

Mapping Report on Challenges



**Improving Farmers' Wellbeing
through Social Innovation**

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1.

Introduction

This paper is part of a larger Horizon 2020 Thematic Network entitled 'FARMWELL'. This project aims at mapping social innovations in farming and making these social innovations more accessible for farmers and the larger community, with the prime purpose of improving the overall wellbeing of individual farmers, farming households and the larger rural community. With this purpose in mind, 6 European countries (Belgium, Greece, Romania, Poland, Italy and Hungary) have systematically mapped the main social challenges they are being confronted with. Based on this mapping exercise, a set of social challenges have been selected for deeper elaboration and analysis. In addition, a set of social innovations have been mapped that aim at improving the wellbeing of individual farmers, farming households and rural communities.

This research which took place in the first half of 2021 is meant to provide a systematic evidence based upon which social innovations in farming can be analyzed further on their effectiveness and made more accessible through innovate communication.



In addition, these papers should enable a productive exchange of ideas and insights between different European countries and partners involved in the FARMWELL project.

This paper presents a practice group carried out in Italy. After this introduction, PART 2 'Methodology/data gathering' will present the main methodological steps undertaken in mapping and analyzing these social challenges and innovations as well as the practice group organization and conduction. PART 3 "Description of main challenges" will provide a general introduction to the main challenges Italy is being confronted. In part 4 'Analysis of selected theme(s) in social challenges', a limited number of social challenges is being selected and delved into in a systematic manner and based in primary data gathering. Part 5 then gives a concise summary of the main arguments and insight being put forward in the paper. The paper is finally concluded with a table that provides 10 important social challenges in Italy that has to explicit the aim of improving the overall wellbeing of individual farmers, farming households and rural communities.

2.

Methodology/ data gathering



The methodology utilized for this mapping report consists of a desk research followed by experts' interviews. This information was further complemented with the results gathered throughout the first practice group meeting held for this project in July 2021.

The desk activity started with the collection of grey and white literature, including journal articles (the selection was conducted using key words such as “farm wellbeing” “Italy socio-economic challenges in agriculture” in Scopus, Google Scholar and in the Unipi online Library). The analysis of the selected literature was utilized to sketch the socio-economic-demographic situation in Italy, in order to set a framework where to allocate the main social challenges Italian farmers are confronted with.

11 experts' interviews were conducted to validate the desk research and the correspondence of the identified social challenges with the ones perceived by

practitioners and category organizations. The interviewed subjects were identified among farmers, policy makers, journalists, business operators, associations and NGOs that have a direct or indirect experience in relation to the main social challenges identified and in particular to the topic related to employment, workers' rights, and related issues. The interviews, lasting between 60 and 90 minutes, were conducted individually and virtually (Zoom platform or Google Meet platform), and, upon agreement, recorded. The interview was structured as a series of open and informal questions aimed to obtain knowledge on the main social challenges that, according to the interviewee's perceptions and experiences, currently affect the Italian agricultural system. After an introduction on their own background and (in case of farmers as interviewees) farming business, we addressed the following questions:

- What undermines the mental, physical, and social wellbeing of farmers? Are these issues directly linked to the challenges that farmers must deal with on a daily basis?
- What are the main challenges that farmers must cope with? (Generational renewal, impoverishment, gender inequality, access to facilities, administrative support, bureaucratic impediments, strenuous work)
- What does it mean to tackle the challenge and what does this entail from your point of view, both at individual level, for farmers, and at a systemic level?
- What is being done? According to your perceptions, what are the available tools, what are the innovative measures that are being developed, applied, and made accessible?

The validation, through the interviews, of the relevance of certain previously selected topics emerging from the literature review allowed to focus the practice group on one specific theme: employment and related issues; including both entrepreneurs and their families' perspectives and workers perspectives. It hereby emerged that regular and irregular work in the agricultural sector is related to several factors such as low incomes for small farmers, high competition in specific sectors, the fragility of immigrant workers due to their socio-economic conditions combined with the constant increase of the average age of farmers, creating a particular and peculiar combination that generates high stress among both farm employers and employee farmers.

Other challenges also emerged from the literature analysis such as economic and market pressures, bureaucratic burdens, loneliness, distance, social isolation, gender imbalance, aging of the population, depopulation and generational renewal, environmental change, wildlife as a threat and management, unfair competition and illegal activities, job market. These challenges have indirectly been addressed during the practice group.

The practice group was conducted on July 7, using the Zoom platform, with 20 participants among farmers, farmers' representatives, stakeholders and Unipi and Coldiretti research team members. After a round of introductions of all the participants and a presentation of the Farmwell project, the floor was given to the participants, utilizing a set of prepared questions. The first question was focused on problems identification, followed by an open discussion with producers mostly; the second question aimed at depicting potentialities and contributions to social innovations or innovative tools. This was principally directed at each expert present, and it was followed by an open discussion as well, both with producers and experts. More specifically, the questions were divided into three main areas:

a. Perceptions and needs:

1. In your role as a producer and agricultural entrepreneur, what are the factors that generate stress and those that generate well-being?
2. Please, tell us how your job makes you feel in two words; pride and satisfaction or fatigue and frustration or ... (something else)?
3. Does your business contribute in some way to improve social needs?
4. How is the farm work reconciled with family work? How is the farm workload distributed?

b. External needed work (external from the family farm group):

1. Do you use labor outside the family? (If so, how do you find people? Is it easy to find them? Do you need labor for short or long periods?)
2. What are the advantages and disadvantages of employing external labor? (indicate two advantages and two disadvantages).

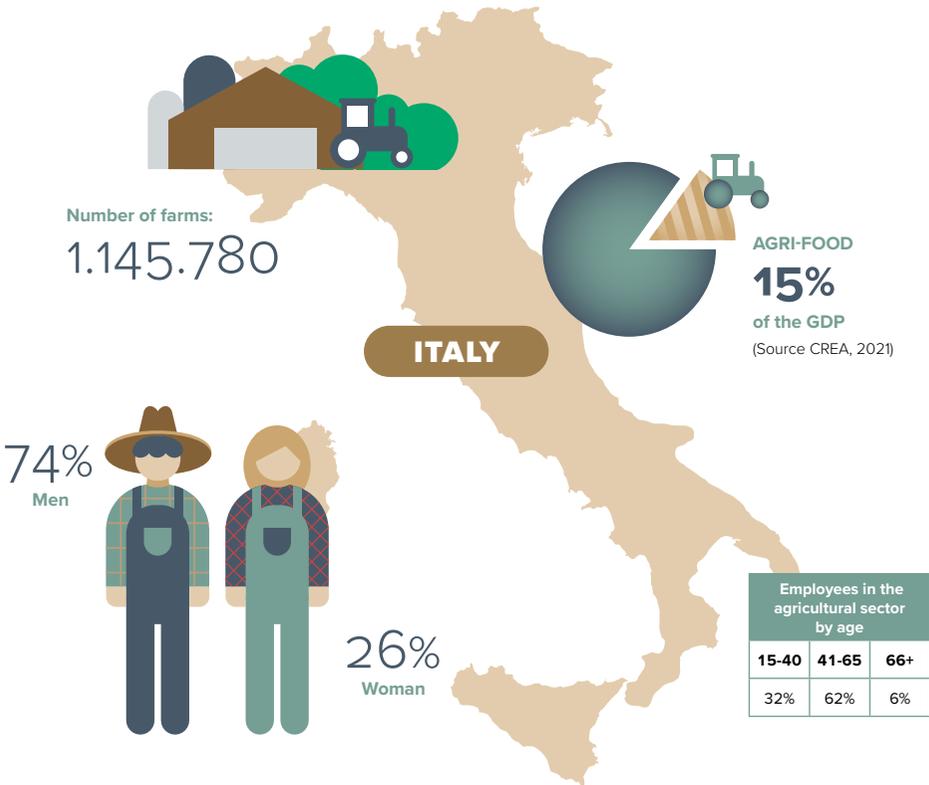
c. The work and the possible difficulties:

1. In which situations, also due to seasonality, is it difficult to find external workers?
2. What are the problems in using existing instruments (contracts)?
3. How does a reality such as that of labor exploitation, grey work and, more generally, a distorted agri-food chain affect your farm?

