

# Practice Group Feedback Report

## Italy



Project acronym & number	FARMWELL
Project title	Improving farmers' wellbeing through social innovation
Project coordinator	E40 Group
Grant Agreement No	101000797

Deliverable / Work package number	D1.1 Practice Group meetings
Date	31/07/21
Document Type	R: Report
Lead beneficiary   Primary author(s)	E40 Group   UNIPI, Coldiretti
Document version	1.0
Distribution level	Public





## Table of Contents

<b>1</b>	<b>CONTEXT OF THE PRACTICE GROUP MEETING</b>	<b>3</b>
1.1	Background	3
1.2	Membership	4
1.3	Purpose & focus	5
<b>2</b>	<b>METHODOLOGY</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>OUTCOMES</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>3.1</b>	<b>Main findings on challenges &amp; solutions</b>	<b>7</b>
3.1.1	Challenges	8
3.1.2	Social innovations	9
<b>3.2</b>	<b>Main lessons from the process &amp; next steps</b>	<b>11</b>
3.2.1	Main lessons	11
3.2.2	Next steps	12
	<b>ANNEX 1: AGENDA OF THE MEETING</b>	<b>12</b>





## 1 Context of the Practice Group meeting

### Basic information

Date of meeting:	07/07/2021
Place of meeting:	[online – Zoom platform]

#### 1.1 Background

After an in-depth literature study/desk research aimed at elaborating an overall mapping of the most important social challenges in farming in the national context, we chose to further focalize on one main challenge; work and employment conditions in agriculture in relation to farmers wellbeing and its related issues such as irregular work and low-paid workers. In the meanwhile, continuing to explore other challenges as well (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). We had a meeting with the WP Leader sharing ideas and getting the feedback about the proposed thematic, that appeared to be positive.

This led us to conduct a dozen of semi-structured interviews nationally with key informants working in the sectors of agriculture, food business, food networks and trade associations (farmers, policy makers, journalists, business operators, associations and NGOs), to gather information and perceptions from a wide range of stakeholders, and to have a better understanding of the perspective by farmers themselves on their wellbeing.

These interviews were aimed at validating the desk research activity and complement certain gaps in the literature and obtain information on the key drivers expected to influence the food system and the farmers' wellbeing.

Depending on their knowledge and experience in the field and on their interest in being engaged in the process, we have then shortlisted a few key informants that we could engage throughout the project and include in our stakeholders mapping.

After identifying our main social challenge, we proceeded according to two criteria mostly; a thematic one, thus by seeking to reach out experts and practitioners in the field, and a territorial one, therefore trying to cover as many macro-regions of the national territory as possible.

When dealing with this issue, our effort was also to identify actors that are attempting to reverse the status quo; as an example, someone trying to contribute to find a solution to the shortage of workers in agriculture - establishing a new platform to make labour supply and demand come across each other - or someone seeking to find an alternative to current illegal





practices –by implementing project and initiatives with the aim to provide job placement's opportunities to migrants or vulnerable people.

Being Coldiretti a partner of FARMWELL and the largest farmers 'organization in Italy, we were able to engage several of its farmers and experts (members). To a lesser extent, we sought to reach out a few experts belonging to Slow Food network; Slow Food is a global, grassroots organization, founded to promote local food and worldwide food-related tradition, while protecting biodiversity, both at national and international level.

## 1.2 Membership

Number of participants:	17 + Unipi and Coldiretti involved members
Out of which farmers' representatives:	4
Out of which female farmers:	6
Out of which young farmers (e.g. under the age of 35)	4
Out of which older farmers (e.g. 65+)	[if available]

Approximately 10 farmers (representing the 50% of the invitees – 50% farmers, 50% organizations and others) have been engaged based on key informants' indications and farmers' availability.

July is an important month for crop farmers; given the harvesting period, it has been difficult to involve the expected number of farmers; the ones involved have been reached out through farmers' organization as Coldiretti and Unipi direct contacts.

