

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Supporting rural areas on health services
“Independently (not alone)”
(Poland)



1 Implications for policy and farming support

1.1 The Challenge & Needs – What is the situation?

Both in Poland and the Kujawsko-Pomorskie region, there is a large group of small family farms, whose agricultural activity provides little income, unsatisfactory from the point of view of their living needs. In a situation of strong competition in agri-food markets and limited opportunities for the development of agricultural production, **farmers and their family members face the need to diversify their sources of income** to maintain their farms, stay in the countryside, or improve their living standards. In conditions of low levels of cooperation and trust among farmers, often also accompanied by their social “isolation” and numerous market barriers, **the possibilities of undertaking joint economic ventures are small.**

The experience of farmers from Tuchola County participating in the project “Independently (not alone)” shows that to meet their economic, social, and psychological needs, as well as to spread and increase the sustainability of the innovative model of care farms, numerous changes are necessary to be introduced in the institutions dealing with people with disabilities, legal regulations, and social attitudes and practices concerning this community in Poland. **The current legal and organisational framework creates a major barrier for farmers** to the dissemination of an innovative model of supporting people with intellectual disabilities. As the experiences of the participants in the project “Independently (not alone)” show, currently, in Poland, there are administrative, tax, and insurance barriers for farmers to conduct additional, non-agricultural economic activities, such as providing care services on farms. This applies, for example, to the limited amount of income that can be obtained by farmers from non-agricultural economic activity. Currently, farmers who run care farms often conduct this activity in the complicated legal and organisational forms, which are highly taxed (VAT) and may discourage those potentially interested in setting up a care farm as expressed by the quotes below:

“... What we all strive for is that a care farm should be included in the act - where it will be formulated, what it is, and how you can get funds as part of social services.” (Representative of an NGO, 5.10.2022)

“... Changes should also be introduced in the act on taxes on goods and services. At the moment, farms are struggling with the fact that they are fully under VAT. One-fourth of the amount is returned to the state budget in the form of tax.” (Representative of Tuchola County Family Support Centre (PCPR), 5.10.2022].

An identified obstacle to the dissemination of social innovation was the fact that the innovative model of a care farm – “Independently (not alone)” – has been implemented so far as a project supported by public funds (mainly from the EU budget). This meant that after its implementation, **farmers and their families lost the funds for the provision of care services:**

“This is the point, about this institutional support - so that it is not only just like all of these programs and projects. It needs to be an alternative source of income. Today, people

are creative and capable to face various new challenges, but this (care farms) requires an alternative source.” (A farmer from the region, 5.10.2022)

“... And what I see as the most lacking is the security of running this farm. Because I can start today, but after a year someone will not give me a grant, and there will be no project. At some point, I will enter the house, and what will I tell these people - that they took away our grant? I want to have such a sense of security that at any time at night I will welcome a person who will come to me.” (A farmer, 5.10.2022)

On the other hand, for people with disabilities, **the end of the project meant a cut-off in using specialist assistance** (e.g., psychological, rehabilitation, and speech therapy support) provided near the place of residence, which in most cases has a positive effect on increasing their independence in life (level of social inclusion) and improved the well-being of care recipients (psychophysical development through contact with others, increasing the sense of security, contact with nature), as well as the life situation of their relatives.

People with intellectual disabilities, due to the limited access to specialist services (limited time, spatial, institutional, and financial availability) in rural areas, have little chance in many Polish regions, including Tuchola County, to benefit from the assistance aimed at supporting the process of becoming independent and improving the quality of their lives. At the same time, due to the financial constraints of a significant part of the families of people with disabilities, as well as because of a lack of knowledge about the care farms in the country, **there is a low demand for care services provided by farms in Poland.**