After the introduction to each question and subtheme, the farmer was invited to speak and have its say in keywords and/or by explaining their perception and experiences. Participants were also allowed to intervene through the chat or by verbally intervening in the discussion. After the session with the farmers, the floor was opened to the experts who were then asked to intervene and provide feedback on what has been said in the first session. These experts also intervene with suggestions and indications about how to deal with different challenges using social innovations. The last part was devoted to a short summary about the most pressing issues and the possible solutions.

3.

Description of main social challenges – national level



3.1. Overview of the socio-demographic characteristics of the farming population

As of January 1, 2020, the Italian population is estimated at 59.6 million residents. The overall population has decreased for the sixth consecutive year with more than 100,000 fewer people than the previous year (-1.6 per thousand). This dynamic is especially outspoken in the South of the country (-3.9 per thousand) (source: ISTAT).

Out of the entire Italian population, foreigners constitute 8.4% (about 5 million) (source Istat). The foreign population had a sustained growth from 2002 until 2015, passing from 1,341,000 residents to 4,835,000. After this year, a stabilization in the foreign population started, with even a slight reduction in the period 2015-2016. As of January 1, 2019, 4,966,000 foreigners were registered (Istat, 2021).

3.1.1. Employment in the agricultural sector

In the EU, the agricultural sector remains an important “employer”, with 9.2 million people employed in 2018, which is about 4% of the total employment. This is an average value that hides a wide variability between countries. Italy is hereby following an intermediate position with an employment rate of 3.8% (CREA, 2019).

In 2018, employment in agriculture remained more stable, but this result stems from opposing changes in two varieties of employment that is: dependent and self-employed. The self-employed component remains significant, especially when measured in terms of standard units. This needs to be explained by specific characteristics of the farming sector, such as the strong work contribution of the owner, the often-informal contribution of family members, as well as the incidence of undeclared work, partially or completely.

Analysing just the 413 thousand (out of the 1.5 million) active agricultural enterprises (which means those economic units which operate in the agricultural sector as a primary activity, differentiated by those economic units whose income mainly comes from activities conducted in sectors other than agriculture; only the active farms could be beneficiaries of the CAP support), the number of people employed in the agricultural sector in Italy are about 815 thousand.

These are mainly micro enterprises: more than 407 thousand enterprises have less than 10 employees who represent 98.6% of the total and employ 84% of employees. 11.5% of employees, equal to 93,000, work in companies with 10 to 49 employees, representing 1.3% (5,000 companies) of total firms. Only 0.1% of enterprises employ

more than 50 employees, absorbing 4.5% total employment (over 36,000 employees) (Istat, 2019)

Most of the workforce is employed in cultivation, both permanent and non-permanent, where 280,000 companies operate with 520,000 employees, equal to 68% of the companies and 64% of the employees (of the total respectively). On the other hand, 12% of farming companies are involved in animal breeding, plus another 12% of companies and employees are working in crops associated with animal husbandry.

3.1.2. Women in the agricultural sector

Data on gender differentiation in farm management show a male prevalence, with an overall incidence of 68.5%. However, both at the national level and in some regions, there is a slight increase in the number of farms led by women, from less than 30% in 2013 to 31.5% in 2016.

It should be noticed that according to other statistical services, this percentage is slightly lower. For example, EUROSTAT 2016 reports that female farm managers represent 28% of the farm managers. According to the study conducted by Unioncamere in 2019 (Unioncamere, 2020), agriculture is the second most important sector in which female businesses are concentrated: with more than 210,000 farms, female farmers represent 28.4% of Italian farms. Data from RICA (Rete Information Contabile Agraria) report that in 2018 female farm managers in Italy were 26.5% of total farm managers (CREA, 2020).

These inconsistencies mainly come from the different approaches to the research (the RICA survey for example excluded farms under a certain threshold of income) and reflect the complexity of the agricultural system (as the fact that “the census investigation does not allow to grasp those situations in which the management responsibility is shared between the two spouses (...). It is also useful to highlight that often the woman is the owner of the company but is not formally invested in the management role that, instead, is attributed to the husband often employed in other more profitable activities” (Rete Rurale Nazionale).

Despite these inconsistencies, what emerges from our analysis is that **the presence of women in the agricultural sector is increasing.** Agriculture, together with tourism, is experiencing a process of profound innovative transformation (green, technologies, etc.), in which the role of women could be of great importance thanks to their capacity for diversification and innovation, managing to combine tradition and the recovery of old knowledge with new technologies (Unioncamere, 2020).

Dealing with female presence among agricultural workers (despite their role in the company), ISTAT reports in 2020, 233.000 employees, with a reduction of 7.000 units since 2016. They represent 25,6% of total agricultural workers and 2.4% of total employed women in Italy (ISTAT, 2021).

3.1.3. Generational characteristics of the farming sector

WORKERS BY AGE		
	2016	Δ% 2007-2016
Agricultural workers under 40 years	44.1%	-5,7%
Agricultural workers between 41-59 years	47.8%	n.a.
Agricultural workers over 60 years	8.2%	+1,1%
Non-agricultural workers under 40 years		-22,6%
Workers for merchants U40 years		-26,1%
Workers for artisans U40 years		-45,4%

With reference to the age of the farming population, data show some differences among salaried workers and farm managers.

Looking at the composition of salaried agricultural workers by age group, the picture that emerges between 2007-2016 is of a slightly aged professional group that is certainly less aged than other categories of workers in sectors other than agriculture. We observe that in 2016 the prevailing class is that between 40 and 59 years old (47.8%) followed by the age group of young people under 40 (44.1%). Ten years earlier, in 2007, the under-40 age group (46.9%) was slightly more prevalent than the group between 40 and 59 years old (46%). Essentially, agricultural workers under 40 years of age decreased by 5.7% between 2007 and 2016.

However, it should be also noted that during the same period, non-agricultural private-sector employees under 40 years of age decreased by 22.6%, and even larger decreases among workers under 40 years of age were recorded for merchants (-26.1%) and artisans (-45.4%). Over the ten years considered, the share of over-60s agricultural workers increased by one percentage point (from 7.1% in 2007 to 8.2% in 2016), much less than for other categories of workers in which the share of older people increased by 3 to 6 points.

When studying the category of farmers (as farm managers), data from CREA 2019 show how the

percentages of farms led by under-30 farmers and by over-50 farmers remains stable over the period 2013-2016 (4.2% and 70% respectively). This is in line with the trend registered by Eurostat over the period 2013-2016 which highlighted an unchanged percentage of companies run by under-35 and a slight increase of those run by over-55.

