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## **Green Care in Poland. Essence, limitations and development opportunities with the kujawsko-pomorskie province as an example**

### **Abstract**

An ageing society has triggered the development of new intervention mechanisms and the engagement of both state and non-governmental institutions. It can be said that, for each group of persons, place-of-residence and social-structure-specific social security models must be designed. In Poland, such innovative actions include the initiative of launching care farms, known as green care. This article presents the results of the current study and observations of the operation of such farms in the kujawsko-pomorskie province. The study mostly involved the use of qualitative methods: interviews with carers, a covert participant observation and the analysis of the opinions of the psychologist coordinating the care farm therapy. The study shows that the idea of green care is quite easily implemented in the rural areas of Poland, with plenty of potential clients and farms which, with sometimes inconsiderable investment inputs, can be adapted to welcome that specific group of guests. However, one must note many barriers, especially a lack of permanent sources of green care financing, in many places a profound distrust of the local community for changes and innovations, and

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uncertainty regarding the continued care prospect, which can result in an even greater social withdrawal of the clients and an abandoning of the efforts by the carers and farm owners for a further operation to be continued.

**Keywords:** green care, care farming, social exclusion

## Introduction

A contemporary challenge to the development of many European countries, and beyond, is unfavourable demographic trends (Fonseca 2008, Kuijsten 1996; Lesthaeghe 2010; Malnar D. and Malnar A. 2015; Reher 2007; Sackmann et al. 2014), including an essential increase in the rate of the elderly in society. Poland is one of the fastest ageing societies in the European Union (Krzyżowski 2011; Mucha and Krzyżowski 2010; Richert-Każmierska 2015; Rosochacka-Gmitrzak 2014; Sobolewska-Poniedziałek 2016). Scientific analyses show that an unfavourable population age pyramid poses a serious threat to the economic efficiency of the pension systems (Kuchciak 2011) and results in growing OAP's medical care and social services expenditure (Arai et al. 2012; Spillman and Lubitz 2000; Weiner 2007). The ageing society also leads to changes in labour resources (Niewiadomska 2016). It is expected that in 2035 the share of people 65+ in the population structure will be 24.5%, and in 2050, it will be 32.7%, against 15% today, including people aged 80+; respectively 7.8% and 10.4% (today 3.9%) (Sytuacja demograficzna 2014).

A report on the state of the rural areas in 2018 shows that, in Poland, there is observed a positive trend – a very fast increase in the number of foundations and associations, especially in rural areas. Those organisations take up an activity which was earlier performed by state entities, thanks to which the gap in many public services, including education, sports, culture and, mostly, welfare, is filled in (Wilkin 2018: 17). However, it must be remembered that rural localities accumulate many more problem areas than the city, and so they adapt less easily to changes such as ageing society, defeminisation or a migration outflow. Similarly, the agricultural sector is especially susceptible to the accumulation of unfavourable demographic tendencies, thus inhibiting the process of rejuvenating the agricultural farm operators (Stanny, Rosner and Komorowski 2018: 74). The demographically youngest communes in

Poland, where less than 10% of the population is at the post-production age, are mostly located in the north-western provinces (wielkopolskie, pomorskie and zachodniopomorskie) and, in addition to this, they are suburban communes. The oldest, in a demographic sense, communes, where the post-production-age population exceeds even 40%, are located in five provinces: podlaskie, lubelskie, mazowieckie, łódzkie and świętokrzyskie (Stanny, Rosner and Komorowski 2018: 114–115). The problem areas, especially poor accessibility to facilities of regional and municipal institutions, limited access to the job market or low social activity, are most often accumulated on the borders of the provinces, thus intensifying a peripheral character of rural areas, which immediately translates into an increased threat of economic and social exclusion. Those unfavourable phenomena can be eliminated by, e.g., increasing non-agricultural employment with jobs in the commune and not, as is usually the case, in the cities, since it is only what provides additional revenue from taxes. The agricultural farm owners, to diversify their sources of income, following the idea of combining care with therapy, have launched new innovative forms of activity already commonly known as “green care”, “green therapy”, “care farm” or “social farm”, and even “agriculture for health”. Such varied terminology results from, e.g., the fact that the EU does not offer a homogenous definition of social farming despite an agreement that the role of social farming is a search for a synergy resulting from the promotion of a multifunctional rural development combined with the execution of social and health-orientated measures (Parzonko 2019: 366–367; Kamiński, Marcysiak and Prus 2018). For that reason, in the literature available, and in this elaboration, the terms are interchangeable and considered synonymous.

