

## CHAPTER 20

### FARMING FOR HEALTH IN ITALY

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**Abstract.** The framework of Farming for Health in Italy is presented in this chapter. Starting from some historical features, we present practical experiences, institutional arrangements, relevant actors and main target groups involved in Green Care in Italy. The final result shows a peaceful but also dynamic situation from a geographical, technical as well as organizational point of view. Although mutually very different, Italian 'social farms' also share common features and some new arrangements. In any case most of the experiences are mainly informal and not well codified. Due to the lack of information, more details from some Italian regions are given in the text as well as some general conclusion.

**Keywords:** drug addicts; prison farms; therapy; rehabilitation; social inclusion; rural areas; social services

#### HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT OF FARMING FOR HEALTH IN ITALY

Until after the Second World War, Italy was basically a rural country. In 1951 about 45% of the working population was employed in the agricultural sector. As the most important industry until a few decades ago, agriculture has a long history in integrating and socially including people with special needs. Although no specific historical research on Farming for Health (FH) programmes in Italy has been carried out so far, it is well known that in some particular fields social or therapeutic farming programmes have been carried for a long time. In order to understand the evolution of Green Care and FH programmes in Italy during the last decades it may be useful to present briefly the more general context in which health services are provided in this country.

The present national public-health system was established in 1978 with the institution of Local Health Authorities charged to provide, at no or low costs, both health and social services to all citizens. An important feature of the 1978 health reform was the shift from a national health service toward a decentralized system based on local health districts. In the same year a radical reorganization of mental

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health care passed. The reform established a gradual shutting down of psychiatric hospitals and assigned prevention, care and rehabilitation in mental health to new community-based services. Compulsory admissions to psychiatric wards were regarded as exceptional, had to be time-limited, and were allowed only when out-patient interventions were ineffective or were refused by patients.

At present the Departments of Mental Health within the Local Health Authorities are committed to provide mental health care offering different kinds of services to the local population. In this context, a number of therapeutic and rehabilitative programmes for patients with mental disorders that deal with agriculture, horticulture and gardening have been developed in almost every region. Nevertheless, the awareness of the possibilities of plants in psychiatric rehabilitation does not seem to be consolidated in the country. Programmes based on Green Care run by the public sector tend to be marginalized by the Health Authorities, and there is little evidence on their efficacy because they received no specific attention by scientists and researchers in health care or in the psychiatric field.

A further therapeutic and rehabilitation domain with a relevant presence of farming, concerns drug addicts. Since the sixties, when drug addiction started to become a wide social and health problem, many care centres (often called 'Therapeutic Communities'), run either by public or third-sector organizations, settled in rural areas and involved patients in farming activities. Again, also in this field there is not much awareness of the therapeutic effects that dealing with plants may have on patients. In case of drug addiction, the choice of being in a rural, rather than urban, environment is usually preferred for its isolation from places where drugs circulate. In these communities, psychologists and social educators tend to consider farming more effective than other kinds of activities, since agricultural work is physically demanding, does not require high educational skills, has many and different duties, and the final products (food) may be consumed within the community. The healing properties of patients' interaction with plants and the therapeutic impact that this interaction may have appear to be overlooked.

A third field in which farming plays a rehabilitative role regards penitentiaries. A recent survey reveals the existence of authentic farms within many Italian prison walls, where dozens of inmates participate in farming activities involving plants as well as animals; the output is brought to internal or external markets, and agricultural activities are strongly preferred by prisoners. A governmental project, entitled Agricola 2002, funded by the Ministry of Justice, aims to extend farming activities in ten Italian penitentiaries. These types of farms are mainly part of the institute. At the same time there are also programmes that offer rehabilitative agreements with regular farms, mainly in forestry. The aims of the project are twofold: to improve farming within the institutes and to provide labour integration of former prisoners in regular farms. This is the reason why Confagricoltura, one of the most important national farmers' associations, is one of the partners in the project.

A further context in which farming plays a social role concerns the labour integration of individuals with intellectual or psychic disabilities.

While the other fields of FH (psychiatric care, drug addiction and prisoners work) aim primarily at therapeutic and rehabilitative outcomes, in this case social

inclusion is the main goal to be achieved through farming. The potential of agricultural activities to involve and integrate people with limited intellectual skills has been well-known in rural areas for decades. It should be noted that in the traditional peasant family the 'disabled' were unknown, at least as a specific category separated from the 'able', for all family members contributed to the running of the farm. Even those with reduced capabilities could perform a task, although limited or marginal. Disability became an issue of major concern when society moved away from the old rural economy and non-agricultural labour markets began to discriminate people with special needs.

In the domain of labour integration of people with disabilities many projects have been started throughout the country, mostly by so-called 'social cooperatives'. Social cooperation represents a growing movement in Italian society and the law grants the Type B social cooperatives the task of labour market integration of 'disadvantaged' people<sup>1</sup>.

In 2001 the National Statistics Institute conducted a survey on social cooperatives. There were 1.827 Type B cooperatives, with an average of 10 disadvantaged members, half of which with some kind of disability. No information is available on the activities run by these cooperatives, but it seems reasonable to estimate that between 10 and 15% of them run farming-related activities and/or work in the field of the maintenance of public green spaces.

Beside agriculture and farming, a specific interest in taking care of plants and animals as a therapy arose at the beginning of the 1990s. In 1992, the Agraria School of the Park of Monza became involved in a horticultural-therapy project and started to offer courses in horticultural therapy. The Italian Horticultural Therapy organization was established in 1995. Several initiatives have been developed since, mainly in central and Northern Italy, based on the healing properties of plant interaction, but so far nothing close to a Community of Practice has been developed among the professionals involved.