Additional interesting data come from Unioncamere (the Union of Chamber of Commerce, which study runs from 2017 to 2020) about the number of under-35 farmers. At the end of 2017, farms led by under-35 increased by 6.8% since the previous year. More recently (September 2020), Unioncamere also revealed that over the last 5 years, farms led by under-35 farmers increased by 12% since 2015.

Concerning the educational qualifications of business managers (these can be owners, employers or even freelancers), the percentage with a bachelor's degree or college diploma remains very low (< 8%). Interestingly however, **younger farmers (under-35) are more educated** as 1 out of 4 of U35 has a bachelor's degree (Fondazione Symbola, 2018). More than 1/3 of the managers has a middle school diploma and more than 28% have a high school diploma.

3.2. The socio-economic characteristics of the farming population

The total utilized agricultural area in Italy is 12,777,044 ha totaling 302.073 km² or 42.3% of the national territory.

Active agricultural enterprises (those who, according to the CAP 2014-2020, could be beneficiary of direct payment as agriculture is their main economic activity, opposed to those inactive which are employed in different working sectors and agriculture represents just a small part of their economic activity) **hold 65% of the national UAA** (Utilized Agricultural Area) and have an average farm surface area of 21 hectares, well above the national average for agricultural enterprises (7,9 hectares). Economically, **they represent 75% of the total standard production** and therefore are a form of enterprise mainly aimed at the market. Their diffusion in the territory is concentrated as several productive units in the northern regions, equaling 49% of the total units in the North, and as a surface area, they reach 80% of the same district, while in the Center the active companies cover 63% of the surface area and 56% in the South. The most widespread productive specialization of this type is that of wood crops (36%), followed by arable crops (24%).

According to Chamber of Commerce data, updated in September 2020, active farms in Italy, amounting to 704,930 units, are down to 0.6% compared to 2019, a smaller percentage decrease than in the previous two years (-1.3% in 2019 compared to 2018) (CREA, 2019).

Total revenues in 2017 amounted to 66,755 euros on average, while net income amounted to 26,158 euros, constituting 39% of company revenues. Higher economic values are recorded in the northern regions, attributable to a greater presence of intensive farms and industrial-type livestock enterprises. Southern companies, despite registering lower average values, are generally more efficient in terms of net income on company revenues (RICA).

The productive and income-generating capacity of agricultural companies can be examined through the study of balance sheet items, in particular, the Profit and Loss Account (CE), processed with data from the FADN RICA database. The analysis of average values of the main components calculated for groups of companies classified according to specific characteristics, such as territorial dislocation, economic size, and farm specialization, allows verifying the potentialities and weaknesses of the agricultural sector from the company's point of view.

The first item in the Profit and Loss Account is represented by the total company revenues (RTA). For the farms in the RICA sample in 2018, the national average figure for Rta is 67,619 euros, recording a significant recovery, of 1.3%, compared to the significant drop, of almost 10 percentage points, that occurred in 2017.

The EUROSTAT estimate for real agricultural income per labor unit for the 28 EU countries shows in 2018 an increase of 7% compared to 2016, with a rather diverse situation among member countries. In most of them, there was an increase, particularly strong in the case of Denmark (+38.4%), Estonia (+35.4%), Ireland (22.4%), and Luxembourg (21.9%) (EUROSTAT; CREA, 2018).

On the other hand, other countries have seen decreases, even sharp ones, such as Slovenia (down 15.5%), Malta and Spain (down around 6%), Croatia, and the Czech Republic (down 5%). Italy, in contrast to recent years, is showing a recovery, with an increase of almost 4% (CREA, 2018).

The average agricultural income per labor unit employed in agriculture, according to (Eurostat, CEA) was 16.3 thousand euros in 2007, higher than the average agricultural income of the EU 28 by about 3,700 euros. In 2016, it – net of inflation – rose to just over 19 thousand euros (+18% compared to 2007) while that of the EU grew by 21%.

Ultimately, the profitability gap with the EU widened considerably in favor of Italian agriculture between 2010 and 2013, only to narrow in subsequent years.

Similar considerations apply when looking at net business income, i.e., what remains for the entrepreneur and his family members employed in the agricultural activity, once the capital and labor factors have been remunerated, that is, after deducting depreciation and wages: the average annual net entrepreneurial income, with only the work units independent – the entrepreneur and his family members, is equal, in 2016, to about 16 thousand euros and increased by 29% compared to 2007 (Agricultural and farm income, 2018). Again, it is necessary to emphasize the fluctuating trend of the indicator, which had strongly increased between 2011 and 2013 and then recorded a significant deterioration in the last three years.

3.3. Overview of the evolution of the farming sector

The recent evolution of Italian agriculture is characterized by two main distinctive elements:

1. An increasing dichotomy between 2 farm systems, divided between those farms producing for the market and farms running occasional market relationships, almost exclusively oriented towards self-consumption;
2. The gradual embedding and intensification of the processes of diversification of production activities, which on average amounts to 1/5 of the overall value of the agricultural production. Agritourism is one example of increasing income diversification in farming in Italy. Also noteworthy is the role of direct sales which, although still somewhat marginal, is growing in recent years. There also is a growing interest in short food supply chains which involves an increasing number of companies. In this context, the section of certified quality productions (PDO-PGI) is among the most dynamic of the Italian agri-food sector (+4%) (CREA, 2021).

In terms of number of farms, Italy has, according to the latest data (ISTAT, 2020) 1.5 million farms, among those which work both mainly and as secondary activity in the agricultural sector (the first are known as active farms and could be beneficiaries of the CAP support). Based on this, **Italy ranks third in Europe for the number of farms**. Moreover, among the economically most important countries in the EU, it is the one with the highest incidence of small and medium-sized farms; **the average size of Italian farms is 8.4 ha** (ISTAT, 2017). In Italy, **over 90% of farms are specialized**, thus characterized by a defined productive orientation; the prevailing specialization (in terms of company size) is that in permanent crops (trees).

The number of people employed in agriculture increased by 28,000 units over the past 5 years.

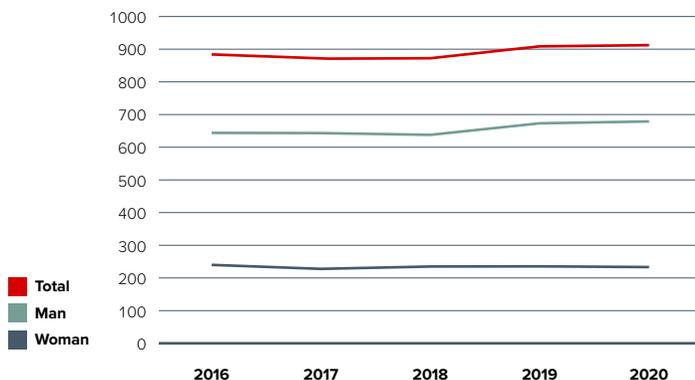
The contraction of the land for agricultural use (the UAA decreased from 15.3 million hectares in 2000 to about 12 million hectares in 2019) was accompanied by an increase in the wooded area and the share of the agricultural area destined for organic farming. These trends, however, particularly in inland areas have corresponded to the abandonment of the territory, contributing to the increased risk of landslides.