1.2 Support framework – What is needed?

As the cases in the project “Independently (not) alone...” and the experiences of farmers in other EU countries show, care farms are a good answer to the economic, social, and psychological needs of farmers and members of farming families. The provision of care services on farms can be an adequate way to increase the income of farming families, tailored to their situation and potential. Farmers and their families usually have the appropriate knowledge, skills (agricultural production, food production, animal care, care experience in multi-generational families), and resources (e.g., agricultural land, animals, buildings, nature, forests, machinery, and equipment) to provide comprehensive care and effective therapy for groups of rural residents in a difficult situation, especially people with intellectual disabilities, the physically disabled, or seniors. As the SROI findings and the analysis of cases of the project’s participants showed, both farmers and their families wanted to continue providing care services, which turned out to be beneficial for them. However, **the condition for the continuation of such activities was to maintain public support, and, in the long term to create the institutional framework (administrative, legal, and organisational system) conducive to setting up and developing care farms.**

The long-term implementation of social innovation was related to the problem of its economic sustainability (financial self-sufficiency). The case of the project, due to the difficult financial situation of a large part of families of people with intellectual disabilities and current economic and institutional conditions, showed that there are small chances of functioning the model of care farms in typical market conditions. For this reason, **there is**

a need to develop various forms of public support for this model (financial, organisational, administrative, and social). At the same time, among the potential recipients of care farm services (families of people with disabilities) for whom the financial barrier is not a problem, there is a need **to intensify information, promotion, and marketing activities related to the offer of care farms** (reaching new customers).

During the project implementation, the problem of insufficient preparation of farmers and their families for the professional running of care farms was also identified. The majority of farmers and their family members did not have in-depth knowledge and practical skills related to running care farms and providing care or specialist services for intellectually disabled people. Therefore, there is a need to **create a comprehensive educational offer, e.g. training, study visits, demonstrations, and courses, to increase the competencies of farmers and their families in this field.** In addition to financial benefits from running care farms, farmers and their families acquire new knowledge and competencies that could be used in the non-agricultural labour market, as well as they become actively involved in the lives and problems of local communities and establish broader relationships with the community, which contributes to overcoming stereotypes and strengthening the level of their social integration.

A model of supporting people with intellectual disabilities, thanks to the use of the potential of farmers, farming families, and their farms, complements and is complementary to the existing activities of the social assistance system on a local scale, expands the available forms of therapy for people with disabilities, and constitutes a partial deinstitutionalisation of public support, social assistance services, therapy, health, and social activation. As a result, thanks to the innovative model of support, the beneficiaries become independent relatively faster, which may reduce the costs of public social assistance in the future. The data and information from the project “Independently (not) alone showed that the vast majority of people with intellectual disabilities and their relatives were satisfied with their participation in the project [SROI]. Nevertheless, in the long term, **there are no organizational and legal mechanisms, as well as financial resources, for the creation, development, management, supervision, and financial support of care farms in Poland. Therefore, there is a need to establish such a system.**

A significant limitation in the implementation of the model of supporting people with intellectual disabilities on a wider scale is the lack of appropriate legal and organizational conditions and practices of cooperation between various entities in the country. The case of social innovation documented that for the successful implementation of a project consisting of the creation and implementation of a model of a care farm, **it is necessary to create legal and organizational conditions for such activity, as well as to strengthen the cooperation and coordination of activities of various organizations, both public and private ones** (farms, local social policy institutions - Tuchola County Family Support Centre (PCPR), local government authorities, NGOs, agricultural advisory centres), operating at the local, supra-local, and regional level. It is also necessary **to coordinate activities and cooperation between entities involved in the model of supporting people with intellectual disabilities** (recruitment of people with disabilities, animation of relations between farmers, and involvement of specialists in various fields). In the project, for these tasks, the coordinating team (legal specialists, supervisors, and therapists) was established.