#### FARMING FOR HEALTH IN PRACTICE – THE ITALIAN SITUATION

In Italy, like in other countries, it is not easy to define FH activities. There are experiments with many new ways to use agriculture in situations of social need. They vary from *educational farms* to *care farms* or to *farms for recreational activities*. There also is an increasing amount of experience in *public gardening* and in *rehabilitative programmes for prisoners* related to agriculture. In a different way, family farms were traditionally – and still are today – used to work in FH, mainly paying attention to relatives with specific health problems. In this report we mainly focus on *care farms* and on *recovery activities linked to biological processes*.

As already said, the Italian situation differs strongly from region to region and from one experience to another. From a geographical point of view, care farms are mainly concentrated in the central part of the country and slightly less in the North, with experience growing in a few cases in the South, mainly on the islands (Sardinia and Sicily). The total number of care farms in Italy can be estimated at about 300-350, with a positive trend during the last few years.

Experiences in Green Care are mainly on a voluntary basis and contractual agreements between public-health services and farms or social cooperatives are very locally based. For these reasons there are no databases at national and regional level.

Regarding differences within the cases, each situation arises as a consequence of the effort of a single person or a strongly motivated small group of people attempting to link agricultural practices and care services, sometimes without specific skills and with very little information. Without any exchange and working in a very informal way, different solutions were tested in each situation in order to challenge quite similar problems. This autonomous process resulted in different ways to operate in FH. This means that there are no formalized good practices in the field and quite often any experiment can offer specific solutions for different target groups and sometimes individuals. All this means that tacit and personal knowledge is more important in FH than formalized and scientific knowledge.

In order to give an idea of the different ways of care farming in Italy we will focus on the Tuscany and Latium regions where specific surveys on FH were organized by the Universities of Pisa and Viterbo, respectively.

#### *FH in Tuscany*

Much of the information comes from a direct survey organized during the period September 2003 – September 2004.

In Tuscany there are about 45 places where about 1,200 people with special needs have been active in FH for a long period during the last 20 years and 300 people had activities in the units for short periods. FH activities followed three different steps.

Many of the activities started in the 1970s following a first process of counter-urbanization when young urban social groups decided to move to the countryside in order to follow new life styles. Ethical behaviour was considered the baseline for the new life. Initially, many of them were not highly regarded by the local communities because they were seen as foreigners, not homologated, and the idea of accepting people with psychic or physical difficulties into communities or farms contributed to marginalize their activities. During those years people started to leave the psychiatric hospitals. Some of them were hosted on farms and until today they spend their time there (photo Paterna). Nowadays many of these first experiments in FH are still active and sometimes they are also quite well-structured farms at the same time running a good business. They have a long experience in FH and have been able to build quite strong local relationships with social services or other types of institutions (penitentiaries, juvenile courts).

The second step was mainly linked to the growth of a social cooperative movement. These were founded after the reorganization of the public social and health services. Quite often they were active in caring for the disabled and some started introducing agricultural practices in order to improve rehabilitative processes and/or established a farm to improve job opportunities and to provide a direct income to people ending the rehabilitative processes. In these cases, Green Care services were mainly provided and tested by social professionals. From this point of

view they were used to apply their own skills and knowledge but very often the weak point was the limited experience in farming normally run on a voluntary basis. Some of these cooperatives did not manage to overcome technical and economic difficulties. There were – and sometimes still are – two main problems: 1) to find job opportunities for people at the end of a therapy, and 2) the public services not recognizing or funding agricultural processes as therapy schemes. In both cases social cooperatives would run two different activities – social care and agricultural business – with very large difficulties.

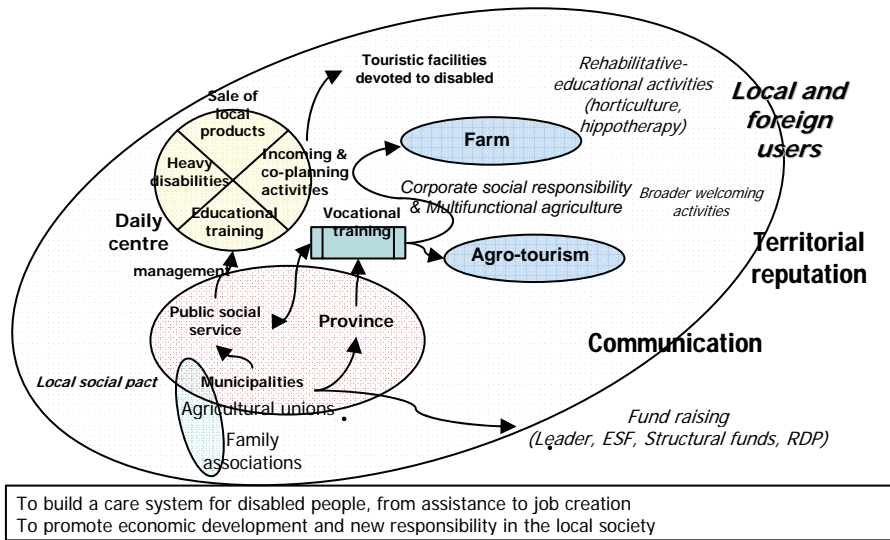
At the moment a third step is in progress. New links among social professionals (public and private), associations and private farms are improving. Small local networks are starting, which increases the knowledge and confidence between farmers, people affected by social problems, and public territorial services. People with different skills can work together overcoming many of the earlier problems. Social structures and farms can work together once they have solved some organizational issues. At the moment there are two to three examples of this type at regional level: in one case the network was animated by an association that was able to involve local municipalities, public territorial services and two farms (see Box 1) in a rehabilitative process for 7 people. In a different case the public services involved local farmers' associations and municipalities in a local agreement. Educational training was organized for about 10 farmers. Six of them started with on-farm training of disabled people (see Figure 1).

