

FARMWELL

Improving farmers' wellbeing
through social innovations

Policy Factsheet



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CALL FOR ACTION

TO SUPPORT FARMERS' WELLBEING

Agriculture occupies a unique position at the heart of the European Union's society, environment and economy (European Commission, DG AGRI).

At the core of a socially, economically and environmentally sustainable agriculture and healthy food system are committed farmers, whose physical, mental and social wellbeing is, therefore, a crucial concern for all of us.

Farmers are facing unique challenges today that impact their mental, physical and social wellbeing and often exposed to economic, physical and family-related stressors that other societal groups may not necessarily face in the same way or to the same extent.

Policymakers, decision-makers, funders / foundations, farm support organisations (farmers' associations and farm advisory services) and other key stakeholders can do a lot to support a sustainable and healthy farm system in Europe through caring about and supporting farmers' wellbeing: from designing suitable funding schemes, through planning dedicated training activities, to creating a more favourable legal and administrative environment.

FARMWELL provides practical tools & inspiration through social innovations - among others - to:

... implement **mental health care services** based on existing experience that has helped hundreds of farmers to start to talk about their problems and find solutions

... incentivise **social farming** that not only help integrate people with disabilities into our society, but also farmers to overcome their isolation and improve their mental wellbeing

... enable organisations and processes that can support **legal work and appropriate living conditions** for farm workers (including migrant workers)

... create a better support framework for **emerging energy communities** to provide the most vulnerable (including farmers) with **cost-saving options** especially in times of crisis, reducing their stress levels

... support **cooperation of farmers** – including women farmers – through **networks to find solutions to common problems**, building on trust and peer-to-peer learning

This factsheet shows you how!



FARMWELL

FARMWELL (2021-2023) was a European Thematic Network project funded under Horizon 2020 that aimed to improve farmers' mental, physical and social wellbeing through social innovations.

Globalisation has increased the economic, environmental and social pressures on the agricultural sector, making farmers' lives tougher. While the economic and environmental implications have been studied extensively, there has been relatively limited focus on social aspects. However, in recent years **researchers and practitioners have increasingly turned their attention to the social implications affecting those who are active in the farming industry.**

An alarming sign of the serious social issues has been the high suicide rate of farmers in some countries. The problem has been recognised at both the local and European levels. The recent Communication of the European Commission on a comprehensive approach to mental health (2023) highlights that *"People living in rural or remote areas, such as farmers, have particular mental health challenges associated with the risk of disconnection and lack of access to mental health services. Suicide rates among farmers are 20% higher than the national average in certain Member States, which is why support will be offered to strengthen their resilience."*

The main objective of FARMWELL was to ensure that individual farmers & farm workers, farming families and farm communities benefit fully from social innovations (research and practice), to ultimately improve their mental, physical and social wellbeing.

FARMWELL brought together farming and research organisations from 6 countries: Belgium, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Poland and Romania; and many more stakeholders locally - through the so-called "practice groups" - and at the European level - through the European Thematic Network meetings. These multi-actor exchanges contributed to all the steps of the project.

FARMWELL has offered a range of practical tools based on the work carried out in relation to a range of inspiring innovations in the 6 partner countries to address the social challenges that farmers are facing today.

This factsheet aims to provide inspiration for the work of policymakers, decision-makers, farm advisory services and farming organisations, healthcare and mental health service providers and all those who care about farmers' wellbeing.



WHY SHOULD WE CARE?



The main challenges that farmers are facing today have been analysed in-depth in 6 partner countries of FARMWELL (Belgium, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Poland and Romania) - and presented in the format of 6 FARMWELL country mapping reports. While the country mapping reports demonstrate the diversity of challenges that farmers are facing today depending on the national/ local context, common trends are also identified by the FARMWELL Synthesis Mapping Report (SMR)[1].

1. EXTERNAL PRESSURE ON FARMING & FARMERS

The highest rate of risk of poverty or social exclusion in the EU was recorded among people living in rural areas (Eurostat, 2020), and such challenges can be even more pronounced in the context of farming where one of the key vulnerabilities is the **relatively lower income level** generated compared to national averages or other professional groups [2]. Farmers often feel the lack of bargaining power in the daily management of their farms (SMR, p.40). Despite the dominance of small to medium-sized farms (at an overall European level), the farming sector is also characterised by pressure on family farms due to an increase in larger, capital-intensive farming systems, and a decline of small and medium sized farms (SMR, p. 18). In addition, high land prices are one of the major hindrances that young farmers are experiencing when entering the farming business.

Lower quality or lack of basic services in rural areas - including access to transport, social security and/or education, healthcare, digital connectivity - has particularly negative impacts on farming families.

Administration and regulation add extra pressure on getting support and accessing funds for sustaining and managing farm businesses. Other external factors that are hard to influence and that farmers have no control of, and that negatively impact on the sustainability of farming businesses and reduce the attractiveness of farming, include **volatility of prices, unforeseen diseases, and extreme weather conditions** (also due to climate change).

Finally, a particular stress factor for farmers is the often negative perceptions of society on farmers – resulting in alienation / lack of respect or feeling of being overlooked and not appreciated by society.

[1] Flanders Research Institute for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (ILVO, 2021): https://farmwell-h2020.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/D-2.3_SYNTHESIS1.pdf

[2] It has to be noted that there are important differences between sectors, for instance in Flanders some sectors (e.g. vegetables cultivated in greenhouses) has a remarkably high income.

2. THE SOCIAL CHALLENGES OF THE FARMING PROFESSION

Farming is a **physically demanding job** (with a higher risk of work accidents[3]), and farmers have a tendency to continue working as long as their physical conditions allow, even if confronted with health problems (SMR, p.26). The problem is even more pronounced due to **the ageing farm population**. In addition, farm businesses aim to minimise their costs - including that of external labour - further increasing the physical workload of farmers.

At the same time, **more limited access to healthcare and mental care services** – a typical challenge in rural areas – often further aggravates the health conditions of farmers. The synthesis report highlighted that it is the most vulnerable/ impoverished populations that tend to be affected by a wide range of health problems the most (SMR, p.26).

