Gumpfer and Mrs. Hanna Viinimäki provided the information for this section of this chapter.

There are horses, sheep, chickens and a dog in the NeuroCity Functional Centre in Rymättylä. The animals are an important part of training both in the long-term preparation and in short preparatory courses. The target group consists of children, youngsters and adults in need of specialized support. Children, youngsters and adults may volunteer to take care of the animals. They can join the staff and come to the pasture every morning and evening, walk and stroke the animals and talk to them. Gradually they begin to talk about the animals to the staff and after that about everything else, too. Not all people are interested in animals, and they do not have to take part in the care. Those who are interested in animals, however, can gain a lot of communication skills from working with them.

As a foundation NeuroCity may receive donations from outside. However, the Social Insurance Institution of Finland (Kansaneläkelaitos, Kela) does not finance this method, for it does not recognize other animal-assisted therapies than riding therapy and wants therapists to be qualified riding therapists. The Finnish Foundation for Rehabilitation and Development and the NeuroCity Functional Centre are interested in both domestic and international cooperation and research in order to develop the methods further.

#### *Vekkilä Museum Farm*

The Vekkilä Museum Farm represents the atmosphere of the 14th century with modern features. There are sheep and horses on the farm. Although the farm concentrates on sheep farming and landscape maintenance it is involved in handicrafts and tourism, too. In an interview on 1 October 2004 Mrs. Kristiina Liinaharja provided the information for this section of this chapter.

The farm also organizes visits for tourists, children and disabled persons in cooperation with other entrepreneurs and institutes. The cooperation consists of a farmhouse with animals, horse stable with riding for disabled persons, accommodation for special groups, and a canoe catamaran for travelling in nature. The visitors gain experience of farming and may help to do some simple tasks or watch the owners do them at the farm. They may also ride the horses in the woods near the farm. There are even visitors who come to take exercise or to spend some quality time with each other at the farm. For example, it is good back exercise to ride a horse, and many office workers visit the farm just for physical rehabilitation. In this way, mental rehabilitation and relaxing come spontaneously.

The most important aspect in the activities is to teach the circle of life: animals are born, they grow up, get ill and die. The visitors, who may never have seen where their food actually comes from, learn it at the farm. It all contributes to one's sense of proportion and tells how important it is to love, to work and to be devoted to something, especially in our modern society where nothing seems to last for a long time.

The Vekkilä Museum farm is not eligible for the support of Social Insurance Institution of Finland (Kansaneläkelaitos, Kela). Some associations for disabled persons may finance the activities for their members and the local authorities may sometimes cooperate in matters related to children and youngsters, but there is no direct financial or other support.

#### POLICIES PROMOTING FARMING FOR HEALTH IN FINLAND

FH is related to priorities of social policy on the one hand and to the agricultural and rural policy on the other hand.

In its Government Programme, the Finnish government in office (Vanhanen) declares its support for further integration of the social-welfare and health-care systems in order to improve the well-being and health of the nation and to reduce exclusion. An effort will be made to promote new service production methods and technology and product development in social welfare and health care. State financing will be targeted specifically at ensuring care and support services for mental-health and drug-abuse patients. Surveys clarifying the impact of in- and outpatient care charges and the use of services and types of places that provide care will continue. To prevent social exclusion and to improve people's life-management skills, it is necessary to increase the number of joint service agencies and to expand multiprofessional cooperation between the social, health, education and employment authorities within a municipality, on the one hand, and between municipalities, the Social Insurance Institution (Kela) and other actors involved, on the other. Special attention will be drawn to children's mental health problems and the prevention of such problems, and to sufficiently fast access to care. Support services for chronically ill and disabled children and their families will be further developed (<http://www.valtioneuvosto.fi>). These general frameworks set by the present Finnish government contribute to the development of and cooperation on new, innovative health-promoting methods. FH can have excellent opportunities to become a recognized, official method of vocational rehabilitation within these frameworks.

The former Finnish government (Lipponen II) had already drawn up a health programme for the future. The Government Resolution on the 'Health 2015' public-health programme outlines the targets for Finland's national health policy. The main focus is on health promotion. The foundation for the strategy is provided by the Health for All programme of the WHO, dating from 1998. The strategy is a continuation of the Finnish national HFA 2000 programme. Health 2015 is a cooperation programme that provides a broad framework for health promotion in various areas of society. It reaches across different sectors of administration, since public health is largely determined by factors outside health care: lifestyles, living environment, quality of products, factors promoting and factors endangering community health. The settings of everyday life and the course of life play an important role in the programme. The strategy presents eight targets for public health, which focus on problems requiring concerted action by various bodies. They indicate the outcome aimed at in different phases of life. In addition, there are 36 statements concerning the lines of action underlined by the Government,

incorporating challenges and guidelines related to citizens' everyday environments and various actors in society (<http://www.terveys2015.fi>). In general, there are no direct obstacles to the development of FH in Finland.

As a member of European Union, Finland is implementing the common agricultural and rural policy. Agriculture in Finland has been rapidly changing during the past decade. The number of farms has decreased by some 30% and this development will continue. Low-productivity farming with health services may be a solution for many farms, located especially in the northern and eastern parts of Finland, where the decrease of 'traditional' farming is strongest. The EU agricultural-policy reform in 2006 will open new challenges for developing 'multifunctional agriculture', including on-farm health services. The policy measures of agriculture should be developed in such a way that these kinds of activities will be included in the support systems.