### **Objective and subject matter of the study**

The objective of the present study was to provide a response to the question regarding the effects of implementing, and the challenges faced when implementing, the idea of Green Care in Poland. Besides this, an attempt was made to estimate the opportunities of maintaining that business activity in Poland once the farms are no longer covered by the economic support from the institutions implementing a green care programme in Poland. With the above in mind, the following research hypothesis was developed: Selected Polish traditional agricultural farms, similar to some farms in other European

Union states, can successfully render care services and provide care to the non-self-reliant persons. For the purpose of the analysis, there were selected 15 out of 30 pilot care farms with care functions.<sup>1</sup> The study covered the area of the kujawsko-pomorskie province, located in the north-central part of Poland. The farms performed their tasks as part of two projects: “Green care – care farms in the kujawsko-pomorskie province” (2016–2018) and “Care in the farmhouse – care farms in the kujawsko-pomorskie province” (2018–2020). The projects were co-financed by the European Social Fund as part of the Regional Operational Programme for the Kujawsko – Pomorskie Province. This diagnosis included 78 individual opinions of the psychologist and the results of 15 interviews conducted with the use of in-depth interviews with carers, and the reflections generated from the covert participant observation, which involved participation in everyday chores together with the charges of one of the care farms (preparing meals, field work with hay harvest and storage, farm animal welfare care, including horses, donkeys, pigs and small livestock) as well as helping with organising stays on the farm for groups and guests.

We assumed that the success of such innovative undertakings would be determined by the key resources, e.g., agricultural farm type, social farm infrastructure and the natural landscape, qualifications of the hosts in terms of care and soft competences of the carers, especially empathy and readiness to develop their own professional qualifications to cover therapy, psychology and social services. Another aspect in addition to project location and personnel preparation is the social environment, namely an acceptance of such innovative projects in the local community, which frequently shows some distrust in innovations, both economic and social. The study was thus explorative, with its subject being the analysis of the operation of care farms in a wider context: the effects of an innovative combination of farming with health care, aptitudes of the leaders who register to participate in such projects, and an attempt to evaluate the effectiveness of green care in Polish socioeconomic conditions. The explorative nature of the study required going beyond the specific study patterns and assuming an ethnographic approach, involving participant observation with attentiveness to the social actors

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<sup>1</sup> The analysis covered the farms which, at the time the article was being developed, had a complete project documentation; interviews made, observation records, psychological expertise, etc.

directly engaged in the project of a care farm and the environment (farm owners, programme beneficiaries, neighbours, social workers, job counsellors, experts). Therefore, one of the authors stayed on the farm and accompanied the charges as they went about their everyday chores; he worked with the charges in the field, in the stable and in the kitchen, while, in 2018, he was the manager of a summer camp organised on the farm for 20 children under the charge of the local GOPS.<sup>2</sup> The analysis also used the results from the interviews with 15 carers, most of whom were also farm owners. The results were discussed with representatives of the institutions engaged in the project: experts from the Kujawsko-Pomorskie Centre for Agricultural Consulting in Minikowo and GOPS personnel. Moreover, the study is supplemented with conclusions from the observations made by the psychologist coordinating coordinating the charges' therapy, which sheds light on the diagnosis of green care effectiveness as compared with the traditional care.