Quite innovative green care examples are also arising. Young neo-farmers coming from the cities (sometimes psychologists or people with other skills than farming) are introducing a new way of thinking, improving the multi-functionality of agriculture and providing specific care programmes (mainly hippo-therapy or pet therapy, quite often related to children with relational difficulties ([www.cavalgiocare.it](http://www.cavalgiocare.it))).

In order to monitor different experiences and to improve knowledge about them as well the exchange between them, a small database has been set up in Tuscany by ARSIA (Regional Agency for Development and Innovation in Agriculture). The database includes different typologies of care farms: 6 community farms, 15 simple farms, 16 social cooperatives with a farm or running agricultural processes, 4 associations working with farmers in order to improve social-care processes, 4 associations and foundations working with elderly people in order to rebuild public gardens and kitchen gardens. Some of these units are demand-based – especially when elderly people or family groups with disabled are involved. In other situations, demand was mainly organized starting from mutual knowledge of social institutions and farmers.

A network has been established with a newsletter and meetings throughout the year. A technical mutual advisory service is being tested in order to facilitate the exchange of experience following a problem-solving approach.

<b>BOX 1</b>	<b>Farm:</b> Colombini family farm. <b>Main activities:</b> Organic horticulture.
<p><b>History:</b> The Colombini farm is an 18-hectare family farm. The farm was converted from conventional to organic when Alessandro, the son of the family, started to work actively on the farm. At the moment the farm employs about 5 people and 2 more disabled workers were recently taken on.</p>	
<p><b>FH:</b> In 2001 Alessandro was asked to collaborate in a project founded by a local association (ORISS) following an agreement with territorial public social services and local municipalities. The aim of the project was to include disabled people in agriculture. The Colombini farm decided to accept the proposal and started educational training of seven people involved in the project (mainly psychiatrically and physically disabled). Initially it was difficult to find the right task for each person but after some time they are able to match any needs and capabilities with different farm activities. After one year, two people were engaged in farm work and the other three are still on the farm as educational training.</p>	
<p><b>Knowledge:</b> Alessandro and his family started to work with the seven people who had no specific knowledge. At the same time ORISS followed the process with specific social competencies. The association also helped the farm to enter into new networks. A Solidarity Purchase Group was established, together with new relationships with a local school to supply the canteen and Organized Distribution. This resulted in the Colombini farm strengthening its reputation in the area with good marketing results.</p>	
<p><b>Specificity:</b> There are two main points in the experiment. The first one is related to the network established by ORISS which made it possible to build new relationships and to increase the local resources for health activities. The second one is related to the Colombini family. The people with different capabilities follow Alessandro and his family as a new driving force and this is also the reason why they enthusiastically follow the agricultural processes. At the same time they are really proud of their new jobs.</p>	



**Figure 1.** Building a local private-public network in FH in a Tuscan mountainous area

*FH in Latium*

Latium is a region in central Italy, on the west coast. Its main characteristic is the presence of Rome, the greatest municipality in the country. Farming activities maintain certain relevance in the total region. There is a considerable agricultural sector in the municipality of Rome, with some 37,000 hectares of arable land, mostly included in protected areas. Agriculture is highly diversified and almost all typical Mediterranean crops are cultivated. The average farm in Latium of only 3.4 hectares of arable land is significantly smaller than the national average. Although most of the regional farming sector is little market-oriented, agriculture and green spaces in general play a relevant role in the region, particularly in the area close to Rome. This means that farming activities in Latium show a considerable potential in the provision of healing services and in contributing to the social inclusion of fragile people.

The combination of a large population and vast agricultural and natural areas makes Rome the place where most of the Latium FH programmes are located. These programmes concern almost all different fields of Green Care and healing and social farming described above. As in the rest of the country, no inventory of Latium Green Care and FH initiatives has been made yet. Considering the wide variation in farming initiatives related with health, care and social inclusion, we will concentrate on three areas: horticultural therapy programmes, rehabilitative farming programmes within prisons, and social farming for labour inclusion of mentally disabled persons.

*Horticultural therapy programmes*

Although plant care has gained growing attention in Italy over the last decade, there is not much practical experience in Latium. Nevertheless, something is moving particularly in hospitals, homes for the elderly and in some public-health services. Hospital-related Green Care projects have been started in the Rome urban area. The objectives of the initiatives are related either to contribute to conventional therapy methods or to the more general field of so-called 'hospital humanization'. Against this background, the project *A garden for horticultural therapy*, undertaken at the psychiatric section of Grassi Hospital in Ostia, a suburb of Rome, should be mentioned. The section hosts patients with an acute psychiatric illness for a short period. A green area, with ornamental plants, flowers and a small vegetable garden, has been created in an abandoned courtyard and horticultural therapy activities have been started to bring patients relief and to create an environment that could help persons with communication difficulties to interact with other people.

*Farming in prisons*

As mentioned above, Latium prisons are among the public institutions with more attention for the therapeutic and rehabilitative role of horticultural and farming activities. Latium has 14 penitentiaries with a total inmate population of 5,750 (June 2004). Since the middle of the 1990s, five regional prisons have introduced farming inside the penitentiary walls alongside more traditional 'industrial' activities.

Relatively speaking, the number of captives involved in farming is very low, but it must be noted that only a minority of prisoners are actually working inside the prison. An exploratory survey, recently completed by the University of Tuscia (Giannini 2004), highlights some aspects of farming in jails and the healing benefits for the 'prisoner-farmers' (see Box 2). A number of inmates who participate in agricultural activities have been interviewed about their feelings when dealing with plants. There were several reasons why farming was found to be the preferred activity of the various working possibilities in jail. First of all, work is carried out in open-air spaces, which may be considered a scarce resource in prisons; secondly, plants are considered 'sincere' in the prison environment where distrust dominates. Moreover, the variety of tasks that may be performed in cultivating plants makes work more interesting and allows to acquire responsibility through the continuous decision-making process required in almost all single tasks.