They have been selected according to their expertise and engagement in Farmwell-related thematic: the young farmers are, for example, members of a Coldiretti thematic group on inner areas, thus they have a specific overview on some social challenges faced by people which live in remote and disadvantaged areas; among the female farmers, there was a good representation of female workers from different professional sectors. Other two farmers, a woman, and a young farmer, have been selected as she adopted a young man, which worked, before the adoption, as migrant in the agricultural sector.

Besides producers, farmers 'organizations, grassroots organizations and food networks, we also engaged other organizations and journalists.

As a matter of fact, journalists were the first to pay attention to and raise the odd question of labour exploitation and especially the phenomenon identified as "caporalato" in agriculture, in Italy, providing a comprehensive survey of the phenomenon; through journalistic





investigations and research inquiries, journalists reported on the main distortions of the Italian agricultural sector together with conducting advocacy campaigns.

Likewise, emergency humanitarian organizations and grassroots associations have been the first – and often the only – ones to take on the responsibility for alleviating the symptoms of marginalization, exploitation, slavery, poverty and injustice. This is the case of actors like Slow Food, whose network and communities around the world works to raise awareness of local food traditions and develop countless initiatives to support local small-scale producers, as well as to increasingly foster numerous international partnerships.

### 1.3 Purpose & focus

The main purpose of the 1st practice group meeting has been to elaborate in more detail on the most important and urgent problem(s) and needs of farmers, identified as key theme(s) during the mapping of challenges (WP2). In particular, the practice group aims – in a participatory and engaging way with farmers - to reflect on:

- The root causes of the specific problem(s) of farmers
- The specific needs for support of farmers, highlighting existing innovative solutions

The 1st PG meeting aims to further inquiry, debate, and evaluate, through an open discussion, about the main social challenges we identified, that are the issues related to employment such as the irregular employment and low-paid workers, as well as to discover any other challenge and relevant problems causing wellbeing problems.

While through the informant interviews, we have been able to gather individual information and perceptions, we believe that a group discussion and moderated interaction allowed us and participants to share personal beliefs, experiences and gain an in-depth understanding of social issues and common challenges, as well as discuss and pinpoint causes and roots of the problem, need of farmers and potential supporting tools.

The specific theme that the PG is focusing on is in relation to employment, including irregular one and low-paid workers, for more than one reason; FARMWELL directly deals with wellbeing, and working conditions are a prime source of information on job quality and straight correlated with the health and well-being of workers, thus, of farmers and farmworkers specifically. Secondly, labour conditions and irregular employment in agriculture is tremendously very typical; also, the European Parliament has adopted a clear position on that: CAP direct payments must be conditional on respect for the applicable working and employment conditions under relevant collective agreements, national and EU law.

## 2 Methodology

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





they were exposed to and asked to freely answer. The first one was focused on problems identification, followed by an open discussion with producers mostly; the second one was 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. In particular, 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. Pride and satisfaction or fatigue and frustration or ....? 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 / being 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, gray work and, more generally, a distorted agri-food chain affect your farm?”

Based on the foreseen questions, we accordingly gave indications to the participants about the mode of intervention. Generally, throughout the meeting, each participant was invited to get the floor and feel engaged, this especially happened with experts in the second session. After the introduction to each question and subtheme, the farmer was invited to speak and have its say in keywords and/or by arguing their perception and experience; participants were allowed to intervene through the chat or by opening the microphone and say something verbally. After the session with the farmers the floor was opened to the experts that were asked to intervene and provide feedback on the first session as to intervene with suggestions and indications about how to solve the expressed difficulties using social innovations, they were aware of. The last part was devoted to a short summary about the emerged issues and the possible solutions.

The Practice Group Agenda is included in the present document as an Annex.





### 3 Outcomes

#### 3.1 Main findings on challenges & solutions

Generally, the PG confirmed what we had been able to identify and gather during the collecting phase prior to the meeting. We focused on the factors in agriculture that might be perceived and lived as a source of stress or other forms of feelings sorting an impact on farmers' wellbeing; we then paid particular attention to the various aspects of labour market in agriculture and related inspiring solutions or existing good practices.

Bureaucracy, market relationships, unpredictability due to weather conditions and climate change, unfair competition, as well as limited access to services are **the main stress factors** that the participating farmers mentioned, based on their own experience.