With reference to the overall employment in the agricultural sector, according to data from ISTAT, in the last 5 years, the number of people employed in agriculture increased by 28,000 units.

EMPLOYED, AGE +15 (THOUSAND)					
Year	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Total	884,000	871,223	872,368	908,779	912,301
Man	643,908	643,338	637,903	673,286	678,97
Women	240,092	227,885	234,465	235,493	233,331

Source: own elaboration on data from ISTAT

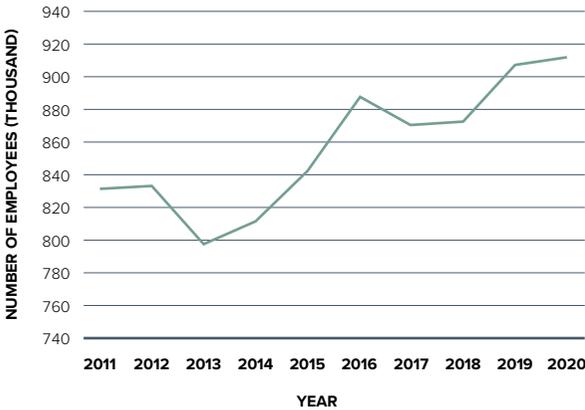
Employed in the agricultural sector, age +15 (thousand)



Source: own elaboration on data from ISTAT

The exodus of workforce from agriculture to other occupational sectors has decreased over the last decade (2010-2019) and has been replaced by a trend of slight (albeit discontinuous) growth in the number of workers employed in this sector; these positive dynamics are mainly driven by the **increase in the payroll employment; instead, independent employment is in decline** (Veneto Lavoro, 2019).

Trend of employees in the agricultural sector



Source: own elaboration on data from ISTAT

The incidence of foreign employees displays a solid upward trend, from 17% in 2016 to 19% in 2020 (CREA, L'agricoltura italiana conta, 2018).

The incidence of foreign employees displays a solid upward trend.

Year	2017	2018	2019	2020
Italian	724	716	743	744
Foreigner	147	156	166	168
Total	871	872	909	912

Source: own elaboration on data from ISTAT

From a generational perspective, **some dynamics show a tendency towards rejuvenation**, despite the overall agricultural sector being rather old. The increasing number of under-35 farmers in Italy over the last 5 years, as well as the growing number of registrations at the University of Agriculture (on average 2,000 more per year since 2014), are a positive signal which should be further exploited (ISMEA, *Seminiamo il futuro*, Febbraio 2020). According to data that Coldiretti collects among its associated farmers, there is also a growing number of young farmers who chose to work in this sector coming from different personal and educational backgrounds.

However, the shortage of young farmers is part of the ongoing dynamic of an ageing European population in the agricultural sector; which is interlinked with a depopulation affecting some areas in particular and, consequently, to land abandonment too, especially in some regions. Basilicata is the Italian region that has been hardest hit by rural depopulation, although over the last decade the situation has started to reverse, thanks to the large number of foreign residents who have chosen to live there (Candioli & di Benedetto Montaccini, 2019).

The ageing problem of agriculture not only has a direct socio-economic effect, it also has a great influence on the manner agriculture is being conducted.

The ageing problem of agriculture not only has a direct socio-economic effect, it also has a great influence on the manner agriculture is being conducted. Innovations and investments, that could be vital for rural territories, are more feasible for young farmers which can be important drivers of change in the countryside. They are on average more educated than other age groups (51% of young farm managers have a diploma and 16% a degree even if not related to agronomic subjects), have larger farms (18 hectares of UAA per company against 10 of the over 40s), have a greater entrepreneurial spirit (31% of the under 40s interviewed by Ismea intend to invest over the next 12 months, against 17% of the over 40s) and propensity to network.

3.4. Main social challenges and needs the farming population is being confronted with

Economic and market pressures

Farmers' position in the supply chain, in particular their lack of bargaining power vis-à-vis their buyers, has been at the heart of policy discussions in the last decade, especially for smaller farms (Davidova and Thomson, 2014; Sorrentino, Russo and Cacchiarelli, 2017). Small farms have weaker positions within food chains, in particular those led by large-scale retailers or processors (Berti and Mulligan, 2016). Despite their resilience and their contribution to sustainability and food security, small farms are less represented than larger farms in agriculture decision-making structures (Šūmane *et al.*, 2021); they are the ones who mainly bear the pressure of economic competitiveness (Moore, 2015) and suffer from an unbalanced power structure and resources distribution (Brunori and Bartolini, 2016). In this sense, small-scale farming systems call for designing context-specific policies, both at regional, national and European level (CAP) (ūmane *et al.*, 20Šūmane *et al.*, 2021).

Bureaucratic burden

Compliance with food safety and hygiene standards are a constant source of pressure for farmers, above all for small farms. Adapting hygiene regulation to the needs and capabilities of small farms is one of the main drivers providing or inhibiting access to small farms' markets (Schmitt *et al.*, 2017; Toma and Redman, 2020). Although minimum standards must be maintained, there is a potential at national level for further flexibility in the interpretation and implementation of some of these standards.

We also refer to the bureaucratic impasse during the pandemic Covid-19 as farmers clearly asked for simplifying voucher issue in order to offset the lack of labour force of migrant workers (la Repubblica, 2020; Corriere della Sera, 2020) as their labour input is essential for the maintenance of the food system (CREA, 2021).

More generally, bureaucracy is perceived as a critical barrier for the development of efficient farms, in terms of time spent on administrative burden and resources and the missing of different opportunities because of very slow procedures. A recent analysis conducted through an online questionnaire by Coldiretti over 8500 farmers (Coldiretti, 2021) shows that bureaucracy is among the main obstacles in the farming business, indicated by 36,9% of respondents.

Just referring to the administrative burden linked to the CAP support, according to the "Analysis of administrative burden arising from the CAP" (European Union, 2018), Italy has the second highest annual cost of administrative burden in Europe, reaching more

than 800€ while the EU average is €236 per farmer and year. Among the reasons for this difference, the Italian system of managing the CAP; each region, in fact, has its own Plan and Program and several managing authorities. This inhibits the exploitation of economies of scale, is time consuming and adds to the difficulties in gathering, producing, and submitting documentation. Other negative consequences include young people being prevented from starting-up a new business, as there is a higher risk of a rejection of their request. There are also potential difficulties in further developing the business if financial resources, even when approved, are paid with great delay.

Unfair competition and illegal activities

Fraud and lack of transparency on labels are considerable problems in the agri-food system (Perone, 2020). According to the latest data on food fraud (MIPAAF, 2020), “Made in Italy” counterfeit affects the Italian agribusiness system for a total value of 21 million Euros. Likewise, there is a great concern about the arrival on the European markets of agricultural products contaminated by pesticides that are not permitted in the EU and often sprayed by workers without adequate knowledge and safety measures.

One of the most threatening phenomena occurring within the Italian food system consists of auctions with a competitive bidding system that is implemented by the large-scale retail trade. Through these biddings, a fixed “reference price” is being set to which all companies must comply (Terra, 2021). This often translates into exploitation and violation of workers’ rights, fruits, and vegetables pickers’ rights and dignity (Fanizza, 2020) as within this neoliberal industrial model, the farm needs to achieve the lowest cost of production in order to compete and remain competitive (Corrado *et al.*, 2017; Internazionale, 2018).