All Latium penitentiaries together include 15 hectares of cultivated land, attended by a total of 50 inmates who generate, besides the therapeutic and rehabilitative effects on themselves, products worth more than 250,000 Euros, estimated at market prices, an amount that contributes to the self-esteem of inmates and challenges the dominant 'negative' public thinking about prisons.



<b>BOX 2</b>	<p><b>Farm:</b> Velletri Jailhouse (Latium). Velletri is a town with 50,000 inhabitants, located in a hilly region 40 km south of Rome. The wine produced in this area has been celebrated since ancient Roman times.</p> <p><b>Main activities:</b> wine production</p>
	<p><b>Farm:</b> Velletri Jailhouse (Latium). Velletri is a town with 50,000 inhabitants, located in a hilly region 40 km south of Rome. The wine produced in this area has been celebrated since ancient Roman times. Main activities: wine production</p> <p><b>History:</b> The prison was built in 1991 to host 200 inmates, but currently their number has increased to 350. Almost 5 hectares of farm land are found inside the penitentiary's wall and a farming programme was started in 1998. The first idea was to set up a small vegetable garden in order to introduce prisoners to plant cultivation. Recently, a much more ambitious project has been set up. Three greenhouses, with a total covered area of approximately 3,800 m<sup>2</sup>, were built to extend production to a wide range of vegetables. Moreover, 2.3 hectares of vineyards and one hectare of olive groves were planted. Two years later, due to the presence of an oenologist among the prison inmates, an area for grape processing was created and in-jail wine production was started. The first bottle of wine was uncorked in November 2002 and in the following year 40,000 bottles were produced. The most innovative feature of Velletri's project concerns the marketing side. In 2003, an agreement was signed between the prison administration and the Type B social cooperative Lazaria.</p>
	<p><b>FH:</b> The Lazaria social cooperative employs a small group of prisoners to run farming activities related to the vineyards and the grape-processing phase in the prison. The cooperative also became responsible for marketing the wine produced. In 2004 three different wines were presented at the most important annual Italian wine fair in Verona (<i>Vinitaly</i>) and recently a marketing agreement has been signed between the social cooperative and one of the largest Italian supermarket chains. At present, Velletri's jailhouse wines are sold in many restaurants, contributing to fight prejudices of citizens against prisoners and to improve the self-esteem of inmates involved who, although they cannot physically pass the jail walls, might do this, so to say, virtually.</p>
	<p><b>Knowledge:</b> In this case the most important part of the professional work is based on direct manual work. Specific knowledge (e.g., oenology) was already available in the jail.</p>
	<p><b>Specificity:</b> An 'Escapee' wine that promotes prisoners' social integration. At present three types of wine are produced at the winery of Velletri prison:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- the 'novello' (Italian word for 'new wine'), labelled <i>Fuggiasco</i> (Escapee),</li> <li>- a white Chardonnay called <i>Quarto di Luna</i> (Quarter Moon), to remind the night view of the moon from a cell,</li> <li>- a red wine named <i>Le Sette Mandate</i> (The Seven Turns of the Lock), to evoke the cell doors security closing.</li> </ul>

#### *Farming as a means of labour integration of people with disabilities*

A third type of FH programme in Latium aims at the working integration of mentally or psychically disabled (see also Box 3).

'Social farm' is a new expression to refer to agricultural enterprises that employ disadvantaged individuals. Type-B social cooperatives represent an important instrument to bridge the gap between people with disabilities and the labour market. In Latium there are more than 400 such enterprises and, while several provide green maintenance services, only a dozen run farming activities.

Most of them operate in the green areas of the capital, close to urban areas with high population densities, with only a very few in relatively isolated rural areas.

These social enterprises are a sort of sheltered farms where social inclusion of persons with disabilities is achieved through the production of goods and services sold either to the public sector or on the market.

<b>BOX 3</b>	<p><b>Farm:</b> “La Fattoria Verde” Association.</p> <p><b>Main activities:</b> Organic poultry and egg production.</p>
<p><b>History:</b> “La Fattoria Verde” was founded in 2002 to offer services to differently able people after an agreement with the Rome municipality. The association works on a public farm (Tenuta Albucceto a Palidoro). Aim of the Fattoria Verde farm is to improve environmental resources, buildings, as well as to offer social services with an economically viable dimension. Buildings were totally renovated thanks to the financial and human resources of the group. During spring 2003, the centre started a therapeutic process with a group of young people. At the same time they finished the renovation of the centre. The farm keeps about 300 hens on about 1 hectare. An intervention on the uncultivated area (a little forest with walnut and alder trees) allowed avoiding the abandonment of the land, where some rabbits live. There are also free-ranging ducks and geese in a large area. A fruit garden has been set up and the fruit is to be processed in a new facility where people may work and process the products of the farm.</p>	
<p><b>FH:</b> Two groups cooperate with Fattoria Verde: the Social Coop Presenza and the OIKOS association, which all work on the farm with small groups of people (the target group is mainly autistic). The groups follow the farm activities and actively participate in running the farm. Participation, responsibility and a friendly environment stimulate reciprocity and the activity of the people involved. One of the main problems is related to financial resources and market opportunities for the products. Some donations helped in setting up the activities (from the municipality, from a local enterprise association, from the Netherlands Embassy, private citizens, cultural associations). New relationships are established with the Rome Province (for educational training) and with the CIA association (a farmers’ association). The farm was also involved in an ESF Equal Project with the local municipality. It is intended to expand farm and processing activities in the next few years.</p>	
<p><b>Knowledge:</b> The people in charge of the Fattoria Verde Farm only had personal experience with social care. They try to find information on Green Care activities by visiting and following other activities, sometimes abroad. They managed to build new relationships in the area involving private and public partners in the project. They are increasing their knowledge by working on the farm and collaborating with the staff of the social coops.</p>	
<p><b>Specificity:</b> The farm is completely orientated to social care. It is organized in a self-sufficiency way, following the triple bottom line: environmental, social and economic viability. There is a strong integration between farm and local social cooperative. There is a strong family participation in the project as well. The initiative is considered a good example at local level and some family associations visit the farm in order to find new health solutions for their relatives. At the same time the farm does not succeed in receiving grants from the local public social plans, while well-organized private and public organizations normally manage to receive funds for their activities. The farm is marketing its products with a specific label ‘twice tasty’ in order to remember the quality as well as the ethical value of the products.</p>	