The main **factors of wellbeing** on which participants strongly agree are the bucolic aspect of their job on farm and the awareness of their doing something good and useful to the community (wholesome food) and healthy lifestyle; Few key message reported by farmers on their feeling (handwork on farm and being a farmer) are: "pride, fatigue, gratification", "enjoy nature and the interaction with people and animals", "the awareness that your work is good and being able to live in a beautiful and healthy environment"; "the joy of children and people you come into contact with".

Generally, all the participating producers consider their firm/farming activity able to contribute to meet **social needs** like education, rehabilitation, solidarity, inclusion, aggregation. Moreover, their provision of food was decisive and crucial even during the acute phase of the Covid-19 pandemic; it's important to highlight that some farmers state that selling their products during the lockdown and restrictions on mobility was made possible thanks to organized markets (like "Campagna amica") or for those who had an established market channel. Otherwise, other than a shortage of laborers in the countryside, the lockout of farmers' markets in many countries has deprived small farmers of a fundamental sales channel (ndr).

About **external labor**, we asked about the difficulty of recruiting workers and when/how long they need external laborers; we also asked if their needs in these terms changed over time. Someone told us that it's more difficult to recruit laborers in summertime, more than wintertime. They expressed the advantages and disadvantages of employing external laborers or of working as external laborers on farm by key terms: the possibility to take some days off, looking after the family (for women mainly), sharing and teaching love for agricultural work, for the land and nature, a mutual learning (especially among people of different cultures, although sometimes there can be a linguistic impediment). Among the disadvantages, what farmers mostly complained about are the time-consuming and unwieldy red tapes of (legal) hiring, the difficulty of guaranteeing a continuity of the workers on farm, especially in the long term.





**The bureaucratic burden** and hidden charges relating 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 that, directly and indirectly, inadequate operations and distortions along the supply chain (e.g. there are not bureaucratic costs for those who use the figure of caporale) cause.

The meeting did not detect many relevant **social innovations**; this can be due to the complexity of the issue and to the structure of participants as well. Nevertheless, both producers and experts generally agreed upon a few needed and “ideally resolutive” concepts, that can be summarized as following: networking, knowledge, awareness, reciprocity, and collaboration. Participants believe that keeping - and institutionalizing - the “good side” of the system of caporalato, that is its potentiality in terms of a (illegal) service able to efficiently intermediate between labor supply and labor demand - could somehow represent the starting point when addressing the problem of labor exploitation and illegal hiring. In their words: “it would be necessary to replace the current illegal service with a legal one, able to make labor supply and demand meet each other, while providing and guaranteeing adequate infrastructures and facilities (housing for workers, transports); (likewise) farmers draw attention to the urge of cutting and simplifying the bureaucracy of recruitment and of educating the large organized distribution on the squeezing impacts that their commercial strategies highly contribute to engender on farmers and on the overall system.

### 3.1.1 Challenges

As mentioned above, the PG confirmed the relevance and the urgency of addressing the social challenge we had identified. The PG has been key to better assess the relevance of some crucial aspects in relation to bureaucratic burden and in relation to possible solutions addressing two main issues: how to legally recruit workers and the work cost.

This reflects what already emerged with the mapping report, where the weaker market position of the farms, above all the smallest, the bureaucratic burdens, the unfair competition and the illegal activities, which are strictly linked among each other with reference to the effect they have in resorting to illegal employment, were all listed as key challenges for the Italian agricultural sector.

During the PG some key elements have been added to the narrative with reference to the selected challenge:

- Farmers would appreciate the existence of a system which rewards those farmers who respect all the rules in employing farmers. In particular, the smaller ones, which have lower margins compared to the bigger farms, and could be more inclined to recruit irregular workers.
- Farmers pointed out that the illegal intermediaries (the so called caporale) are answering to needs which should be covered at public, institutional level, but which are





not. They allow the match between job demand and supply which should be done by the public employment services which however are not efficient, thus farmers do not turn to that service. Moreover, the “caporale” also offers other public services, not covered by public administrations or other regular forms, that determine its usefulness for farms: housing for irregular workers, albeit crumbling, and the transport service. Thus, as previously said, what emerged during the PG, was the necessity to set-up an alternative, regular, system to the “caporale” which farmers could avail of. The frustrating aspect is that the solution is complex and necessarily involves different actors of the overall system: all the public institutions responsible for these different services, employment centres, farmers, farmers’ association, consumers.