Organised crime continues to undermine the development of the Italian economy, mostly in the south of the country, which is already challenged by low investments and tourism and intense outmigration. The so-called “Agromafia” (organized crime in agribusiness), which makes billions from Italian agriculture (OPR, 2018), imposes its control throughout the whole agricultural supply chain, from production to retail (purchase of lands with proceeds from illegal activities), passing through the processing industry (e.g., setting harvest prices or processed products prices (“local agri-food cartel”), transports and large-scale distribution, control over supermarket chains (Financial Times, 2018).

Impoverishment

The introduction of new technology partially substituted classic labour-driven intensification (Knickel *et al.*, 2017). Through this mechanisation of agricultural production, there will be a job polarization with a widening gap between high and low skilled workers as technological change requires specialized competencies. This results in new jobs and new opportunities for those who can access high-level

and professional courses. Conversely, it also means that those who do have not this possibility will continue to be employed as low skilled labours, with even lower salaries. This in turn helps to decrease the costs of production, an objective for businesses seeking to rationalise company resources under growing competitive pressure. This problem involves particularly foreign workers willing to do low-skilled and low-paid jobs. This also affects farmers aged over 50 (not necessarily foreigners), whom have less technical skills and difficulties in acquiring these skills (Faleri, 2019).

Loneliness, remoteness, social isolation

Remoteness is characteristic for many rural areas in Italy. This problem particularly affects women and has an impact on different aspects of life. The concentration of the main social services in urban areas has an impact on the life quality of groups that already are at risk of social exclusion; such as health services for the elderly or disabled, childcare facilities for female workers, etc. The accessibility of schools as well as a reduction in existing public and private services (e.g., retail, postal offices, banks, childcare, libraries, kindergartens) are important questions for children and parents living in remote rural areas (CREA, 2021). In these areas, agricultural land use is likely to be given up without policy assistance and without an adequate European Common Agricultural Policy support on both environmental and socio-economic challenges. This would mean, therefore, ensuring availability and access to social services and infrastructures (health, education, transportation, post offices, housing for disadvantaged populations, broadband) (Pe'er *et al.*, 2020; Schuh *et al.*, 2021).

Foreign workers, invisible workers

There often is a large employment of migrant irregular workers in agricultural activities in western countries such as Italy, Spain, and Greece (Oxfam, 2018). This has translated into new forms of mobility and settlements, generates new needs and has profound socio-economic and political repercussions (Corrado, 2018). For instance, in some areas characterised by intensive farming, gaps related to housing and access to social, health and welfare services have emerged. In these areas, the risk of illegal immigration and exploitation is often associated with very poor living conditions, low salaries, and absence of any kind of insurance (Mangano, 2014). The risk of poverty and exclusion is still higher in those areas where there is a presence of criminal organizations that control the labour market by new forms of caporalato¹ (Terra!, 2021).

¹ “Caporalato” is a form of illegal hiring and labour exploitation through an intermediary. It could be roughly translated into English as “gangmaster system” (Poppi and Travaglino, 2019), nevertheless this would not be a proper translation since the Italian term has no corresponding in the English language.

Sectoral studies emphasize that foreign women agricultural workers are more vulnerable than men; furthermore, women are often subjected to both labour and sexual abuse (Palumbo and Scieurba, 2015). The precarious nature of job contracts, fragile supporting networks and the lack of welfare services that are dedicated to women specifically make the conditions of these women less visible to authorities and organizations. In this context, gender-based violence appears to be a characteristic of a productive system that exploits foreign women rural workers and exposes them to different sorts of physical, psychological and economic violence (Palumbo and Scieurba, 2018).

Gender unbalance

The agricultural sector remains a male dominated profession, even if some dynamics are changing. For example, it is important to highlight that agriculture is the second most important sector in which female businesses (leader of a company) are concentrated (Unioncamere, 2020). Moreover, as already mentioned, the statistical tools are not always adequate to detect the complexity of the farm business, as, for example, in case the management of a farm is shared between two spouses. Further, it could also emphasize that activities carried out by women in the company are often closely related to family activities (ISTAT, 2021), thus not considered as working activities.

However, there appears to be a gender imbalance in the rural parts of some Southern and Eastern European countries, with strong rural-urban migration of females in the economically active age groups, looking for better remunerated job opportunities. Quite logically, this causes a degree of “masculinisation” of the rural population (Wiest, 2016).

Moreover, a certain gender unbalance should also be explained by the conditions and opportunities for women farmers to operate in the agricultural sector. Some interesting data on social challenges and needs for woman farmers come from an analysis conducted by Istituto Ixè S.r.l. on a sample of 1160 female farmers in January 2020. The survey revealed that in the last 3 years, financial support for the development of the farm business arrived mainly from family (29.1%) and rural development programmes (23.5%). These data confirm that one of the main obstacles for female businesses compared to male ones, irrespective of the sector, is accessing finance. The analysis of Unioncamere on female entrepreneurship 2020 reports that the credit crunch for female entrepreneurs is higher than for the male entrepreneurs (8% vs 4%); one of the reasons being that the bank system asks women for more guarantees of honourability of their debt. Further, women farmers involved in the survey listed a set of welfare services they consider important for women living in rural areas; these include: financial support for family needs (36.1%), looking after older relatives (32.9%), and 0-3 aged children (27%).

Another important finding in the analysis is that non-agricultural activities conducted by female farmers are related to social needs and require direct contact with other people. Women farmers consider these activities crucial not only because they increase farm income but also because, very often, they are the result of their own decision, give them great satisfaction and represent the most creative part of their job. These are also activities through which women farmers feel closer to their community.

Ageing population, depopulation and generational renewal

Many rural regions are experiencing structural challenges, particularly ageing and depopulation. With the rapidly ageing population, one of the biggest difficulties might be the transfer of knowledge and traditional farming methods from the older generations to their successors (Beluhova-Uzunova, Roycheva and Atanasov, 2018). At the same time, depopulation could undermine the provision of key public services (Rovný, 2016) and lead to a progressive abandonment of land and traditional agriculture, which in turn risk endangering the landscape and biodiversity (Otero *et al.*, 2015).

Environmental change

Dealing with climate change calls for the urgent development of adaptation strategies but also for a national and European support that leaves none behind. The climate change adaptation framework should consider measures both for small and large farms, incentives or compensation for lower carbon production, transition towards more sustainable technologies, as well as access to crop insurances in case of crop failure (e.g. as a result of climate change induced risks and severe diseases) (European Union, 2017). At the same time, adapting agriculture to climate change means approaching and managing new products and plantations (e.g. tropical food like avocado, mango, goji berries growing in Apulia) (la Repubblica, 2020), consequently facing new potential pests and diseases, making the integration of new knowledge and technical skills on land preparation absolutely crucial (Fetsis *et al.*, 2019).

Wildlife as a threat and its management

The number of wild boars in Italy has almost doubled over the past decade until about a million animals; killing livestock and destroying crops (Tack, 2018). Although the boar hunt has continued for years, the number of these ungulates has not decreased; on the contrary it tends to grow when more use is made of slaughtering (Massei *et al.*, 2015). Wildlife threats make farmers feel particularly vulnerable and call for exploring new governance arrangements surrounding social-ecological tensions (Kross *et al.*, 2018).

4.