### **Green care as a social-exclusion-combatting policy instrument**

Care farming, green care or social farming has been, since the 1990s, a dynamically developing care services sector all across Europe as well as in the United States of America (Hassing 2018). It is an innovative concept of combining agricultural production (animal farming, land cultivation, orchard-growing, and horticulture) with health care and social care services, frequently also generally referred to as Farming for Health (Hassink and van Dijk 2006). Care farms have been operating successfully in Holland, Norway, Finland, Denmark, Slovenia, Germany, Belgium, Great Britain, Switzerland, Austria, and Italy, as well as – for a few years – in Poland. These farms not only offer their care to a selected group of beneficiaries, but also support the creation of new jobs, which is especially essential in terms of the ideas of multifunctional and sustainable development in rural areas. In Holland, Finland and Norway, green care is mostly provided by private family farms, where such services are a source of the farm's additional income. As noted by Jan Hassink, green care is nothing but a return to the initial idea of care located close to nature and rural landscape, which was to be, at the same time, a response to a negative impact of intensive farming development and

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<sup>2</sup> GOPS, the Commune Welfare Centre.

progressing agricultural production intensification (Hassink et al. 2018: 186). Laboriously, thus, a logic of production treadmill was being turned into a logic of equilibrium between man and ecosystem or, as assumed in the literature of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, socially sustainable agriculture (Zabłocki 2002; Woś and Zegar 2002).

The idea of green care is most common in Holland, and so many researchers consider the Dutch care farm model simply as the point of reference for comparative studies. It is claimed, for instance, that an extremely essential green care development stimulator in Holland was the system solutions coordinating the operation of care farming, starting from the national level and moving to the regional institutions providing support and activating the networks between clients, farmers and health care institutions. Besides this, and as noted by Jan Hassink, an essential contribution to the care farm development in Holland was made by female farmers who, less tied to the land than their husbands, were more experienced in non-agricultural jobs and frequently had an educational background related to taking care of the disabled, elderly, or the youth. Their engagement also enhanced the position of women in agriculture, as they became the initiators of multifunctional farm development solutions, thus going beyond the scenario of passing only the agricultural and production functions over to the next generation (Hassink et al. 2018). As such, the early days of agricultural farm professionalisation in Holland towards green care, with time, coincided with a new trend in agricultural policy focused on a development of multifunctional agriculture, which was to be a response to growing concerns about the natural environment, food safety, animal welfare and decreasing agricultural produce prices (Hassink 2009). Care farms have, therefore, become an opportunity for the farmers searching for alternative sources of income accompanied by a continued agricultural production. Back then not only was additional money an incentive, but also tax reliefs as well as the fact that running a family farm was recognised by health insurance companies as equal to other forms of health and social care (Hassink 2009: 191). In 2011 in Holland there already operated more than 1,100 care farms with 20,000 clients, which created over 1,000 jobs (Hassink 2018: 188). However, it must be noted that the profitability of Dutch care farms is mostly secured by the funds from customers' individual health funds or from national health insurance funds. Value added also stems from the incomes resulting from the outcomes of work performed on the farm

by customers involved in, for example, crops cultivation or animal farming (Dessein and Bock 2010: 18).

The Dutch example demonstrates that the success of care farms depends on the enthusiasm and the engagement of the farm owners, as well as on their professional competencies and on how permanently the care farms are part of the health care system. Unless they are considered an integral part of the health care system, and not only an occasional alternative to traditional care, the idea will definitely bear an uncertainty and investment risk. Even though the Dutch model is very often a reference point for discussions on the green care operation, it is not the most common green care organisation model in Europe. The first reason for this is that focusing on following the Dutch solutions is totally useless, as such solutions can turn out to be completely ineffective in other socioeconomic conditions (Dessein and Bock 2010: 16). Second of all, the Dutch model was developed at grassroots during the transformations taking place in rural areas in Holland for almost half a century for which it was not quite that obvious that a family agricultural farm could be combined with other business forms, especially with health care services, and still remaining “a true farmer”. One must thus consider that the position of the actors identified with green care has improved with care farming services’ professionalisation and been reinforced in the process of a development of associations and networks due to cooperation from individual actors, NGOs and state administration institutions.