*Common features in FH*

Although mutually very different, 'social farms' share some common features. Firstly, most of them are organic farms. From a sociological point of view, organic farmers seem to be more flexible to extend their ethical attitude to new topics. For technical reasons, the non-use of chemicals and, more generally, activities that are friendly to the environment appear to be the natural choice when fragile people are involved. Other common features concern:

- daily activities (like in animal husbandry) and short-term cycles (as in horticulture) correspond with social needs for building new routines, and increase responsibility in people affected by physical or psychic problems
- diversification of cropping patterns. In order to guarantee the higher involvement of disabled persons, social farms always have several crops; to a certain extent they are all 'open' farms, in the sense that they run some specific activities or initiatives to attract the external community. Several have an on-farm shop where they sell their products; some are also 'educational farms' where families, children and entire school classes go to learn about nature and farming.

Social farms, more than other FH initiatives, tend (or should tend) to be business-orientated. Actually, the economic side in therapeutic, rehabilitative and social farming is often neglected. There is not much awareness of the therapeutic benefits of taking part in the open market. Too often, activities are conducted in a 'pretending to do' way rather than in a 'true' way when dealing with disabled persons, especially when they are mentally or psychically disabled. This attitude prevents to move from merely medical therapy to a more comprehensive social rehabilitation.

The basic resources for Green Care are always the same: time, space, biological cycles, contact with real problems, responsibility, the possibility to establish new relationships in a quiet environment, gaining new knowledge, starting with a job are the main resources of care farms, as well as daily dialogues in small groups or communities. Of course, different resources affect different target groups. Farms and social cooperatives are quite often specialized in specific groups – disabled, mentally and physically, people with drug addictions, alcoholics, young immigrants, prisoners, vulnerable children. This depends on the experience that has been gained and on the network that has been built over time. Sometimes it also depends on farm resources. It is quite common to find prisoners involved in forestry, while children are mainly welcome in groups and communities.

The people who drive the FH processes have quite different attitudes as well. People who live in a farm community are used to pay attention to social relationships and to welcome others. In this case mutuality is the mission and FH is an easy choice for them. The presence of a large group of people may help driving a process that involves a heavy responsibility and a lot of attention. In these cases, people may spend all day in the community, especially when lodging and indoor spaces are available. In case of a family farm, the main focus is on agricultural practice. Disabled people spend part of the day working on the farm and the other part in their own house or in a public environment. Farmers involved in care activities often increase their social/health knowledge themselves by working with

specific target groups. Nowadays, new initiatives start where public social services organize educational training for farmers in order to improve their capabilities and to improve the final social output of the process.

Social cooperatives start from a different point of view. They have professional skills in social and health care. The main problem for them is to improve their skills in agriculture and run an economically viable process in this field.

#### BUILDING THE ENVIRONMENT: ORGANIZATION, NETWORKING ACTIVITIES, POLICIES AND FINANCIAL SUPPORT

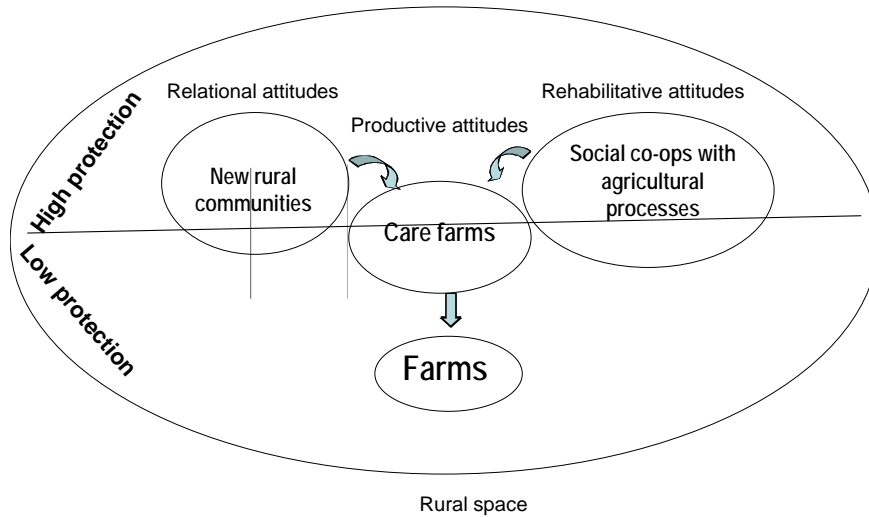
##### *Organization of Farming for Health*

Over the last few years, attention for FH has been increasing rapidly, together with the number of initiatives. New initiatives are growing besides older initiatives. As stated above, the units mainly work individually with few mutual relationships and sometimes there is a relationship with the public social services. At the same time a spontaneous process of joining mutual interests is growing.