FH activities are also related to rural development as it is important to improve and diversify the rural livelihood, to develop the know-how and human resources, to strengthen the already existing services network and to utilize the natural possibilities that the rural areas have to offer in order to keep them viable ([http://www.mmm.fi/maatalous\\_maaseudun\\_kehittaminen/](http://www.mmm.fi/maatalous_maaseudun_kehittaminen/)).

Developing health and welfare services in the rural area has already been a policy aim in the current rural-development programmes. For example, 75 projects (<http://www.lande2000.fi>) have been funded by different national programmes (LEADER, POMO, ALMA etc.) aiming at improving the health and welfare services in rural areas. However, activities are not related to farming except some very few examples.

#### RESEARCH AND EDUCATION

The main problem is the lack of research on the effects of animal-assisted rehabilitation on human beings with various problems. However, there are only a few current studies related to animal-assisted therapy.

The research programme of Agrifood Research Finland (MTT) includes some projects of the University of Kuopio and of the University of Turku. Research is also needed in order to develop networks for different actors and activities. The research should cover the institutional basis, as well as organizational and financial issues related to the activities.

Although there already are some educational possibilities in Finland, a clear-cut, integrated coordination does not exist yet. Riding therapy is well organized, though. The main reason for the lack of coordination is probably that there are no explicit goals, in view of the still modest research.

#### FINANCIAL INSTRUMENTS

Especially the social services of municipalities and cities finance therapy for their customers as a hobby or traineeship, although the Social Insurance Institution of Finland does not recognize social-pedagogic rehabilitation as an official method of

vocational rehabilitation. The authorities do not finance these methods, although some private donors and associations may do so.

It appears that only riding therapy is financed by the Social Insurance Institution of Finland. The only exceptions to this rule are normal mental-health institutions, where other therapy methods and activities are part of the rehabilitation.

#### ONGOING PROJECTS

The Agrifood Research Centre, Environmental Research, runs a project in which the therapeutic use of cattle and sheep is explored. The focus is on native breeds, which are threatened to become extinct. Finland also takes part in the Forest and Health Project (<http://www.mtt.fi>).

In 2001 the Equestrian Federation of Finland (Suomen Ratsastajainliitto ry) started a project, in cooperation with the Department of Social Sciences of the University of Kuopio, in order to develop working methods and education of horse-assisted social pedagogy (<http://www.kkk.uku.fi>).

The Finnish Foundation for Rehabilitation and Development has hired a psychology student to work in the NeuroCity Functional Centre and to write her Master's thesis about the matters regarding animal-assisted therapy (David Gumpfer and Hanna Viinimäki, pers. comm.).

Approximately 75 projects (<http://www.lande2000.fi>) have been funded by different national programmes (LEADER, POMO, ALMA etc.) in order to improve the health and welfare services in rural areas. The activities, however, are not related to farming, except for some very few examples.

A different project aims to create a functional model for a company providing services to adolescents who have been diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome (<http://www.lande2000.fi>). It should be mentioned, however, that all ongoing projects are not necessarily in the registers in use.

#### CONCLUSION

Farming for health and other health-promoting activities are starting gradually in Finland. The local and national authorities have already recognized the need for riding therapy, but other animal-assisted rehabilitation methods are not supported to a great extent. The riding therapy is well organized in Finland with its recognized status, association and financial background. Although there is only one educational establishment for riding therapy in our country at the moment, it seems to guarantee the further existence of the profession. Among private entrepreneurs, there are a hospital and a college for disabled persons which use the method in their work.

The other animal-assisted therapy methods are expanding all the time. The social pedagogic rehabilitation can be studied in courses of the University of Kuopio.

In addition to horses there are other animals involved with therapy. We already have farms that provide rehabilitation to their average customers and special groups, as well as we have centres for disabled persons in need of rehabilitation. The

financial structures have to be clarified in the immediate future in order to develop the working methods further.

In the long run, as soon as more research is conducted, the awareness of the possibilities of FH is recognized and new entrepreneurs become interested in it. There is a strong connection between our efforts to save the Finnish indigenous breeds from disappearance and the research related to FH and the health-promoting effects of plants, farm animals and landscapes. FH could be an essential part of the survival of indigenous breeds in the future, for the health-promoting effects of the animals could become an important field for the utilization of the indigenous breeds; especially, as the number of farms has decreased in our country and the development will go on. The low-productivity farming with health services may be a solution for many farms, located especially in the northern and eastern parts of Finland, where the decrease of 'traditional' farming is very strong.

FH is still a relatively new and unknown phenomenon in Finland, but it is, anyhow, expanding rapidly. Because of its innovative nature, it has not been mapped completely yet, although many research projects have already started in our country. The research is needed in order to define the phenomenon and its effects, and to create a basis on which the financial structures and working methods can be developed further. The main future challenge for FH in Finland is to become an officially recognized method of vocational rehabilitation. In order to reach this, one still needs a lot of both domestic and international research into the possible health-promoting effects of plants, animals and landscapes. The knowledge gained from research projects will contribute to the development of FH and to its status as a professional health-promoting activity.

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