Whichever way one looks at the situation, an ideal model does not exist, meaning that there is no such thing as the best solution, and so more closely examining examples from other countries is still worthwhile. In Norway, for instance, farmers offer a wide selection of care services, especially health care, child care, education and leisure activities (Dessein and Bock 2010: 19). In Italy, although official numbers concerning social farming are missing, it is estimated that there could exist more than 1,000 farms which run such an activity. In a way, Italians have specialised in child education and care, as well as in plant and animal care therapy. Many initiatives also address the disabled, persons with mental disorders, and the socially excluded, especially the long-term unemployed or the crime victims who require long-term therapy. Some of these individuals also find employment on social farms, with jobs in agrifood processing, direct sales, or in restaurants on the farms. Social

farming in Italy fulfils yet another crucial function: stopping the process of rural areas' desolation.<sup>3</sup>

It has also become trendy to combine an agricultural job with animal-assisted therapy. In Poland, the most common are equine-assisted therapy, canine-assisted therapy and human interaction with cats, as well as, recently, mule-assisted therapy and alpaca-assisted therapy. According to experts, the presence of animals on care farms is of great therapeutic importance. Being around animals lowers stress and anxiety. Besides this, animal care satisfies basic social needs, especially showing affection, and teaches how to be responsible for another living creature while also enhancing self-esteem. In other words, developing the skills of bonding with animals improves one's social relations in interactions with other people. However, despite many unquestionable benefits, the effect of staying on a care farm, with animal-assisted therapy provided, has hardly been investigated, especially in terms of which animals best affect specific types of green farm beneficiaries (Hassink et al. 2017). As has been seen, a holistic approach to health care is not only part of the idea of green care, but also a philosophy of life of social actors who see social farming as something more than only a source of income.

Taking care of the elderly or those incapable of independent existence in society is organised and financed differently across countries. This variation stems from tradition, culture, needs and available sources of financing and health policy. The social farms are cared for and controlled by public, private and commercial institutions or non-profit organisations, and their effectiveness is usually a derivative of cooperation between the government and non-government sectors. As early as 1999, the European Commission<sup>4</sup> identified four dimensions of the problems of ageing societies which are affected directly: the ageing labour force (a necessity of lifelong learning), increasing burdens of pension and public finance systems (a necessity of creating pension systems considering the demographic changes), an increase in demand for medical services and for taking care of the elderly, and, finally, a growing diversity of resources and needs of the OAPs (an increased risk

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<sup>3</sup> <https://socialfarmyouth.eu/good-practices/social-farming-in-italy/> (date accessed 13.05.2021).

<sup>4</sup> Towards a Europe for All Ages – Promoting Prosperity and Intergenerational Solidarity, COM (1999) 221 final, Commission of the European Communities, Brussels 1999, p. 4.



of social exclusion). However, one must consider the cultural differences resulting from, e.g., well-established intergeneration bonds in respective regions of Europe. In the countries of Northern Europe, it is believed that care for the elderly should be provided by the state, while in the countries of Southern and Eastern Europe, the family are expected to take care of this (Kujawska 2015: 710). For example, in Italy, for a dozen or so years social farming has been successfully developed (*L'agricoltura sociale*) which, as noted by Francesca Giarè, is a natural derivative of Italian farming and rural tradition. Italians prove that, together with the idea of social farming, consumer attitudes are changing (the market is being supplied with a greater number of high-quality products), which also creates new career possibilities for the socially-excluded and, first and foremost, working on a social farm is the cherry on the cake of the medical and nursing services, which can totally re-evaluate and redesign the welfare system (Giarè 2009: 5). However, the pioneers in the development of green care are the Dutch (De Boer et al. 2017a, 2017b; Hassink et al. 2010; Dessein 2013; Nowak et al. 2015), who not only develop care farms for senior citizens, but also for people with addictions or with mental diseases. The Dutch studies show that working on a care farm mostly means everyday routine, which helps to think beyond the addictions. And, consequently, staying on a green farm is much better than staying in a clinic. For rural residents, with small agricultural family farms, it is obvious that, on the farm, there is always something to do and, despite many technological facilities today, the work is still hard. Working on such a farm, however, offers many advantages. Those who have not worked physically before can learn to be humble and can see that nature is a completely different world, which requires discipline and responsibility. Naturally, physical work makes one hungrier, and a full stomach helps with good rest and regeneration. The Dutch studies clearly show that, despite being tired, respondents experience a condition that they have not previously encountered. They learn from scratch what a food production process is like, and how much time and what treatments are required for anything to grow and to become a valuable product. As stated by one of the respondents from the Dutch study, a person lives on a care farm in harmony with nature, which affects that person whenever he/she attends the farm (Elings and Hassink 2008: 314).