Analysis of selected themes in social challenges

4.1. Social challenge identified: employment, irregular employment, and low-paid workers

In the past decades, global economic integration has generated huge impacts on national economies. Participation on the world's agribusiness global markets hereby imposes the need for enterprises to change and adapt their strategies leading to higher market competition. The constant reduction of labour costs has become a structural feature of agricultural systems, deeply integrated in the value chain, and often “necessary” to support the competitiveness of farms, the low prices paid at the door of the farm and the increase in cost of production inputs (Crocevia, 2016). Moreover, over the last 30 years, in various European rural regions, including Italy, the farm sector has grown increasingly dependent on a steady supply of migrant farmworkers. These farmworkers have entered the country illegally for the most part, ending up for feeding exploited-labourers' ranks and greatly influencing socioeconomic and

rural-urban dynamics. Since the 1980s, foreign workers have indeed constituted an increasingly large pool of manpower, especially in the years of the economic crisis, between 2008 and 2013, in which the migrant workforce, both from the EU and from third countries, almost equalled the Italian one (Macri *et al.*, 2018). As a percentage, migrants represent about 40% of the total agricultural labour according to the latest data (CIA, 2019).

This context can easily result in exploitation and irregularities of agricultural work, which affects migrants and Italians alike. According to the latest data, the fifth report “Agromafie e Caporalato” provided by the Observatory Placido Rizzotto of the Flai-CGIL union, an estimated 180,000 “vulnerable” workers in Italy, both Italians and foreign workers, risk being exploited within the agro-industrial sector. The problem is particularly serious in southern Italy but, unfortunately, it affects the whole country and also moves across Europe, as shown by growing research and inquiries on this matter, also at the European level (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2019; Terra!, 2021).

Grey labour (where the employer does not record the days effectively worked by the labourer), illegal work (involving the employment of irregular and low-paid workers) and labour exploitation – including the phenomenon of ‘caporalato’ – affect the whole Italian country, rich regions included and different economic sectors.

“Caporalato” is an Italian term indicating illicit intermediation of labour demand from farms, illegal hiring of workers and labour exploitation perpetrated by corporals, “caporali” in Italian. Importantly, the phenomenon of labour exploitation is not necessarily correlated to illegal hiring, while the opposite is true; where there are caporalato, the workers who are victims of it are also exploited (key-informant interview²). This phenomenon

This context can easily result in exploitation and irregularities of agricultural work, which affects migrants and Italians alike.

There are an estimated 180,000 ‘vulnerable’ workers in Italy.

² Yvan Sagnet is a Cameroonian activist; after being victim himself of caporalato, he became popular by founding the first international network to fight against the phenomenon in the Italian agricultural industry. Its name is “NoCap”.



remains particularly strong in southern Italy (Scotto, 2016), where cultural, structural, and economic reasons – also considering its historical development as a “granary of Italy” – overlap each other, resulting in particularly vulnerable situations for farmers. This phenomenon has particularly affected those regions where agriculture is mainly extensive and constitutes the primary or complementary source of income for the most part of local families, i.e., in Puglia, Campania, Basilicata and Sicily. Also, it has evolved in parallel with socio-economic changes, taking advantage of social and labour market changes and adapting to the territories where it has grown and developed. Until 50 years ago, Italians were the main victims; nowadays it mostly concerns migrants, as they are the invisible ones of our society and among the least safeguarded (e.g., refused asylum seekers, devoid of documents, residence permits).

In confirmation of this problem and because of its urgency that calls for new ethical and regulatory measures, **the newly approved CAP** establishes that subsidies to farmers provided through eco-schemes (part of direct payments, the so called first pillar, linked to ecological agricultural practices) are bound by respect for workers' rights. This new measure is named social conditionality (ec.europa.eu, 2021). As the open letter written by the European Federation of Trade Unions in the Food, Agriculture and Tourism sectors to the attention of the Member States 'Agriculture Ministers reports, at least ten million people are employed in European agriculture, mainly as seasonal workers, day labourers or in other insecure statuses. Inhuman working conditions, poor wages, long working hours, a high proportion of undeclared work and sub-standard housing are only some of the daily hardships faced by farm workers in Europe. But it is thanks to these workers that, even in a global pandemic, there is food on our tables (EPSU, 2021).

The phenomenon of caporalato and irregular work needs to be tackled by working on several fronts. **The solution is complex and necessarily involves different actors;** all the public institutions responsible for these different services and all the

actors along the food supply chain, including large-scale retailers, employment centres, farmers, farmers' association, consumers.

So far, Italian interventions against labour exploitation and trafficking have risked being solely a repressive and mitigating approach to prevent the phenomenon and are merely aimed at rescuing victims. A multi-level and multi-partner governance arrangement would be more effective. It should engage and establish partnerships with several public and private actors of the food value chain (industries, processors, large-scale retailers) for both immediate interventions and long-term plans. In this sense, preventing efforts should be realized by considering all the dimensions of labour exploitation in agriculture (Corrado, 2018; Ministero del lavoro e delle politiche sociali, 2020).

At policy level, we would need additional regulatory measures, especially preventive ones. Unfortunately, those farms currently implementing good practices and working legally, suffer the distorting consequences of an unfair competition, both at national and international level. Efforts should therefore be made in lobbying policy makers and governments and asking them to design and set several mechanisms, guarantees and socio-economic approvals and recognitions towards farmers with the purpose of making farming activities safeguarded and sustainable; hereby making the agro-food chain more equitable and fairer.

In Italy, regulatory interventions have been discussed, taking into account the complexities of seasonal work and suggestions have been made about interventions about labour permits as a possible solution to this problem. This consists of concessions of labour permits to migrants, as well as amnesty/immunity for the regularization of foreigners on the national territory. As an example, those people who have started a social and work integration and regularization path, waiting for the recognition of refugee status or for their permit renewal, in case of denial, they lose their job and the right to remain on Italian territory, confining them to a permanent status of clandestinity, which consequently exposes them to the bridle of exploitation and irregular work.



A few measures to combat the phenomenon have been adopted recently and continue to be designed and developed. **The first law against illicit intermediation of labour** dates to 2011, by introducing in the Italian Criminal Code the new crime of “illicit intermediation and labour exploitation” with the aim to fight the phenomenon of caporalato. Subsequently this was implemented through **law no. 199/2016**, wherein the amount of the fines has been increased and it has been established that a person is found guilty of caporalato when an intermediary recruits workers to be exploited by others taking advantage of their economic and social vulnerability, and when one uses, recruits and employs workers, also through intermediaries, exploiting them and taking advantage of their economic and social vulnerability (law no. 199/2016).

In addition to the repressive measures taken against these practices, preventive mechanisms have barely been developed and implemented. After the Covid-19 pandemic started, art. 103 of the Decreto Legge 34/2020 introduced the regularization of the irregular immigrants working in the agricultural sector with the aim to guarantee a minimum level of health protection at an individual and collective level and to get irregular workers out of miserable working and living conditions.

It must also be mentioned that there is an increasing concern about environmental and social issues by consumers, resulting in public pressure for transparency and the adoption of certifications guarantee these concerns. Consumers should learn about the impacts, including the irregular work utilization, involved in the production processes of some goods they buy and consciously choose “cleaner” products over the “dirtier” alternatives (EIA, 2017). We are still far from the pledge of an “ethical traceability” for consumers though on these matters. To a certain extent, labels remain a sort of niche reality within the agribusiness market scenery and we are still far from the pledge of an “ethical traceability” for consumers.