Furthermore, among farmers there appears to be a certain stigma – mostly out of pride – associated with asking for external help, especially for issues related to mental health care - called **'minimal help-seeking behaviour'** (SMR, p.44)

These pressures often result in **tensions and conflicts within farming families**. Farmers generally have limited time to socialise and tend to isolate even more from others when they have financial, mental or other problems.

Watch the animation film on farmers' challenges that aims to trigger discussions about the problems that farmers are facing. #letstalkaboutfarmlife



Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2XL9uvmEgMw>

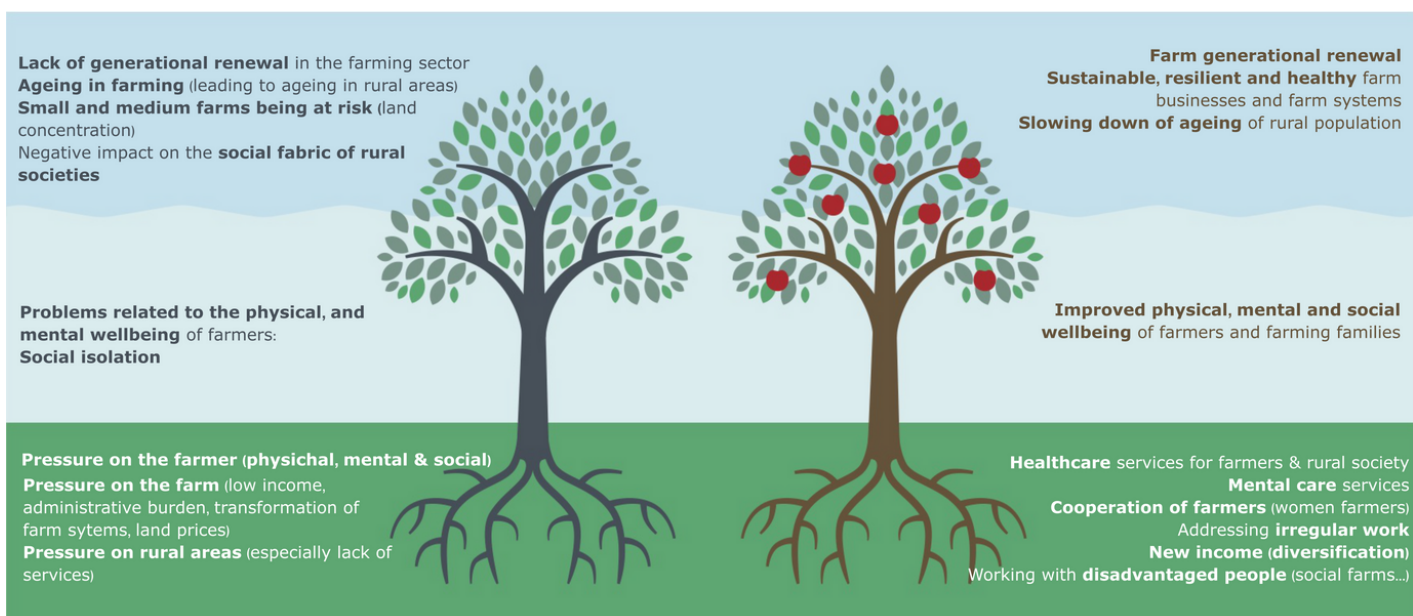
All these factors result in **negative impacts on the physical, mental and social wellbeing of farmers and farming families**. One of the most alarming signs of declining wellbeing is the relatively high rate of suicide amongst farmers.

FARMWELL aimed to map and help better understand the **key challenges and their root causes** that lead to wellbeing issues. The diagram below illustrates the approach with a **"problem tree"** on the left, which is cultivated through provision of inspiring solutions (social innovations) to create a **"solution tree"** on the right.

People living in rural or remote areas, such as farmers, have particular mental health challenges associated with the risk of disconnection and lack of access to mental health services. Suicide rates among farmers are 20% higher than the national average in certain Member States, which is why support will be offered to strengthen their resilience."

European Commission Communication on a comprehensive approach to mental health (2023)

The FARMWELL Framework: Problem & Solution Trees



[3] See for instance EU-OSHA (2020): Review of the future of agriculture and occupational safety and health



WHAT IS SOCIAL INNOVATION IN FARMWELL?



DEFINING SOCIAL INNOVATION

The working definition of social innovation used by FARMWELL is: "Social innovations are innovative practices with the purpose of improving the social, physical and mental wellbeing of farmers and farming families resulting in particular in (1) improved capacity of farmers and their family members to recognise and act upon social challenges and/or (2) improved social environment and services for farmers and farming families and/or (3) improved linkages between farmers and other (local) societal actors."

FARMWELL has been unique because – while most Horizon European Thematic Networks are dealing with technological innovation [4] to improve the economic and environmental sustainability of farming – FARMWELL focused on the **often neglected social wellbeing of farmers** and how it can be **improved through social** (rather than technological) **innovation**.

From its work in the partner countries of Belgium, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Poland and Romania, FARMWELL has produced [a short catalogue of social innovations](#)[5] of relevance to improving the social, physical and mental wellbeing of farmers and farming families. Each of these social innovations has been characterised according to six key components of social innovation that are most relevant in the FARMWELL context as described on the following page.

FARMWELL has distinguished **three main dimensions of wellbeing**:

- **Mental wellbeing**: the ability to realise your own potential when not hindered by mental health issues such as depression, suicidal thoughts, lack of confidence and low self-esteem.
- **Physical wellbeing**: the ability to maintain a healthy quality of life. For obvious reasons, this depends amongst other things on the availability of basic healthcare services.
- **Social wellbeing**: the ability to develop meaningful social relations with other people. This category of social wellbeing includes issues such as social isolation, generational renewal, the position of women farmers, etc.