In the EU, the above-mentioned idea has been known since the early 1990s, and a dynamic development of care farms has already facilitated the

determining of three variants of social farming, which differ mostly according to the level of engagement and cooperation of various institutions. The first variant covers private agricultural farms where care activity is considered to be an income diversification parallel with the agricultural production for the market. This variant is most represented in Italy and in Great Britain. The second variant is based on the wide cooperation of enterprises, social cooperatives, associations, foundations and public institutions with agricultural farms. Such a model is most frequent in Italy and in Spain. The third variant, on the other hand, represents the situation in which care on the agricultural farm is part of the public care, and is commissioned by health care facilities. Such a social farm model is most frequent in Germany, France, Slovenia and Ireland (after Parzonko 2019: 367). As seen, care farms can render their services for very different groups which need support, although to ensure a long life of such projects, permanent and stable sources of financing are most essential. Unfortunately, it is not always the case that one can rely on the fees paid by the care farm beneficiaries, who simply do not have sufficient funds for such care.

When analysing living standards and quality of life, it is therefore of key importance to choose the point of reference and the way in which social actors evaluate their own life situation. It seems that it used to be easier to determine the indicators of poverty and misery, especially on housing estates or in the locations where the incomes of respective persons did not exceed, in most cases, the average. The new contemporary cultural patterns, where one finds oneself surrounded by people with non-average consumer abilities, despite one's own material standing improvement, result in a subjective sense of scarcity. With that in mind, an important action of both local authorities and organisations of locally active people as well as entrepreneurs, school headmasters, etc., is to receive non-commune-budget funds which could enhance the development of their immediate vicinity. According to the authors charged with monitoring the rural areas, there are many possibilities when it comes to applying for such funds (natural environment funds, breaking-the-barriers-for-the-disabled funds, etc.), although the EU programmes are most crucial. The latter cover numerous issues, especially infrastructure investment projects, combatting social exclusion, alleviating the environmental burdens caused by business operation, etc., and they are found in a few structural and investment funds, in particular the Cohesion Fund, part of the funds related to the agricultural policy which concerns the

structural aspects, the Regional Development Fund, and the Social Fund (see Stanny, Rosner and Komorowski 2018: 173). It must be remembered, however, that each commune in Poland constitutes a different social environment; indeed, these environments can be more or less resident-friendly and, despite the structural similarities, can differ, e.g. in how they satisfy the needs of the residents (Rosner and Stanny 2016: 7–11). For residents of small villages, particularly crucial are transport services and the road network, which facilitate easier access to shops or kindergarten, while in a big village the most important aspect is the facilities (a police station, the authorities, an out-patient clinic or a school). Therefore, when implementing green care in Poland, it is vital to consider the huge regional variation.

### **Care farms in Poland**

In Poland, the concept of care farms assumes that the key beneficiaries should be the non-self-reliant OAPs, namely the people who need support with at least one of their basic vital functions. At the end of the day, the offering of so-called green care is also addressed to the disabled, the mentally ill, addicts, persons who need social reintegration support, and to the children and youth with so-called difficult educational needs (Król and Stępnik 2017: 11). The programme itself can be very generally considered part of the concept of counteracting the effects of social exclusion of the OAPs and the social integration of those persons with intellectual disability or other disorders, taken care of, e.g., by institutions such as commune welfare centres.

The year 2016 saw the commencement, at KPODR<sup>5</sup> in Minikowo, of a project to launch day care on care farms as part of the 2014–2020 Regional Operational Programme (Priority axis 9. Solidarity society, Measure 9.3: Development of health and social services, Sub-measure 9.3.2: Development of social services). In the autumn of 2016, there were selected 15 care farms in the brodnicki, mogileński, świecki, tucholski and wąbrzeski counties. After the carers had been trained and the rooms and farm premises had been adapted, in January 2017 the care services were launched, to be rendered until 2018. The charges were persons who were not self-reliant and who could benefit from the support and from activities 8 hours a day, 5 days a week (in

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<sup>5</sup> Kujawsko-Pomorskie Centre for Agricultural Consulting.