Currently, the number of care farms in Poland, about the total number of farms in the country (over 1 million entities), and taking into account the scale of needs of people at risk of social exclusion (people with intellectual and physical disabilities, addicts, seniors, inactive on the labour market), is insufficient. The challenge here is **to disseminate the idea of care farms and promote innovation implemented in the project in other regions of the country**. The promotion of the model is necessary, both in the wider society and among public and non-governmental institutions operating in the fields of social welfare, education, and health. For this purpose, several educational, promotional, training, and demonstration activities, undertaken jointly by various institutions and entities, will be necessary to take. On a local scale, **educational and training activities addressed to farmers and their families**, i.e. to people who may provide care services in the future, are needed to reduce fears related to working with intellectually disabled people.

1.3 Recommendations – What needs to be done to realise the support needed?

In the light of challenges and problems of farmers identified based on their participation in the innovative model of supporting people with intellectual disabilities in care farms, there is a need to introduce the following solutions:

- Creating a mechanism for ongoing support/financial security for care farms. In the short term, this support should be based on public funds. The services of care farms should be indirectly financed by public entities – in the form of contracts with farmers for the provision of services (creation of a financing mechanism). In the long run, the care farms should be prepared (ready) to run profitable market activity.
- Development of the legal basis of providing care services in the care farms (changes in the act on social care): e.g. care farm legal definition, the definition of conditions, range, standards of care services, the system of care farms registration, and certification). Implementation of the definitions of social farming and care farm in the legal order (changes in the act on social aid)
- Networking of care farms. Creating conditions for networking care farms and supporting this process (exchange of experience, good practices, training, demonstrations).
- Supporting the preparation of farmers and their families to conduct care services - training, demonstrations, study visits, and workshops.
- Strengthening the social awareness of care farms: conducting social campaigns, and disseminating the research results and good practices.
- Dissemination of the care farming model and comprehensive support of care farms should be a legal obligation of agricultural advisory centres in Poland. Agricultural Advisory Centres should have organisational, staff, and financial resources for the activity in question.
- Develop the legal and institutional framework (stable solutions and regulations) of care farms. The solutions developed at the national level should be shaped in various areas of public policy: social policy, agricultural and rural policy, and health policy. There is a need to ensure the inclusion of farmers when designing the care

farming institutional support system. This system has to be flexible (providing services to various groups – addicts and unemployed people). Therefore, cross-sectoral cooperation at the level of relevant ministries is necessary. Such cooperation has already been initiated - an inter-ministerial team appointed by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development has been operating since June 2021. The Care Farm Model and the Implementation Strategy have been developed at the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development. Preparation of implementation guidelines for LEADER interventions under the Strategic Plan of the Common Agricultural Policy for 2023-2027 (investment support for care farms) has been started.

- Facilitating the functioning of care farms. This activity, because a separate tax and insurance system for farmers has been in force in Poland for a long time, should be maintained under this system (exemption of income from the provision of day-care on a farm from income tax, farmers and household members in care farms should be covered by farming social insurance system, exemption from the obligation to pay VAT).

Farmer interview questions

Q (FW): ... What are the main needs of farmers – in the context of social innovation – that should be addressed through support?

A (Margaret Farmer 2): The situation today in agriculture is hampered by high prices whether for fertilizers or crop protection products. Therefore, small farms also have difficulties in such situations. And our farm is somewhere around 19 hectares, including 13 hectares of forest. Hence the search for alternatives to nevertheless find this revenue somewhere. To ensure the livelihood of the family, and also from here these ideas, somewhere it is born on the way, maybe they will also create situations such that we take certain actions and wonderful people who stand on this road and help, such as KPODR in Minikowo and PCPR in Tuchola, and many others also.

Q (FW): What do you think should happen to make similar support actions available to farmers/ social innovation a reality?

A (Margaret Farmer 2): Our farm is not large, we have 19 hectares of land, including 13 hectares of forest, and hence such an alternative to finding an idea for additional income. Let's be honest, this is not the acreage to support a family of 6, so that's why these ideas began to appear, and also the senior policy now with people with intellectual disabilities, but we are also beginning to develop an adventure with schools as well, creative workshops for children from nearby schools. Here, for everyone, we can find an occupation and their place.