[4] Soil; water nutrients and waste; sustainable cropping systems; animal production systems; animals and health; public goods; plant health; ecological approaches and organic; rural dynamics and policies; value chains; digital transformation; knowledge and innovation systems are the key thematic categories listed on the EIP-AGRI website for the European Thematic Networks & [EURAKNOS: Explorers guide to thematic networks](#) (2020)

[5] See detailed table here: <https://farmwell-h2020.eu/wp-content/uploads/Catalogue-of-social-innovations.pdf>

The Key Social Innovation (SI) components reflected in FARMWELL

SI components	FARMWELL social innovations ...
<p>Addressing societal needs (as key drivers)</p>	<p>... aim to address a pressing societal need that impact on the physical, mental and social wellbeing of farmers, farming families and farm workers: Mental health issues and the attitude of not talking about these; lack of cooperation among farmers; need for more stable income / diversification or lowering of costs – including energy costs (to avoid stress); need for better living and working conditions for farm workers, avoiding illegal work, lack of appropriate rural healthcare and social services, lack of acknowledgement of women farmers' contributions. Read the FARMWELL Mapping Reports [6].</p>
<p>Novel solutions: ideas, practices, processes and products</p>	<p>... concern context-specific novel services, practices and processes to local challenges: Expanding mental health services for prevention; new learning network of women farmers; open farm network of local farmers; new farms engaged in social farming, new ways to integrate & create better living/working conditions for migrant farm workers; novel healthcare (home hospice) services for farmers and beyond, new energy cooperatives. Check the Social Innovations Database [7] and read the Pilots [8].</p>
<p>Empowerment & engagement of local actors</p>	<p>... are initiated from the bottom-up to empower and engage farmers and other local stakeholders: service providers, NGOs, civil society organisations, farmers with mental health issues, women farmers, migrant farm workers and their employers, (to-be) care farms, elderly farmers, (to-be) members of existing farm networks, farmers in a given territory/ region.</p>
<p>Social interactions: collaboration, partnership, networking</p>	<p>... build on the interaction among farmers and between farmers & support organisations: cooperation activities developed – depending on the specific issue and territorial context – with local farmers, farm networks, NGOs, (healthcare) service providers, farm advisory services, public and governmental bodies, private entities, research, etc.</p>
<p>Knowledge sharing and learning</p>	<p>... build on sharing knowledge and mutual learning among farmers: enabling peer-to-peer exchange among farmers (or specific groups – e.g. female farmers) through dedicated (learning) networks, associations to share problems and learn from each other (“a burden shared is a burden halved”), also involving specialist organisations (incl. legal, financial, regulatory, energy, etc.) issues.</p>
<p>Scaling up and impact</p>	<p>... have been assessed through the Social Return on Investment (SROI), and scaling up through farm support organisations and policymakers: SROI demonstrated the impact of social innovations, especially through quantifying (monetising) the often intangible social wellbeing benefits created. Each case brings specific recommendations in terms of how the scaling up of the practice would be possible. Read the outcomes of the SROI analyses [9].</p>

[6] FARMWELL Mapping Reports: <https://farmwell-h2020.eu/work-strands/challenges/>

[7] Social Innovations Database: <https://farmwell-h2020.eu/social-innovations/>

[8] Pilots: See within <https://farmwell-h2020.eu/toolbox/>

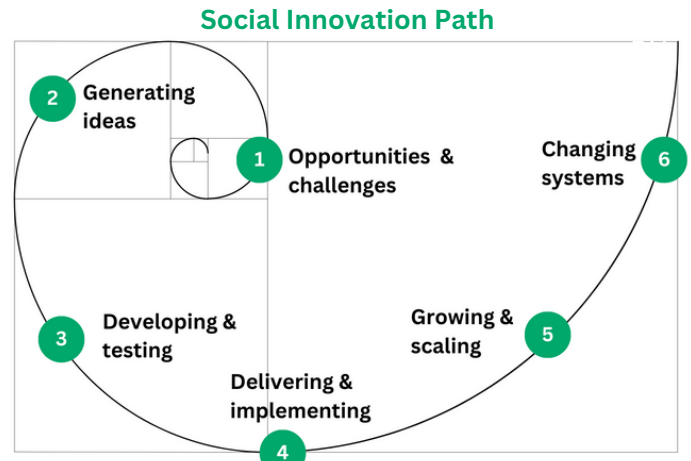
[9] See SROI Guide & outcomes: <https://farmwell-h2020.eu/work-strands/social-impact/>



THE PATHWAY OF SOCIAL INNOVATION

Social innovations have their own paths, which are often presented through a spiral effect (see on the right), where (1) innovation emerges from a specific opportunity or, more likely a challenge (in the case of FARMWELL social challenges faced by farmers). The pressure to solve problems (2) generates new ideas, from leading figures or a group of people, which – if there is sufficient drive – are (3) being developed and tested in the specific context where the problem has occurred. The social innovation is then (4) delivered and implemented more widely (or for more stakeholders). Social innovations that prove to be effective (have a real impact on people’s lives) in a specific context are often ready for growing and being scaled up (5) resulting in a change of the system (6).

“Social innovations can contribute to solving social problems but always as parts of larger patterns of change, and always with a mutual independence of the bees and the trees, the bees being the innovative entrepreneurs, often full of energy and ideas but lacking power and money, and the trees being big institutions - governments, businesses, NGOs - which command resources but often lack creativity.” – says Geoff Mulgan in his book on ‘Social Innovation – How Societies Find the Power to Change (2019, p.14), and he continues by



Adapted from Geoff Mulgan (2019)

stating that: “Bees’ need to find supportive ‘trees’ with the machineries to make things happen on a big scale.” (Idem. p 22).

Social innovations identified in FARMWELL are meant to be taken up primarily by support institutions – especially farm advisory services and farming organisations – and policymakers working in relevant national and EU policy areas.

In other words, FARMWELL has aimed to find the ‘bees’ and showcase their work and journey to inspire policymakers and other support organisations - such as farmers’ organisations, farm advisory services and various service providers - innovationsto become the trees that bring social to fruition. But how...?