3-8-person groups). Each person in the project could benefit from the services for half a year (approximately 240 people in total). The participation in the project guaranteed ongoing consulting for the farms and actions supporting their operation, and even a development offer. All that mostly to adjust the activities to the individual needs of the charges. Both the charges and the carers also had a chance to contact the psychologist. In Poland, individual care of the OAPs still dominates, and such care most often does not take 8 hours. The current project facilitates developing care in small groups, which, due to the factor of social relations, will aid in solving loneliness-triggered mental problems of the elderly. The project's concept was agreed with the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, as well as with the Ministry of Family. The KPODR Minikowo, together with the Centre for Agricultural Consulting in Kraków, works on legitimising a system for the operation of care farms in Poland.

In Poland, the agreements regarding the provision of care and therapy as part of the care farms provide for half-year stays, and persons participating once cannot, compliant with the project provisions, return to the farm following this period, nor can they stay there longer. This is, unfortunately, a great weakness of the Polish projects which will, hopefully, be changed to help the beneficiaries. The care for some of the people is provided by the Commune Welfare Centre (GOPS). Once the project is completed, the GOPS will continue paying for the other persons, while families will pay for some, as long as they can afford it. The care farm project never assumes forced participation, and some people cannot be helped, not because there are no funds available, but because they do not expect such a form of help. One of the solutions is, indeed, a job on a care farm or with a social cooperative. At the end of 2019, care was provided by 13 farms as part of the successive project coordinated by the Kujawsko-Pomorskie Centre for Agricultural Consulting in Minikowo.<sup>6</sup> Interestingly, earlier such activity had been launched by more than 30 farms as part of a few projects, especially “Green care – care farms in the kujawsko-pomorskie province” (2016–2018), and “Care in the farmhouse – care farms in the kujawsko-pomorskie province” (2018–2020). Earlier, in 2013–2015, preparations were made and education was provided for such farms to operate. A number of training sessions were held, while a study visit to Holland also took place (2014). The first partner for KPODR Minikowo

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.opieka.kpodr.pl/pl>

was a group of agritourism farm owners from the region of the Tuchola Forest, all of whom were members of the “Bory Tucholskie” Association of Agritourism Farms (Kamiński 2015). Indeed, it was these farm owners with whom the first talks were held regarding a possibility of expanding their operation to also provide care functions. During a few meetings the agritourism farm owners were presented with a concept pertaining to the operation of care farms in Holland. In addition to the agritourism farm owners, the meetings were also attended by the representatives of the County *Starosta* Authorities in Tuchola, the “Bory Tucholskie” Local Action Group, and other local leaders. The projects, co-financed by the European Social Fund as part of the Regional Operational Programme for the Kujawsko-Pomorskie Province, have essentially facilitated the establishment of the care activity and its expansion beyond the Tucholski County to the entire province. Thanks to a few years of information providing and popularising by KPODR Minikowo, and by the Centre for Agricultural Consulting in Brwinowo, in contact with all the ODRs<sup>7</sup> and hence with all the farmers in Poland, an example and principles of running such a business were shared with all the potential interest-holders. In 2018, KPODR Minikowo, together with the Centre for Agricultural Consulting, held, in Tuchola, the first All-Poland Congress of Care Farms.