4.2. Impact of social challenge

a) individual farmers and farming families

- Stress, frustration, rage, anxiety, powerlessness, isolation

On the side of farmers (producers), they frequently complain about their low-bargaining power and their difficulty during negotiating tables, particularly with supermarket chains and agro-food industries. Especially in southern regions, farmers report the absence of market connections and lack of organizations able to make them more competitive. There is a high degree of individualism and poor organization among local farmers, together with a lack of adequate public measures, making it difficult to support potential grassroots initiatives. To some extent there is also an organized crime-fabric preventing many legal and/or social initiatives, hereby adding to the vulnerability of farmers through their dependence on outside-region processing industries and intermediaries to sell their products.

On the other side, farmers as employees face the same wellbeing issues, based on the awareness that they need to accept to work under irregular conditions because of a lack of bargaining power and consequent low salaries that lead to the acceptance of degraded living conditions and poor sanitary conditions.

b) farming community and wider rural community

Obviously, illegal hiring has strong negative economic and humanitarian implications.

On the first point, there exists unfair competition between regular businesses and irregular business as they aim to reduce costs in order to increase profits, inevitably jeopardizing public finances. Tax evasion leads to a reduction of governmental revenues. Moreover, undeclared workers are excluded from any form of social protection and retirement's contributions (they weigh on public finances by reducing taxes and social security revenues). Although we must consider regulatory and administrative costs that

We are still far from the pledge of an “ethical traceability” for consumers though on these matters.

companies have to deal with when trying to counter the illegality; “One concept must be clear – underlines Francesco Mutti, CEO of Mutti Spa (Italian company specialized in preserved food, particularly in the tomato sector) – striving for legality does not make the economic level of agriculture unsustainable, but the exact opposite is true. It is in the presence of illegality that costs increase, in particular those that must be borne by companies that operate in fairness. Legality is above all an ethical and moral prerequisite, but it is also a prerequisite for healthy competition.” (La Repubblica, 2020).

The phenomenon of caporalato also entails a humanitarian problem, especially at community level, and consequently at national one too.

The phenomenon of caporalato also entails a humanitarian problem, especially at community level, and consequently at national too. We are witnessing the modern face of slavery and the spreading of slums in rural areas where hundreds, thousands of foreign people live (depending on the harvest periods), with inevitable implications in terms of socio-economic degradation, cultural heritage loss, sanitary implications and risk of contracting diseases for employees. We hereby see that Italy’s agriculture is heavily dependent on regular and irregular foreign workers. This dependency has become even more evident when seasonal workers were blocked due to movement restrictions in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, jeopardizing the sowing and harvesting periods (Il Fatto Alimentare, 2020).

There also are a set of **moral implications**. The use of illegal labour impacts on social norms through the normalization of the phenomenon, the toleration of irregularities and the violation of human rights (use of corporals and low-skilled and low-paid workers as a practice) has a decaying and demeaning effect on social equity.



4.3. What are the main causes of the problems identified?

It must be said that there are multiple variables that make illegal hiring a complex problem. The causes of this phenomenon can be classified into different types: economic, institutional, social and cultural.

Economic reasons (and possible advantages to farmers).

We should first mention tax evasion, with the purpose of avoiding social security contributions and social rights (minimum wage, leave entitlements), and the related costs of regular hiring (registration requirements, rules on health and safety). Foreign labour is suitable due to its flexibility and poor wages; due to a lack of work and without any social support and protection measures, migrants can easily be blackmailed and often need to accept low-paid and irregular jobs.

As already argued above, the bureaucratic burden and hidden charges related to the legal hiring of seasonal workers in agriculture is linked to unfair market competitions.

Large-scale distribution plays a key, albeit moderate, role in the exploitation system in force within the agri-food chain; by exercising a strong purchasing pressure towards suppliers, who are “forced” to reduce production costs while guaranteeing certain quality standards, large retail chains have the power to guide and control the production and trade of food (Oxfam, 2018; Terra!Onlus, 2020). Through the imposition by large-organized distribution companies of very low prices, which do not cover the costs of production, labour and transport of agri-food products. This forces suppliers and manufacturers to “cut” on expenses for safety in the workplace and on workers’ wages.

Institutional failures, that can be understood as inefficiency or permissiveness in the exercise of control by the government and institutions, weakness of public employment, lack of



infrastructures able to bring together the demand and supply of labour (match), lack of and dysfunctional employment centres. Lack of transportation to reach companies is another element that binds workers to corporals (to guarantee an appropriate transport for workers in the workplace). Next, there are numerous irregular migration flows and inadequate national and supranational migration policies as well as lack of measures regulating seasonal works.

Bureaucratic/administrative burdens makes it difficult to regularise seasonal workers. The bureaucratic burden and hidden charges related to the legal hiring of seasonal workers in agriculture is linked to unfair market competitions. Besides moral implications and a shared feeling of frustration, disappointment, and regret in respect of what effectively is a human/labor rights violation, farmers are aware and point out the unfair competition against regular business (e.g., there are no bureaucratic costs for those who use the figure of *caporale*).

Context-related causes, from cultural, social ones, which make it difficult to eradicate the phenomenon as a certain level of cultural justification against the informal economy; mistrust/lack of confidence in public institutions; a weak law perception, weak governance, inexistent social networks are present.

To the environmental conditions, which particularly influence the harvesting phase that requires, even in “normal environmental conditions” an increase in the workforce. Sudden climate changes can affect the agricultural entrepreneur’s need to employ larger number of workers who work for a shorter time than usual. For this reason, immediately available manpower will be required. It is precisely in this context that the intervention of the “caporali” is inserted; the corporal undertakes to recruit by dictating the wage conditions of the employer and his own. An inefficient management of migratory flows (both in its most welcoming form – openness – and in its most protectionist, closed one), exposes most of the immigrants who arrive in Italy to precarity. Many, in fact, found employment by working illegally

(the waiting times to obtain permits or renewals are considerably lengthened, facilitating cases of irregularity and clandestinity/ illegality). When living in marginalization and precariousness, agriculture (likewise construction), often represents a sort of “safe haven”, despite it being uncertain, temporary, oftentimes exhausting and without basic rights for workers.

4.4. How do farmers/farming deal with the negative impact on wellbeing?

According to our research evidence, it is possible to state that both at an individual and group level, there are grassroots attempts to initiate something “better and different” from the current status quo throughout Italy.

These generally are solutions aimed at overcoming a public-institutional inefficiency which is otherwise covered by illegal intermediaries, the so called caporali. It happens that some public services (job recruitment, transportation to the fields, housing for workers), which should be covered at an institutional level – but which effectively remained unsatisfied- are provided, albeit not very respectful for safety, security and human dignity, by illegal intermediaries, proving their usefulness for the farms.

In this sense, there is general agreement that there exists a necessity to set-up an alternative, regular, system to the caporalato which farmers could avail of. This is the case with those database platforms that aim to link labour supply and demand, socio-economic projects with the aim to provide job placement’s opportunities to migrants or vulnerable people, job-sharing initiatives wherein local farmers recruit and employ a few workers in rotation on their own farms throughout the year.