FARMWELL Social Innovations in focus

Country	Title & purpose of the social innovations
Belgium	Farmers at a Crossroads: Workshops and helpline to identify and support farmers at risk. Making discussion on mental health issues more acceptable.
Belgium	Learning network on mental wellbeing: Ferm voor agravrouwen brings together female farmers for networking and education
Hungary	Zala Valley Open Farms: Improving financial sustainability and social recognition of small-scale farming through farm and food producer cooperation
Hungary	Hungarian Social Farm Association: Social inclusion of people with mental disabilities, support small producers and enhance local communities
Italy	Humus Job Managing a contractual network among farmers, offering solution for farmers to recruit workers regularly and opportunity for workers to have more stable jobs
Italy	Ghetto Out-Casa Sankara A voluntary organisation led by a group of African migrants to create an alternative reality to the ghetto, planning a legal, economic and social integration path
Poland	Independently (not alone): Care farming. Social care and therapeutic services for mentally rural people with disabilities
Poland	Home hospice: provides healthcare services for elderly, terminally, and chronically ill rural people of five municipalities in the Podlaskie region
Greece	Myrmidones Energy Community: Enhancing cooperation of Stevia Hellas farmers into new areas
Greece	Women’s energy community meets Women in Olive Oil & women’s agricultural/agrotouristic cooperatives: Empowering women in new sectors such as energy
Romania	Women’s Neighbourhood of Saschiz Association: Empowering women in farming communities
Romania	Transylvanian Highlands: Area wide sustainable rural development; promoting eco-tourism destination

HOW TO MAKE SOCIAL INNOVATIONS HAPPEN?

As presented in the detailed [Catalogue of Social Innovations](#)[5], **each and every social innovation is unique** because of its context, including the specific social challenge that it aims to address, the local context in which the problem has been identified, the actors involved in the process, and the national (legislative, regulatory, support, etc.) environment. Therefore, it is very hard to draw universal recommendations on how to scale up such innovations. However, some common findings have emerged - presented in this section - that organisations concerned with farmers' wellbeing should consider. We encourage anyone interested in replicating or adapting these social innovations to explore more in depth the specific cases.

FARMWELL worked closely with 12 social innovations from which 6 policy cases have emerged and an additional policy case has



been developed on the SROI methodology (see list below). These are presented in detailed policy cases (see links in the table below).

Furthermore, the governance challenges, as well as key recommendations emerging from have also been elaborated and summarised and for the 12 cases (see: [Governance challenges & recommendations](#)[11] document).

FARMWELL Policy cases

Title of SI	Purpose of SI
Policy Case No 1	Supporting the mental health of farmers. Country: Belgium Link: https://farmwell-h2020.eu/wp-content/uploads/policycase-1
Policy Case No 2	Supporting farmers' collaborations. Country: Multiple Link: https://farmwell-h2020.eu/wp-content/uploads/policycase-2
Policy Case No 3	Supporting social farming. Country: Hungary and Poland Link: https://farmwell-h2020.eu/wp-content/uploads/policycase-3
Policy Case No 4	Countering irregular farm work. Country: Italy Link: https://farmwell-h2020.eu/wp-content/uploads/policycase-4
Policy Case No 5	Improving healthcare services in rural areas. Country: Poland Link: https://farmwell-h2020.eu/wp-content/uploads/policycase-5
Policy Case No 6	Supporting farmers' energy communities. Country: Belgium Link: https://farmwell-h2020.eu/wp-content/uploads/policycase-6
Policy Case No 7	Using SROI to inform policymaking. Country: Multiple Link: https://farmwell-h2020.eu/wp-content/uploads/policycase-7



1. RAISING AWARENESS

Farmers' wellbeing (and especially mental health issues) is a topic that has gained prominence in recent years, however, it is still not sufficiently analysed and discussed. Individual farmers' wellbeing cannot be seen in isolation, but it is largely dependent on their relations with (1) members of their family; (2) the wider farming community; (3) the wider society (illustration on the right).

FARMWELL provides tools both for understanding challenges (see [Mapping Reports](#)) and for finding the right methods & solutions (see [Toolbox](#)). **Raising awareness is lined to improving networks.** For instance, policy networks (such as the EU and national CAP Networks), AKIS and others can help to raise awareness among local level 'enablers' (including LEADER LAGs or EIP-AGRI Operational Groups).

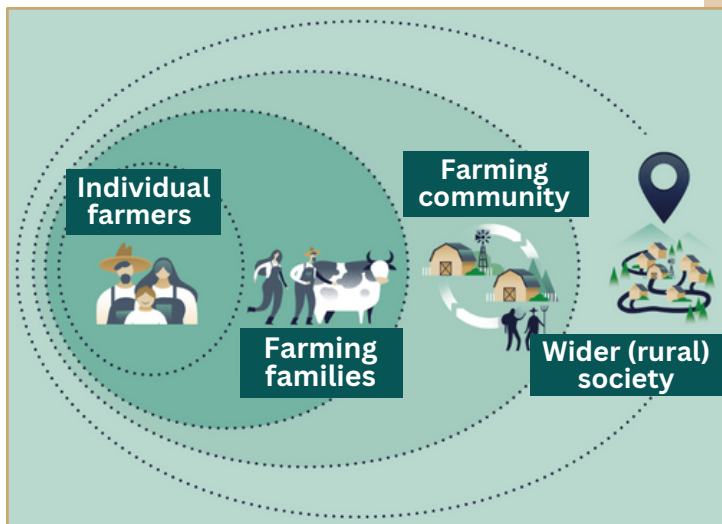
Therefore, raising awareness about the issue is important at all levels:

- Firstly, **opportunities for exchange at the local level among farmers, but also between farmers and other stakeholders are crucial.** It is not easy to create the right space for farmers to start to share their problems[11]. FARMWELL social innovations have demonstrated how this can be done through the right mental health services (see [Policy Case No. 1](#)) and dedicated bottom-up farmers' networks (see [Policy Case No. 2](#)) and so-called 'learning networks' (see [Policy Case No. 1](#)). **Farmers need to be more aware of the available services to them** (e.g. mental health support – [Policy Case No. 1](#), hospice care – [Policy Case No. 5](#), energy communities – [Policy Case No. 6](#), and possible services

2. CAPACITY-BUILDING



The need to **organise specialised capacity-building and training activities both for farmers and for other stakeholders** has been



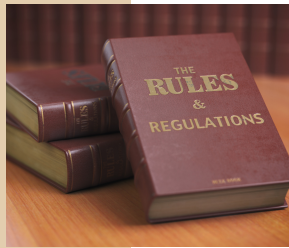
they themselves can provide (e.g. care/ social farms or setting up learning networks – [Policy Case No. 1](#) - and energy communities – [Policy Case No. 6](#)).