By 2019, the official and legal issues were still not regulated enough to formulate such plans for even a year, let alone a dozen or so years. Despite numerous unknowns concerning the future operation of green farms, many farmers had no intention of giving up developing this function of their farms. While waiting for new guidelines, in March 2020 everyone was shocked by news of the risk of a new virus spreading, specifically SARS-CoV-2. The governments of countries across the world, not only in the EU, gradually decided to introduce sanitary regimes by closing down schools, enterprises, hotels, gastronomy services and care farms. Since nobody knew how long the actions to minimise the risk of the virus spreading would last, the media became the source of knowledge and, at the same time, dominated the opinion-forming narrative, in which most attention was given to the statistics of infections and deaths, as well as to making a comparison with the international situation. In contrast, reliable information on how to control the invisible risk was covered much less considerably. At the start

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<sup>7</sup> ODR, the Centre for Agricultural Consulting.

of the pandemic, the care farms operating with project co-financing from the EU funds allowed the project participants to decide; on 16 March 2020, KPODR Minikowo informed the farms that, if the charges were concerned, they could choose not to show up, and the charges of a few farms exercised that option. Following the restrictions, on 25 March, the operation of all care farms was suspended. Furthermore, the situation varied considerably. Certain farms, despite the suspended care, were receiving some funds in the form of compensation for rent, while the personnel stayed in touch on the phone and the food was delivered to homes.

At the end of May, the care could be resumed. To ensure safety, contactless thermometers were purchased to control the temperature of the people on the farm, and this was accompanied by the implementation of face masks and face shields for the personnel, while safety regulations were developed in compliance with the GIS<sup>8</sup> guidelines. Moreover, contracts were signed to ensure the supply of disinfectants, and additional cleaning and disinfecting was introduced. Finally, on 16 June, the care service was resumed. On two farms the charges were very concerned about whether or not to use the stationary care. A meeting with a psychologist was proposed, with support from the farm consultant, and charges began to return on 25 June. To compensate the participants for “the lost period of suspended operation”, the project end date was postponed by two months.

## Results of own study

In the kujawsko-pomorskie province, two editions of popularising the idea of care farms were completed. As part of the 2014–2020 Regional Operational Programme of the Kujawsko-Pomorskie Province, the Kujawsko-Pomorskie Centre for Agricultural Consulting in Minikowo, in partnership with the “Bory Tucholskie” Local Action, initiated the establishment of 15 such farms in 5 counties: brodnicki, mogileński, świecki, tucholski and wąbrzeski. In the first stage (Green Care 2016–2018), to cover the period from September 2016 to June 2018, the care was planned for 480 people who could benefit from the support for 5 days a week. The charges were offered care 8 hours a day, in groups of 3-8-persons. Each person who qualified for the project could,

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<sup>8</sup> Central Sanitary Inspectorate (GIS).

however, use the service for no longer than half a year, which obviously made it impossible for the person to continue the stay, although this was allowed in the successive project. The programme started with a preparatory course for future carers which covered care of the elderly and the disabled. Besides this, the institutions supervising the operation of the farm offered permanent consulting, especially in terms of adjusting activities to the individual needs of the charges. The second edition, referred to as “Care in the Farmhouse” 2018–2020 was provided from September 2018 to August 2020, following very similar principles as the first edition, where care was also planned to be addressed to 240 charges.

### **Green care: psychologist’s perspective**

In the period analysed, the average age of the charges was 70: the youngest programme participant was 37, and the oldest was 93. The health problems which the participants declared, or had been diagnosed with, included: being overweight, coronary diseases, diabetes, schizophrenia, coxarthrosis, epilepsy, hypertension, alcohol use disorder or alcohol dependence, mild intellectual disability, hearing loss, sight defects, conditions caused by polio, rheumatism, problems with memory, disability caused by accident or stroke, losses of consciousness, or recent cancer survivors. The participants also included socially-withdrawn people. The causes of that state were dejection after a loss of someone close, burn-out, no prospects for accomplishing professional goals, and experiencing failures in life. There were also people who had endured unpleasant experiences in their youth or childhood, which they had not talked about with a psychologist and which were still deeply rooted in them. At times, a psychological intervention typical for crisis situations was used. These people were also often uncommunicative, with a varied level of anxiety, a depressed mood, and with difficulties in entering into relations with other people. Moreover, they differed very considerably in terms of their social status, education background and profession. When professionally active, they worked mostly on their own agricultural farms or on state-owned farms, as well as in industry, schools, state administration facilities or in the army/police.