Keeping “the good side” of the overall system of caporalato, that is mainly its potentiality in terms of a (illegal) service able to efficiently intermediate between labour supply and labour

demand, could be, to a certain extent, the starting point for addressing the problem of labour exploitation and illegal hiring. In farmers' and experts' words: "it would be necessary to replace the current illegal service with a legal one, able to make labour supply and demand meet each other, while providing and guaranteeing adequate infrastructures and facilities (housing for workers, transports)". Additionally, farmers draw attention to the urgency of simplifying the current bureaucracy on recruiting workers in the agricultural sector. Also, they call for education and awareness-raising actions addressed to the large-scale retailing actors on the squeezing impacts that their commercial strategies highly contribute to.

Farmers also stress that any food supply chain should engage with consumers, as they play a key role within the attempt to eradicate irregular employment and push for an effective traceability and transparency of products. To make this possible, consumers should be informed about food that is produced respecting all human beings involved in the production, be made aware that their food purchases are as important as the producers' decision to follow the rules, and be "educated", in terms of "costs-sharing" for environmental and social sustainability.

That said, there is growing evidence of social agriculture's initiatives created with the aim to mitigate marginalization and vulnerability, and for fighting labour exploitation as well. Social agriculture is configured as a multifunctional practice of agriculture, since agricultural enterprises increasingly perform not only the economic function, but also functions more attributable to welfare models (Pascale, 2005). The increasing creation of public-private welfare with the aim of responding to the new needs of society is in fact known as "regenerative welfare" (Transform!Italia, 2021) which aims to bring benefits (through the production of goods and services) in the community where it develops.

In Italy, **various social agricultural initiatives have been created** with the aim to eliminate the exploitation of farmworkers.

These are, however, experiences that still constitute a niche and therefore are less well known. This is a reality that deserves to be highlighted as it differs from the reality of global commodity chains, the direct involvement of large retailers and large-organized distributions. “NoCap”, founded in 2019, is, so far, the most innovative and revolutionary experience fighting against irregular work and labour exploitation in agriculture. NoCap is the first international ethical network in Italy, whose goal is to prevent and eradicate illegal hiring and labour exploitation through the creation of projects with a high social impact.

Its founder, originally from Cameroon, has been a victim of caporalato, experiencing first-hand the harsh reality of these practices. The opposition to illegal hiring, and more generally to the exploitation of labour, constitutes the core of NoCap, which has studied and designed how to create an ethically sustainable supply chain, limiting marginalization and social degradation (with the possibility to leave the “ghettos” for hired migrants) but especially ensuring the socio-economic integration of migrants within the communities in which they live. The story-telling, and easy to be recognized logo and the engagement of the large-scale distribution make the case particularly interesting and worthwhile to be further analysed.



5.

Conclusion

Agriculture is one of the key sectors of the Italian economy. Italy ranks third in Europe for the number of farms and has the highest incidence of small and medium-sized farms in Europe. The recent evolution of Italian agriculture is characterized by two main distinctive elements: i) a growing dichotomy between those farms producing for the market in a stable and prevalent way, and those farms running occasional market relationships, almost exclusively oriented towards self-consumption; ii) an increasing diversification of production activities, which averagely amounts to 1/5 of the overall value of the agricultural production, with agritourism and the direct sales as the most important components on this dynamic.

In this context, farmers and agricultural workers are confronted with several economic, social and environmental challenges and needs. The first ones include: the weak position of farmers in the food supply chain and a lack of bargaining power with the buyers; the unfair competition and illegal activities, based on fraud, lack of transparency on labels, but also on competitive bidding auctions which lower the prices to unsustainable levels for smaller farms; or organized crimes to undermine the development of the Italian economy. An important issue is bureaucracy, which prevents an efficient development of the farm, in terms of both time spent on administrative issues and resources and opportunities wasted because of very slow procedures. Among the social challenges, we can note the following points: isolation and lack of services for those farmers who live far from urban areas; ageing of population, depopulation, and generational renewal; gender unbalance; invisibility of irregular workers, whom suffer both the exploitation of the job as such, and the consequences of an even more technology-driven agriculture which offers job opportunities to high-skilled professionals, keeping out those who are not, mainly foreigners, but also aged people. From the environmental point of view, farmers are confronted with two main challenges: climate change, which forces them to adapt their agriculture to new conditions and to face new potential pests and diseases; and the presence of wild animals (mainly boar but in some areas also wolves) which kill the livestock and destroy crops, making farmers feeling particularly vulnerable.

Among all these challenges, a decision has been made to focus on one specific topic: that is employment. Employment has been considered in general, including also irregular activities and its related issues. It also explicitly refers to farmers wellbeing, including the wellbeing of farm businessmen and workers. Overall, the analysis allowed to point out that both farm businessmen and workers perceived themselves as victims of a larger problem. On one side, farm businesses are confronted with the issue of irregular employment because of their low-bargaining power, especially because of the unfair competition caused by large retailers and agri-food industries. The use of irregular labour is considered as needed if they want to survive on the market. On the other hand, agricultural workers, who lack bargaining power towards their employers (or those which work as intermediaries), are forced to accept to live in inhumane conditions as this is their sole alternative.

This phenomenon is complex and has different root causes, that are going to be analysed in the FARMWELL project in order to detect possible social innovations that will help improving farmers wellbeing. Through the desk activity research, confirmed with the evidence gathered in the interviews and in the practice group through direct engagement with different levels of public authorities (from the Minister to the local municipality); it can be argued that it is pivotal to solve inefficiencies in some public services (as the employment office) or to invest in strategic assets as transportation and housing for workers. Ultimately, not that many innovative social solutions have been identified. However, those solutions that have been identified could create the conditions to improve workers wellbeing. Potential innovations hereby include: i) sharing workers among several farms, to reduce the cost of labour and provide workers with a longer-lasting contract; ii) define supply chain contracts with retailers to have a guaranteed price for the food products, also covering the costs of regular labour contracts; iii) alternative, local, job matching platforms, which allow farmers and workers to find each other.

6.

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Annex:

Social Innovations Table

This annex provides an overview of relevant social innovations and national organizations in farming.

Title of social innovation	Coordinator (lead partner) <i>Keywords:</i> <i>type of organisation</i>	Country (of the coordinator)	Objective (Which social challenge does the innovation attempt to tackle?)	Activities	Key target group(s)
NoCap	Yvan Sagnet	Italy (originally from Cameroon)	Any form of irregular work	Establishing new market relations between farmers and large retailing/distribution actors; legal recruiting – workers and training; monitoring the whole food supply chain – a certain production, while guaranteeing the respect of human rights (national agreements, fair wage, etc.).	Producers and farming activities; vulnerable groups of workers
Job sharing	Participating young farmer; Coldiretti's member	Italy	Lack of labour force	Sinergy among some local farmers to recruit and employ a few workers in rotation on their own farms throughout the year	Migrants and job seekers
Workforce database	Caritas	Italy	Lack of labour force	Creation and management of a database containing a list of available workers, locally.	Unemployed people; job seekers
Job in country	Coldiretti	Italy	Lack of labour force	Web platform to facilitate job matching with job offers and applications constantly updated.	Job seekers and farmers
Dieta caporalatofree	Slow Food	Italy	Raise awareness in the consumers and fight irregular employment	Creation on a national campaign run by the young members of the association.	Consumers
Humus	Private	Italy	Job sharing	Application to find e share workforce among little-sizes farms. The farmers would get in contact and find a person with contract sharing the expenses with other farmers.	Farmers looking for workforce