- **Secondly, organisations that support farmers (through dedicated services and/or policies, programmes, projects) need to be more aware of the challenges that impact farmers' wellbeing and get ready to act.**
- **Thirdly, the wider society needs to be more aware of the social challenges that farmers are facing today** - that indirectly impact on all of us - and the opportunities to work closely with farmers to help to overcome these. **Social farming** (see [Policy Case No. 3](#)) is a prime example of a win-win situation for policymakers to provide better healthcare services locally through supporting care/ social farms; for families of people with disabilities to receive more effective services close to where they live; and for farmers to be less isolated and gain additional income. **Raising awareness of ethical supply chains** ([Policy Case No. 4](#)) is another example of better connecting the farming community and the wider society.

highlighted by several policy cases, including training on mental health / and how to cope ([Policy Case No. 1](#)), training for migrant workers (e.g. language, agricultural skills, etc.) to better integrate into the labour market ([Policy Case No. 4](#)); training on how to set up and run a care/social farm and how to work with people with disabilities ([Policy Case No. 3](#)); training for farmers on how to set up an energy community ([Policy Case No. 6](#)). Possible "trainers" / service providers also need to be trained, e.g. LEADER LAGs on how to support farm networks, or farm advisory services (within the AKIS) on how to better integrate (mental) health support within their services.

[11] The Belgian pilot demonstrated that it is generally more difficult to engage male farmers in discussions on mental health than female farmers.

3. ADAPTING THE LEGAL ENVIRONMENT TO THE NEEDS



Several social innovations identified the **legal environment / regulations as one of the main barriers** to social innovations. These are hard to summarise, as legislation is specific to a given country and/ or sector. However, it is important that policymakers better understand these barriers and are open to change. Legislative rules and regulations need to be stress-tested for deliverability. Very often smaller refinements to existing legislative rules and regulations can make a large impact on the emergence of social innovations. FARMWELL cases that highlight the potential of improved regulations include:

- Social farm legislation ([Policy Case No. 3](#)) in Hungary, Poland and beyond;
- Energy communities legislation ([Policy Case No. 6](#)) in Greece but also in many other EU countries (see REDII Directive of the EU);
- Regular work, its implications and legal aspects ([Policy Case No. 4](#)) in Italy and many other countries impacted;

- Local healthcare and social service provision (including home hospice) – see [Policy Case No. 5](#) - in Poland and beyond;
- Small-scale food production, marketing and sales to strengthen small farmers' position within the food supply chain ([Policy Case No. 2](#));
- Legislation & administration that create particular stress for farmers and remove unnecessary burden ([Policy Case No. 1](#)).

As far as 'social innovators' are concerned, **lobbying and accessing government officials and politicians** will be required in addition to investing resources in networking and collaborative activities (see for instance, activities of the Social Farm Association in Hungary in [Policy Case No 3](#)). **The SROI method (see [Policy Case No 7](#)) could be used to strengthen the case in negotiations** (through demonstrating both the investments and social benefits in measurable/monetary as well as qualitative terms).

4. ENABLING COLLABORATIONS AND KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE

At the core of the social innovations is collaboration and knowledge exchange among farmers and other stakeholders; therefore, **anyone who aims to help the creation or scaling up of social innovations should carefully think which stakeholders to engage in the process.** The set of stakeholders depends on the local context and sector, however, collaboration in social innovations on farmers' wellbeing goes far beyond the engagement of farmers and farm advisors/ farming organisations, to include health care providers, local employment services, energy agencies, private investors, women organisations, specialists in many fields (health, energy, legal issues, social/care farms, short food supply chains, etc.), LEADER LAGs and other NGOs.

Reaching and motivating the stakeholders, often require years of well-thought animation and facilitation efforts by stakeholders who are credible in the eyes of farmers. The predictable and simple long-term financing of this animation capacity is a key factor (see point 5). For instance, the LEADER intervention (within the Common Agricultural Policy) can provide a suitable framework for this if it encourages the undertaking of these tasks through simple financing options.

The financing and upscaling of social innovations also require **the engagement of local governments** and other public as well as financial institutions.

FARMWELL has directly worked with farmers' organisations, who are now considering including new services targeted at farmers' wellbeing within the range of services they offer to farmers. This includes Ferm (for women in farming - female farmers and partners of farmers) developing a learning network for women in farming, BoerenBond and Ferm collaborating with Farmers at a Crossroads in Flanders, and Coldiretti (in Italy) considering building closer collaboration with different stakeholders and companies, countering irregular work (e.g. Humus Job project).

The **importance of cross-sectoral and cross-ministerial cooperation** has been stressed in a number of contexts, e.g. in Poland and Belgium (with a focus on health/ social and agricultural), in Greece (for agriculture and energy); or in Italy (with migration policy and agriculture). ILVO provides an excellent example of how committed research organisations can generate such cross-sectoral policy dialogues and induce concrete policy action plans and commitments ([Policy Case No. 1](#)).



5. ENSURING MORE STABLE FINANCING

Not surprisingly, **the lack of available and stable financing** is one of the key barriers identified by several social innovations (be it networks, care farms, energy communities, migrant or health care NGOs or others). As mentioned above, 'bees' (local innovators) have the right solutions but are missing financial resources, whereas 'trees' manage funds but are missing local connections, needs-driven approaches and creativity (Mulgan, 2019). The two should be better connected.

Social innovations evolve (from the idea, through testing, to implementation) to the point of being effective to be upscaled. This is **a long process that does not happen from one day to another**. Initial seed funding is crucial in almost all cases, and a market case takes much longer to develop. Social innovators are most often struggling with sustaining funding in an ongoing way, which results in social innovations ceasing from one day to another, **leaving all of a sudden, many segments of society – especially the most vulnerable ones** (e.g. disabled people and their families, elderly people, migrant workers) **without the stability of effective services**. While project-based funding is important, it is not sufficient to ensure the sustainability and growth of small-scale innovations.