There has been a clear change in the view on Green Care activities in Italy over the last few years. Some new initiatives are growing, mainly resulting from a bottom-up approach. Small agro-health chains are formed between different units (see Figure 2), whereas specialized units (social cooperatives, therapeutic communities) start with professional training and therapeutic practices with specific target groups. Specific agreements with local farms which are already orientated in social practices allow monitoring of the process and improvement of the personal abilities towards working in a more open structure. Sometimes, a well-known farm with a good reputation in an area may be asked by other farmers to train specialized workers. In that case the rehabilitative process may continue in more than one structure and may finish with a job location. This means that after the first initiative on a single farm, there nowadays are local initiatives involving farms, public social services, social cooperatives, municipalities and local associations. At the same time it is still difficult to link the local networks in a broader (regional or national) network. A regional network is growing in Tuscany but it is still informal and does not yet involve important regional bodies.

Two different events are also changing the attitude of farmers' organizations towards FH.

The first one is related to the change in the Community Agricultural Policies and to the debate about the European agriculture model. The idea of multi-functionality and growing competition at a global scale opens new horizons and new ways of farming. Re-formulating and broadening the activities in rural areas implies finding new on-farm activities and offering new services to local communities or to society at large. Against this background farmers associations in many areas are reconsidering their view on Green Care activities and in many cases they organize new partnerships in order to improve local social services.



*Figure 2. Formation of small agro-health chains between different units*

The second point is associated with the change from the welfare state to a municipal welfare organization which also in Italy is increasing the relevance of local governance<sup>2</sup>. Against this background new bonds are growing between local institutions, social cooperatives, farms, and – sometimes – volunteers in those areas where more initiatives are active. This means that expectations for the future are good. Multi-functionality and municipal welfare in rural areas are two keys for a new approach in FH. From this point of view the CIA (Italian Confederation for Agriculture) will be setting up a specific association for FH. The Coldiretti association is working at regional level (in Tuscany but also in other areas) in order to stimulate their members to increase their activities in FH. The same is happening with ACLI Terra, a catholic association involved in rural areas, partner in a national project on welfare in rural areas.

#### *Financing structures of FH*

Under national law there are schemes and opportunities for different kinds of activities that may only indirectly affect Green Care. Therapeutic communities for drug addicts are funded by the state and these are sometimes organized in a rural area while running agricultural processes. Social cooperatives that provide services for people with psychiatric or physical diseases are funded by the regional/local government, and they can define the rehabilitative process by introducing agriculture. In any case, there are no specific schemes or agreements among regional/national government and single local units.

Local agreements are more often funded trying to match the usual schemes with Green Care activities.

The following examples are illustrative:

- Emilio Sereni Cooperative is an organic dairy farm hosting people from the public services (drug addicts and alcoholics) for on-farm job experience. The cooperative does not receive any grants for this activity, which is run on a voluntary basis. The workers receive a low salary from the local services for daily subsistence.
- Zorn Farm is a family farm strongly involved in social services. They form a so-called 'house family' where disabled young people spend all day following on-farm activities (animal husbandry, horticulture, environmental services). The structure has been built and improved mainly with private donations. A recent agreement with the social services provides about €40 per day for each person hosted.
- Archimede Social Cooperative works with disabled people. It normally works with a public scheme for educational training and the people involved receive a salary for a short period. They have decided to work mainly in agriculture. After the first courses they decided to establish a Type B social cooperative (for job inclusion for disabled persons) starting with horticulture and a nursery. The new cooperative runs an economic business but it cannot receive agricultural funds since it is not an agricultural enterprise.
- Paterna Cooperative is an organic farm, one of the first starting in the 1970s offering daily hospitality to a man who left the psychiatric hospital. They were offered a really low grant (about 50 € per month per person) for this activity, which they rejected. At the moment they host the man at no charge.
- Fattoria Verde Onlus (see also Box 2) mainly operates on a voluntary basis, with private donations and funding. They are trying to receive more public support but at the moment they only receive some indirect financial support through the social cooperative that participates in the project.

In some areas (see Box 1 and Figure 1) a partnership is established between public social services, municipalities, farmers and local associations. In these cases partners may also sign specific agreements in order to promote FH and to provide new social services. They are quite interesting but very locally based.

#### *Policies that support or hinder FH*

Empirical evidence in FH and dissemination of good practices for different target groups are also affecting public bodies. Public administrations are paying more attention to FH and they are working on the subject at different levels. At the moment it is really difficult to paint a clear picture of FH in Italy. At the national level, there are no initiatives from the Ministry of Agriculture or from the Social Affairs Ministry and the Sanitary Ministry. The only national initiative focusing on agriculture and rehabilitation is the earlier-mentioned 'Agricola 2002'. This project deals with the introduction of agricultural activities in penitentiaries to promote work integration and social rehabilitation of prisoners. The project, funded by the Ministry of Welfare with € 1,800,000 from the budget allocated to fight drug

addiction, involves ten penal institutions (four of them located in the Latium region, two in Tuscany and four in other Italian regions).

Agricola 2002 envisages the implementation of several farming activities (horticultural, floricultural, nursery, honey-bee keeping etc.) adopting organic methods. The use of these types of production methods is considered particularly suitable for drug addicts, who are used to inject themselves with synthetic substances. In Tuscany, a research action project funded by the regional government introduced an innovative scheme in the regional Rural Development Plan (RDP), including an innovative social, educational and formative project in rural areas involving about €13 million and about 55 projects). In many cases the projects were directly or indirectly linked to Green Care ([www.tramerurali.it](http://www.tramerurali.it)). The measure mainly focused on public beneficiaries but the local partnerships scored very well during the selection, especially when the agricultural resources were actively involved in the project. In the next RDP (2007-2013) farms providing social services should also be funded.