- Farmers also put in evidence that the food supply chain also includes consumers, which are even crucial actors to solve the problem of the irregular employment. Consumers should be aware that a lower price of a food product could also mean a lower level of labour quality rules: consumers should be informed about food produced respecting all human beings involved in the production, made aware that their food purchases are as important as the producers’ decision to follow the rules, and convinced to share the costs of this decision

The mapped challenges which have not been discussed during the PG, but because it has been decided to focus it on the specific challenge of the irregular employment, are those related to generational turnover, isolation and remoteness (except for a farmer which indicate as stressful aspect of his job the lack of digital and road infrastructures), wildlife, and gender unbalance.

### 3.1.2 Social innovations

Title of social innovation	Coordinator (lead partner)	Country (of the coordinator)	Objective (Which social challenge does the innovation attempt to tackle?)	Activities	Key target group
NoCap	Yvan Sagnet	Italy (originally from Cameroon)	Any form of irregular work	Establishing new market relations between farmers and large	Producers and farming activities; vulnerable





				retailing/distribution actors; legal recruiting o workers and training; monitoring the whole food supply chain o a certain production, while guaranteeing the respect of human rights (national agreements, fair wage, etc)	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 Youth Network	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.	Job seekers and farmers
-------	---------	-------	-------------	---	-------------------------

As above mentioned, during this practice group it has been difficult to detect innovative solutions; what deserves to be highlighted however is that farmers were willing to share their perceptions and knowledge about the phenomenon of caporalato and, more generally, about labor difficulties in agriculture. There was, in any case, an attempt to make the thematic be on the agenda for discussion and for trying, together, to figure out something resolute or inspiring.

In view of the next practice group, primarily focused on social innovations detection, we introduced the revolutionary reality of “NoCap”, the first international network against labor exploitation and irregular work in agriculture. It aims to circulate a model which renders ever more transparent the traceability of farm produce within the supply-chain, from production to transformation and commercialization.

### 3.2 Main lessons from the process & next steps

#### 3.2.1 Main lessons

The group responded in a positive way, mostly the farmers were relieved from the fact that despite their allocation in Italy, they were sharing the same issues and willing to solve them. Surely July is a month in which is more difficult to engage with them or with associations dealing with agriculture, even so we had a good participation.

Farmers, in particular, appreciated the opportunity given them to know each other, and to share and exchange their feelings, opinions, and knowledge.

Probably they will continue to participate, what seems to be fundamental from now one till the next PG it is to find a possibility to keep them engaged. A possible solution might be a newsletter once a month or every 40 days assembling the information concerning work contract related issues and news sharing the main press information, books, movies.





### 3.2.2 Next steps

After the first PG, we agreed upon a few virtual follow-ups with the aim to keep participants interested and somehow engaged. Generally, we think that our process of data gathering will be an iterative one throughout the project. As next steps we intend to explore potentialities and innovative realities at national level, if possible, or regionally only - if we need to limit our research, maybe we will consider a couple of regions - and get in touch with their practitioners, also with the idea to invite them to the next meeting. Further key informants' interviews will be developed to cover other aspects of the food system and farmers' wellbeing; likewise, given the political aspect and the cross-sectional crux of the matter, we would like to reach out institutional actors and policymakers to better and deeply discuss about practical and innovative solutions, hindering aspects that prevent those from being realized.

#### ANNEX 1: AGENDA OF THE MEETING

TIMING	ACTIVITY
9.30 – 9.50	Round of introductions
9.50 - 10.20	Unipi and Coldiretti brief presentation of the Project and Practice Group
10.20 – 10.35	Problems identification – open discussion with the farmers
10.35 – 10.40	Coffee Break
10.40 – 10.50	Restitution
10.50 – 11.20	Social innovations identification – open discussion
11.20 – 11.30	Restitution
11.30 -12.00	Open discussion
12.00	Conclusions