The intangible and hard-to-measure social benefits created by social innovations should be considered in any investment decision. **The Social Return on Investment (SROI) methodology has been tested** also in FARMWELL to demonstrate the monetary value of social and other benefits arising from the social innovations identified (see [Policy Case No. 7](#)). SROI analysis outcomes can be used at a wide range of levels, for example: for social innovation promoters to demonstrate the value of their work, and for policymakers to better justify investment decisions (evidence-based policymaking).

Loans and grants are, however, not the only ways to finance social innovations. Crowdfunding, funders/ investors and other governmental financial means & incentives – especially tax incentives, insurance, feed-in tariffs in the case of energy projects, etc. – need to be considered.



WHAT TOOLS DO WE HAVE?

EU and national policies offer a range of opportunities to support social innovations to improve farmers' wellbeing. Addressing mental health issues is an increasingly important concern of EU decision-makers (see for instance the European Commission Communication on a comprehensive approach to mental health, 2023 - box below). This final section of the factsheet highlights some of the key (mostly EU-funded) policy mechanisms and instruments that can be used to mobilise and support social innovations to improve farmers' wellbeing.



"CAP funds can support awareness raising activities including in the area of mental health for example via farm advisory services. In addition, other funds could also be mobilised, such as the European Social Fund+ or the European Fund for Regional Development, to enhance the investments into the social support services in rural and remote areas and thus guarantee that they are accessible to farmers and agriculture workers in need, regardless of their place of residence. [...]"

*Member States are encouraged to [...] develop and **implement policies and best practices to help focus on prevention and strengthen the resilience of essential workers, including health professionals, teachers and farmers.** To help Member States, the Commission will ensure that EU OSHA produces a report that addresses psychosocial risks in the agricultural sector.*

[European Commission Communication on a comprehensive approach to mental health \(2023\)](#)

1. THE COMMON AGRICULTURAL POLICY (CAP)

In the EU funding context, the expectation is that social innovations in agriculture and farming will be mostly supported through the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). In the 2023-2027 programming period, it is anticipated that social innovation interventions will most commonly contribute to two specific objectives of the CAP Strategic Plans:

- Specific objective 8: **Promote employment, growth, social inclusion and local development** in rural areas, including bio-economy and sustainable forestry
- Cross-cutting objective: **Fostering knowledge, innovation and digitalisation in agriculture**

Therefore, policymakers should consider supporting social innovations to improve farmers' wellbeing under relevant interventions and project calls in the CAP Strategic Plans that aim to contribute to the above objectives (including 'COOP' – Cooperation such as LEADER, EIP-AGRI and other cooperation; and 'KNOW' – Knowledge Exchange interventions).

For certain types of social innovations other interventions, such as generational renewal, rural entrepreneurship, etc. might also be suitable.

'**Social conditionality**' might impose further positive pressure in the farming sector to respect the social rights of farmers/ farm workers. It is a new provision of the CAP during 2023-2027 that requires farmers to **comply with minimum social and labour standards in order to receive CAP subsidies**. National authorities have to reduce – or withdraw in the most severe cases – the CAP subsidies where a farmer does not respect one or several requirements under this EU legislation^[12] ([EU CAP Network](#), 2023).

This provision will put improved working conditions in the farming sector even more in the spotlight. During FARMWELL, the idea of an '**ethical label**' for farms has been raised as a possible 'reward' to farmers for improving working conditions on their farms (including disadvantaged groups such as migrant farm workers or people with disabilities).

[12] Currently voluntary, but will become mandatory in all EU countries as of 2025.



A. CAP: LEADER

When it comes to EU funding and policy, the social innovations identified by FARMWELL almost exclusively refer to the LEADER/CLLD funding within the CAP. **There is a clear recognition of the potential to enhance the role of LAGs in supporting social innovations**, particularly identified in Hungary, Romania and Poland, less so in the other 'older' Member States (Italy, Belgium^[13] and Greece) where FARMWELL was active. Therefore, training to increase the ability of LAGs to support farmers wellbeing – including LEADER cooperation projects - has been stressed. In particular, LEADER LAGs can include social innovation & networking in farming (and beyond) in their Local Development Strategies.

The national & EU CAP Networks and LEADER Networks can support this process.



B. CAP: EIP-AGRI & AKIS

EIP-AGRI Operational Groups could offer further opportunity to support social innovation in farming through multi-actor projects and the interactive innovation model (based on collaboration of researchers, farmers and other relevant stakeholders). However, so far there is limited attention from EIP-AGRI Operational Groups (OGs) on social innovation and the wellbeing of farmers. Even when EIP OGs cover social issues, they mostly focus on health and safety (see for instance the publication of the [Irish National Rural Network](#)), farm viability (e.g. land use – such as [OG INNOLAND](#) or generational renewal – [OG RETA](#) in Spain) or wider - than farmers' wellbeing - societal goals (e.g. environmental ones).

Therefore, supporting social innovations for farmers' wellbeing through EIP-AGRI is still an untapped area and would need more attention in the future. CAP Networks and other support organisations (e.g. Farm Unions, Chambers, etc.) could organise **dedicated capacity-building events** to encourage the emergence of such OGs and projects.

Strategies for agricultural knowledge and innovation systems (AKIS) have been incorporated in the CAP Strategic Plans for 2023-2027. **In the current programming period, Member States are not limited as to the form or content of the intervention** but contribute to the achievements of the specific objectives and the horizontal objective of the CAP. According to Article 15 of the CAP Regulation the farm advisory services shall be adapted to the various types of production and farms and shall cover – among others –

“conditions of employment, employer obligations, occupational health and safety and social support in farming communities”. Advice could be provided by farm advisory services or possibly also by other specialists:

(1) **The role of advisors to act as a source of support for farmers' wellbeing should be framed within the context of their core advisory work** with an emphasis on prevention and early intervention - a common recommendation made by FARMWELL partners. Farm advisors are uniquely positioned to support and signpost farmers on health issues. There is a need for up-skilling and knowledge development to support farmers and others in this area through dedicated training programmes or capacity-building events. Activities such as the work of Flemish FARMWELL partners to work with Farmers at Crossroads ([Policy Case No. 1](#)), are inspirational in this regard.

(2) **Mental health specialists who provide support and mentoring to farmers in critical life situations** can also be considered as advisors under the CAP. Accordingly, there is an opportunity for Member States to support mental health specialists in their capacity as advisors. This opens up a new perspective for the provision of specialist advisory services.