*Research and educational activities (and results) related to FH and the health-promoting effects of being engaged with plants, farm animals and landscapes*

In Italy there is a gap between research activities and developments at the basis. Currently, the main research activities focus on the basic level in order to understand practices and experiences gained over recent years and to provide evidence for the phenomena. The implementation of FH programmes demands specific professionals who combine different knowledge fields. The national lack of these scholars is often considered the main restriction in FH programme management.

So far, the only educational course related to FH is taught at the Agraria School of the Park of Monza. Founded in 1920, the School is specialized in horticulture, tree and green-area management and represents one of the few centres in Italy for vocational education in the horticultural field. Since 1992 horticultural therapy has been a field of interest at the Agraria School, which has begun to collaborate with municipalities, psychical and social centres, local health authorities, social cooperatives, and non-profit organizations. A short course in horticultural therapy is currently taught at the School. This is a 32-hour course and the teaching programme concerns the psychical aspects related with disabilities and the use of gardening and horticulture to gain therapy and rehabilitation. The course is limited to 20 participants and the number of applications has been much higher in recent years, showing a growing demand by professionals to learn more about horticultural therapy and rehabilitation.

This evidence, and an increasing interest in the social function of farming, has led the University of Tuscia to launch a Master programme in Ethical and Social Agriculture. The programme originates from the training and research activities the Department of Agroforest Economics and Rural Environment of the University of Tuscia have been carrying out since 1999. Major fields of research concern: inventory and surveys of existing social farming experiences, identification of good practices in social farming programmes, planning and management of therapeutic,

rehabilitative and social farming programmes, economics issues related with social farming, ethical labelling of care and social farms' products. The Master course, limited to 30 participants, lasts 11 months and includes seminars, visits to FH programmes and two months training in one of the programmes.

The University of Pisa works in two different research networks. The first is mainly focused on social services in rural areas and to the relevance of rural/agricultural resources in order to improve the local social network for different target groups (disabled persons, elderly people, youngsters and families with children). At the end of 1999 a research partnership was organized with regional farm associations, the Regional Department for Social Security and the Social Cooperative Koinè. A research action was organized in three different rural areas in order to understand local needs and to define new ways to provide social services in rural areas, including agriculture. The result of the research action project has already been mentioned above. In many cases agriculture was directly or indirectly involved in local partnerships and projects. Nowadays a monitoring project founded by the Regional Government is selecting good practices in order to share and transfer innovation and knowledge regarding new ways to organize social services in rural areas.

The second initiative is more directly linked to FH. A research group involving ARSIA (Regional Agency for Development and Innovation in Agriculture), University of Pisa (Agricultural Economics) and Paterna Cooperative was established in 2003. The aim of the group was to better understand ongoing initiatives in FH in Tuscany and to establish a network among them. During 2003 a survey was organized interviewing different local actors involved in FH and filling out a questionnaire. The group also facilitates meetings and joint study visits to regional and national initiatives. The group also facilitates a problem-solving approach, trying to discuss and find solutions for specific questions coming from the members of the network. In order to improve and consolidate FH in Tuscany the group is deeply involving regional policymakers. The objective is to formalize procedures, rules and agreements, in order to formalize the contribution of FH to the regional social services and to establish adequate measures.

#### *Developments and relevant actors*

The framework for FH in Italy seems to be heterogeneous but dynamic at the same time. A bottom-up process is moving from isolated initiatives to local, sometimes national networks. The Universities of Pisa and Viterbo follow direct research activities and exchange their own knowledge, and they are establishing and merging regional networks. National actors are also showing an increasing interest and activities in FH. Confederazione Italiana Agricoltori (CIA) and Coldiretti (the two main farmers' associations) are increasing their attention for Green Care. The organic-farming association would also better understand the phenomena. CIA would organize a national network for FH. In the past it organized an ADAPT project on Green Care. Recently it has also applied for European funds (EQUAL). The Ministry of Agriculture is funding a new research project on rural welfare. The



research team involves the University of Perugia, ACLI Terra (a catholic association) and IREF (a private research agency).

The Italian Leader+ observatory is organized by the INEA (National Institute for Agricultural Economics). Aim of the observatory is to facilitate relationships among different local action groups, define good practices, introduce new subjects in the network and follow the main results of the initiative. They have different communication facilities like internet, books and a review, and they also organize meetings and seminars. One of the first activities of the observatory will focus on the quality of life in rural areas. The framework above also works on a booklet on rural welfare and a specific number of the reviews will focus on rural welfare and FH. In early 2005 a national meeting on FH is going to be organized jointly by the Italian Leader+ observatory, ARSIA and the University of Pisa. At the same time, the University of Viterbo is organizing seminars on FH as well as an exposition space dedicated to FH in Verona Agrifood 2005, an international exhibition on food produce, safety and typical agro-foods.

All different activities try to consolidate the evidence of the subject and, at the same time, give more evidence to the practices and the subjects involved in FH. From this point of view there is a virtual circle covering FH. Knowledge and evidence of different experiments and results obtained with FH are increasing, as well as the number of actors involved in the subject.

Table 1 was made trying to involve the main organizations active in FH in Italy; this table cannot be considered fully exhaustive of the Italian situation. As already mentioned above, it is difficult to have a real framework in an informal context.

Difficulties are also still affecting the process. FH is mainly perceived as an uncommon as well as quite difficult activity. This idea restricts growth of the number of farmers involved. At the same time, networking activities among care farms, educational training activities, rural and social policies seem to be far lower than required to increase the awareness of FH.