(3) **The 'knowledge exchange and information action' of the CAP could fund other knowledge exchange activities**, such as guided discussion groups, focus groups, and national thematic networks. These knowledge exchange actions can also focus on social innovation and farmers' wellbeing.

[13] In Flanders there is more recognition of social innovations, and hence national public funding is provided.

The Standing Committee in Agricultural Research (SCAR AKIS) also highlights that social innovation is an important aspect of innovation under LEADER, EIP-AGRI and Smart Villages initiatives and also an important topic for continued exploration via Horizon Europe projects. Challenges include

social entrepreneurship and the development of new social business models, as well as consumer-driven innovation and the urban-rural dimension (urban farming/forestry and social innovations in food chains, as well as topics which engage city people such as agro-ecology).

One of the themes of the 5th mandate of the SCAR AKIS is “social innovation and inclusiveness in AKIS: acknowledgement and recognition of the real need for Member States to include social innovation in their AKIS strategy and action plans, taking into account the full range of rural socio-cultural contexts in the different Member States [...] Social innovation involves rural communities (including communities of farmers) finding creative solutions to the complex social challenges they face. These challenges are linked to location, generational renewal, status, lack of willingness to cooperate, poor infrastructure and rural services, lack of skills for picking up new opportunities such as development of smart villages, care farming, consumer-producer short supply chains, agritourism, rural commons etc.”

Perparing for future AKIS - 4th Report of the Strategic Working Group on Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems (2019).

C. CAP: OTHER COOPERATION, INCLUDING SMART VILLAGES

Other Cooperation (Art. 77) under the CAP might be considered to support social innovations to improve farmers’ wellbeing. These cooperation interventions are relatively more flexible (e.g. they do not necessarily have to comply with some of the stricter innovation/ interactive innovation requirements). These cooperations can ensure joint activities that contribute to the wellbeing of farmers, including setting up producer groups, support for Smart Villages (see CAP Strategic Plan COOP interventions in Finland, Hungary, Lithuania), and cooperation for health, education or other social goals (see for instance COOP intervention in Belgium-Wallonia).

Smart Villages is a relatively new concept of the European Commission, launched through the EU Action on Smart Villages (2017). Smart Villages are defined as “communities in rural areas that develop smart solutions to deal with challenges in their local context. Smart Villages benefit from cooperation and alliances with other communities and actors in rural and urban areas” [14] **Social innovation is also a key component of Smart Villages.**

Therefore, solutions that have a focus on linkages between farmers and other local actors within the community could potentially be supported also under Smart Villages within the CAP Strategic Plans. For instance, local renewable energy communities – that is one of the typical Smart Village solutions - require the engagement of local farmers; similarly improving basic services (e.g. healthcare and education) impacts also on the wellbeing of farmers; finally regenerative agriculture and ‘farm-to-fork’ are also a key areas for Smart Village, as well as farmers’ economic & social wellbeing.



D. TECHNICAL SUPPORT & CAP NETWORKS

CAP Networks at national and European levels play a crucial role in making the CAP interventions more accessible to rural stakeholders, including farmers. **Among others they collect and share good practices, they engage rural stakeholders (including farmers) in exchange of experience, they promote networking among rural actors,**

including LAGs and EIP-AGRI OGs and improve the implementation of the CAP Strategic Plans. Therefore, CAP networks’ contribution to making farmers’ wellbeing a more prominent theme within the CAP Strategic Plan implementation and building capacity among relevant stakeholders is very important.

[14] Pilot Project on Smart Eco-Social Villages (2018).



2. OTHER POLICIES AND SUPPORT MECHANISM

Other EU funds and other policies - especially social and employment operational programmes under the Cohesion Policy / mostly supported by the European Social Fund - might also be relevant to support certain types of projects on farmers' wellbeing (such as training and capacity-building actions, healthcare or social inclusion). Furthermore, some specific projects might need more substantial investment support that Cohesion Policy could provide (e.g. projects on renewable energy). Farm advisory services and other support organisations (e.g. LEADER LAGs) can play a crucial role in identifying and channelling relevant resources towards innovative farm initiatives.



A series of relevant/ cross-cutting EU initiatives and strategies are also relevant in the context of farmers' wellbeing:

- [The EU Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2023](#);
- [The European Care Strategy](#);
- [The European Report on the Access to Essential Services](#);
- [The EU Gender Equality Strategy](#);
- [The EU's Long Term Vision for Rural Areas](#).

Beyond EU public funding, other types of resources should also be considered, especially **national, regional and local public funds**. Farmers at a Crossroads (financed by the Flemish Government) is a good example of the commitment of public policy makers to provide effective services for farmers wellbeing. Beyond direct financing (grants), public bodies should consider other financial incentives (e.g. tax incentives and insurance). Alternative resources, such as **crowdfunding, micro loans and foundations** could also be sought given the social nature and value generation of social innovations.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that projects explored under FARMWELL have demonstrated that financial support is not always the key requirement for social innovations leading to improved wellbeing. **Creating an enabling integrative operational and legislative environment, engaging the relevant mix of stakeholders and provision of infrastructure, equipment, or space** may also be significant support for success. For instance, Saschiz women had support of Adept Foundation for their kitchen facilities and in-kind contribution from the LAG; Casa Sankara (Italy) was given land, marquees and commercial scale cooking equipment.



CALL FOR ACTION

If you represent a farm support organisation or an organisation that is in the position to provide support for farmers' mental, physical and social wellbeing; if you are a decision-maker or policymaker who can make a change in how to support farmers in these crucial areas, then hopefully this factsheet can give you inspiration and support to make the first or next steps.

Most importantly, this factsheet and other products of FARMWELL aim to trigger discussion and exchange of ideas, as the key message of FARMWELL is that: We need to talk about problems openly and try to find solutions together. Let's care about each other: A burden shared is a burden halved.

If you would like to find out more check out the rich material produced by FARMWELL partners on the FARMWELL website: <https://farmwell-h2020.eu/> or contact us on farmwell@e40.eu.

For the collection of practical tools on supporting farmers' wellbeing throughs social innovation check out our FARMWELL Toolbox: <https://farmwell-h2020.eu/toolbox/>

FARMWELL INFOGRAPHICS



FARMWELL IMPROVING FARMERS' WELLBEING THROUGH SOCIAL INNOVATION

FARMWELL is a European Thematic Network that aims to

identify the **core problems that impact on farmers' wellbeing** (including their effects & root causes) based on existing research and practices.

identify **innovative solutions (social innovations)** and make these accessible to farmers to help improving their mental, physical and social wellbeing.

EFFECTS OF PROBLEMS

There are **serious economic and social consequences** (including high suicide rate among farmers) that not only impact on farmers' wellbeing but also on the wellbeing of our whole society.

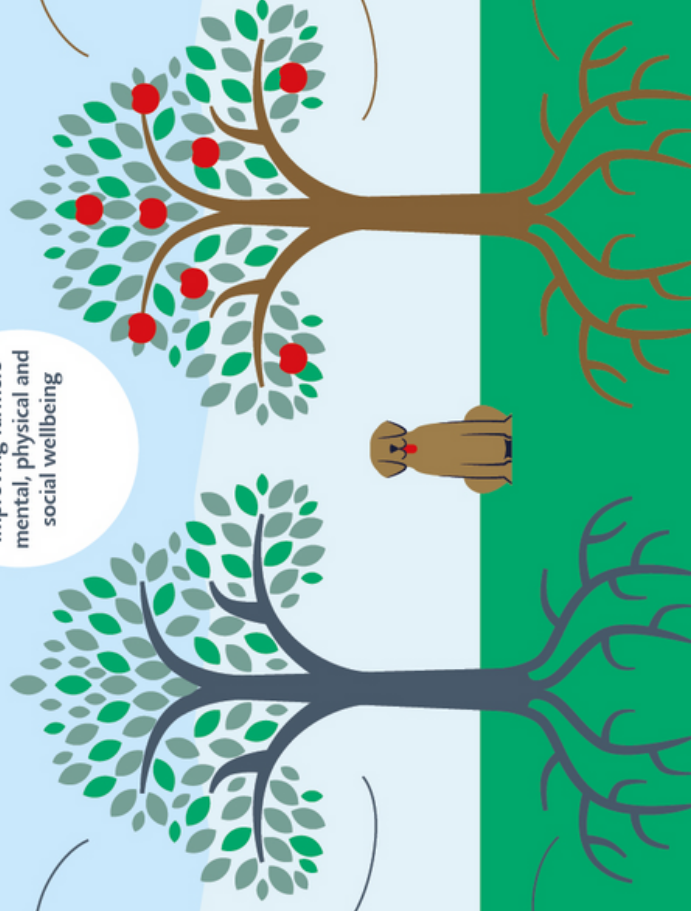
PROBLEMS

Farmers are facing some **serious problems** (related to mental health, farm succession, isolation) that impact on their wellbeing.

ROOT CAUSES

It is crucial to understand the **root causes** in order to be able to tackle the problems effectively and sustainably.

Improving farmers' mental, physical and social wellbeing



IMPACT OF SOLUTIONS

Impact achieved in terms of improved mental, physical and social wellbeing of farmers and their families - through the engagement of farmers and organisations concerned.

GOALS

The main goal is to **improve the mental, physical and social wellbeing** of farmers and farming families.

SOCIAL INNOVATIONS

It is crucial to **identify innovative solutions (social innovations)** to address the root causes of problems.

FARMWELL DIRECTLY ACTS ON THE GROUND IN SIX COUNTRIES



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THE FARMWELL CONSORTIUM

Horizontal partners coordinated & contributed to cross-cutting task in the project:



E4O GROUP

PROJECT COORDINATOR

Coordinator of Multi-actor exchanges and actions (WP1), Social innovation practices (WP3) Dissemination and communication (WP5)

NEW HEROES

Coordinator of multimedia products: Farm Well - The story of farmlife (animation) and documentary film series (within WP3)

UNIVERSITY OF GLOUCESTERSHIRE

Coordinator of Assessing cost-benefit aspects of practices through the application of SROI (WP4)



Flanders research institute for agriculture, fisheries and food

FLANDERS RESEARCH INSTITUTE FOR AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Coordinator of Mapping of national landscape - Synthesis of challenges (WP2)



BOERENBOND

Coordinator of Pilots (within WP1)
Coordination of Toolbox (within WP5)



COUNTRYSIDE AND COMMUNITY RESEARCH INSTITUTE

National partnerships represented research and farming in each country and contributed to all tasks:

Belgium:



Flanders research institute for agriculture, fisheries and food

INSTITUUT VOOR LANDBOUW EN VISSERIJONDERZOEK (ILVO)

Research partner in Belgium



BOERENBOND

Farming partner in Belgium

Ferm voor agrarvrouwen

FERM VOOR AGRAVROUWEN

Farming partner in Belgium

Greece:



ARISTOTLE UNIVERSITY OF THESSALONIKI

ARISTOTLE UNIVERSITY OF THESSALONIKI

Research partner in Greece



STEVIA HELLAS COOPERATIVE

Farming partner in Greece

Hungary:



Institute of Agricultural Economics

INSTITUTE OF AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS

Research partner in Hungary



HUNGARIAN SOCIAL FARM SOCIETY

HUNGARIAN SOCIAL FARM SOCIETY

Farming partner in Hungary

Italy:



UNIVERSITÀ DI PISA

UNIVERSITY OF PISA

Research partner in Italy



COLDIRETTI

COLDIRETTI

Farming partner in Italy

Poland:

IRWIR PAN

INSTITUTE OF RURAL AND AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT (POLISH ACADEMY OF SCIENCES)

Research partner in Poland



KUJAWSKO-POMORSKI AGRICULTURAL ADVISORY CENTRE in Minikowo

KUJAWSKO-POMORSKI AGRICULTURAL ADVISORY CENTRE IN MINIKOWO

Farming partner in Poland

Romania:



highclere consulting

HIGHCLERE CONSULTING

Consultancy/research partner in Romania



TINUTUL BRASEI ASSOCIATION

TINUTUL BRASEI ASSOCIATION

LAG partner in Romania

THE FARMWELL TEAM

#LETSTALKABOUTFARMLIFE

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