*Table 1. FH-relevant organizations in Italy*

Name	Main activity	Web address	Activity in FH
ACLITerra	Farmers Union	<a href="http://www.acli.it/acliterra.htm">www.acli.it/acliterra.htm</a>	Research
ARSIA (Regional agency for development and innovation in agriculture)	Technical advice in agriculture	<a href="http://www.arsia.toscana.it">www.arsia.toscana.it</a>	Research action
Banca Etica	Ethical banking	<a href="http://www.bancaetica.com">www.bancaetica.com</a>	Funds local projects with an ethical nature
CIA (Confederazione Italiana Agricoltori)	Farmers' Union	<a href="http://www.cia.it">www.cia.it</a>	Building a national network
Coldiretti (Coltivatori diretti)	Farmers' Union	<a href="http://www.coldiretti.it">www.coldiretti.it</a>	Working in local initiatives
Confcooperative	Consortium for cooperatives' political representation	<a href="http://www.confcooperative.it">www.confcooperative.it</a>	Working in local initiatives
Horticultural Therapy Association	Advancing HT	<a href="http://digilander.libero.it/htitalia">digilander.libero.it/htitalia</a>	Advancing HT
INEA (National Institute for Agricultural Economics)	Research and technical support for the government	<a href="http://www.inea.it">www.inea.it</a>	Communication and networking
IPAB (Institutions for Public Assistance and Charity)	Management of residential facilities for social targets, educational activities	<a href="http://www.socialinfo.it">www.socialinfo.it</a>	Working in local initiatives/structures
IREF	Economic and social research	<a href="http://www.acli.it/iref.htm">www.acli.it/iref.htm</a>	Research
Legacoop	Consortium for cooperatives, political representation	<a href="http://www.legacoop.coop/">www.legacoop.coop/</a>	Working in local initiatives
MIPAA (Ministry for Agriculture)	National policies	<a href="http://www.politicheagricole.it">www.politicheagricole.it</a>	Policies and research
Parco di Monza	Research and education	<a href="http://www.monzaflora.it/">www.monzaflora.it/</a>	Education and practices
Tuscan regional government	Regional Policies	<a href="http://www.regione.toscana.it">www.regione.toscana.it</a> <a href="http://www.tramerurali.it">www.tramerurali.it</a>	Policies and research
University of Perugia	Research and education	<a href="http://www.unipg.it">www.unipg.it</a>	Research
University of Pisa	Research and education	<a href="http://www.unipi.it">www.unipi.it</a> <a href="http://www.tramerurali.it">www.tramerurali.it</a>	Research and action
University of Viterbo	Research and education	<a href="http://www.unitus.it">www.unitus.it</a> <a href="http://www.agrietica.it">www.agrietica.it</a>	Research and action

#### SOME GENERAL CONCLUSIONS ABOUT FH IN ITALY

Development of FH in Italy does not seem very structured and depends on many aspects. Regional diversity, local traditional and cultural features, different historical backgrounds affect private and public behaviour as well as the consistence of specific groups of farms. Three different aspects may be highlighted:

- There is lack of evidence supporting the practices of Green Care, as well as their therapeutic impact. Also considering the long psychiatric tradition in a more open approach to mental disease, there quite often are no findings about the final

result of new therapeutic approaches related to agricultural processes. Without formal rules local solutions have to be negotiated each time and, sometimes, defined. As always happens without any formal procedures new settings may be defined. This means that there is no learning from collective experiences. Each time people learn just by doing and the final results are strictly linked to personal histories.

- The previous point means that there is no formal registration and evidence about the phenomena; this results in a lack of political and financial instruments.
- Initiatives in the past were often based on the ethical behaviour of farmers or professionals involved. Also today, this choice is principally based on personal gratification of the people involved. This is also why there is very little communication about realities. It is still considered wrong to use social activities as a means to improve one's own reputation. Starting from this idea, experiences are just occasionally shared with other groups of people and with the local society.

For these reasons it is still difficult to get FH in focus. Different stakeholders are unable to start networking activities and also facilitation is still a task for the long term.

At the same time there is increasing attention for the theme. This depends mainly on the effort that a few organizations (the Agraria School of the Park of Monza, specific associations, universities and technical agencies) are providing. External attention for FH increases the awareness of the regional and national – private and public – actors. From this point of view there are a new approach and a more open behaviour that facilitate communication about the experience.

There are also external conditions that are turning attention to FH. These are multifunctional agriculture and welfare municipalities. In both cases farmers' associations are looking at social services as a new opportunities for two different aspects. The first is to explore multifunctional possibilities in a field not very well known. The second is to improve the social network in rural areas and the characteristic features of rural culture. The idea is to establish new relationships among rural and urban areas, also with a complementary approach to social/health services. Urban and rural areas manage different kinds of resources. In urban areas scale economies stimulate the concentration of specialized services. In rural areas economies of scope<sup>3</sup> fit the opportunities to produce soft social services both for urban and rural inhabitants.

The new attention of farmers' associations is also affecting the political arena. Partnership and negotiation are quite common in many political dynamics. Social services in rural areas and multifunctional agriculture are becoming more evident in the political debate, stimulating new ways of thinking about agriculture and new multidisciplinary approaches, also inside public administrations.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> According to the Italian law, disadvantaged individuals are: prisoners, ex-prisoners and prisoners on release programmes, former drug addicts, the mentally, psychologically and physically disabled, alcoholics, working age minors in difficult family situations, and gambling addicts.

<sup>2</sup> Welfare community and FH: following globalization and the fiscal crisis of the state, the national welfare system is being reconsidered. A new welfare community is growing in order to meet local needs and to increase the promotion of local resources. In rural areas many resources are related to time and space management and to farms and agricultural processes.

<sup>3</sup> Economy of scope: cost savings that are generated through the joint provision of several outputs as opposed to their separate provision.  $C(x,y) < c(x,0) + c(0,y)$ . In rural areas the provision of social services starting from rural resources may cost less than the provision of services in specialized structures (e.g. the use of agro-tourism resources during winter for elderly people instead of supported residence for elderly people).

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