According to the psychologist, after a few weeks it was already possible to observe many positive changes. The functioning of the charges provided with



good care improved considerably. The effect of therapy was also influenced by the selection of charges; moreover, there were such charges who did not show any cognitive deficits, with a positive impact on the group with an unintrusive sense of humour, initiating actions involving the entire group, or willingly sharing their talents and skills. The respective groups were socialising in the kitchen when preparing meals for themselves and often for other guests. Some charges were so engaged in their role that they even chronicled the events. For the participants it was also important to break away from the daily routine, which was limited to the simplest activities, satisfying only the lower-level needs. The stay on the care farm was also an opportunity for them to take care of themselves, to make their hair look better, to put make-up on, or simply to dress neatly.

For a more complete illustration of the effects of care farm therapy, two examples have been selected from the covert participant observation at the farm. The below descriptions concern a woman (F\_G\_37) and a man (M\_K\_63) respectively:

*“Ms. (K\_G\_37) – the stay on the farm has rebuilt her self-confidence enough to enter the job market. She came to the farm with a demanding attitude, deeply frustrated, with a conviction that the world and the people, even those close to her, are unfriendly, hostile, pose a threat, and are unjust. A change in that deeply-rooted internalised, although false, conviction made it possible for her to overcome her concerns and to confront reality, which appeared less threatening than she thought. Entering a job market, on the other hand, let her stabilise her financial situation and enhanced her self-esteem. The change which occurred in her, as it seems, is considerable enough that it made her not only find a job but also keep the job ever since. The farm owners report that Ms. (F\_G\_37) is still staying in touch with the farm, which gives her a sense of security”.*

*“Mr. (M\_K\_63) lives alone in a rented room; in the past he had some alcohol drinking problems. After the divorce, his wife and two daughters left him. At present, one daughter lives in another province, the other one – abroad. They do not keep in touch. He never had a regular job. He used to work occasionally, and was dealing with alcohol use disorder as well as receiving alcohol dependence treatment. After alcohol rehabilitation, he was placed on a farm and he did not start drinking again. He has hearing and vision problems. On the farm he feels very fine. Initially he kept to himself; he was reserved. He has communication problems (unclear speech, mumbling). He stayed with the animals more than with the other charges. As he says, he likes to work around*



*the house, in the garden, and outdoor a lot. At the moment he is strongly socialising with the other participants, and he has improved his functioning in the group considerably. Smiling, he links himself up, and is also eager to help in the kitchen. He is very attentive to detail and responsible when laying the table. He makes sure everyone has a place and a place setting. He assumes the role of the host, «headwaiter»”.*

In the opinion of the psychologist, the therapeutic and care actions, as part of the project, achieved their objective, which was also possible thanks to well-prepared farms and well-trained personnel as well as, very importantly, a continuous monitoring of the level of satisfaction, moods, and good relations between the charges in the group. This is also confirmed by the conclusions drawn from the participant observation. Every week it could be seen that the charges felt more and more secure, treating the farm a little bit like their workplace and as though they were in their own place. They also made contact with unexpected guests on the farm, assuming, as the situation required in a sense, the role of the host; they would prepare a fast meal, show people around the farmhouse, and keep an eye on safety if there were children among the guests.

### **Perspective of the carers – conclusions from the interviews**

From March to April 2021, 15 interviews were conducted with the owners (carers) of the family farms, with the aim being to gauge their opinions on the effects of working with the charges, the present situation of the care farm, and its future in terms of the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic. The opinions collected demonstrate that, despite the suspected operation due to the sanitary regimes introduced, the farm owners' charges continued to stay in touch on the phone and, very importantly, with one another. They were helping each other with shopping and, if possible, they were meeting each other. It can therefore be seen that the stay on the care farm made them open up to people and triggered their social activity. Unfortunately, the long break and losing revenues from the care farm made a few carers take up a full-time job outside the care farm, and at the time of writing they no longer plan to work on the farm as carers, which, although a satisfying job, turned out to be too risky from the economic perspective. One person became unemployed yet still hopes to resume the

same professional activity. The others made a living from the earlier farm functions, especially agriculture, or a pension.

According to the respondents, a big problem was the short time of the single stay which, according to the project criteria, was 6 months long. After that period, some of the charges felt disappointed about the impossibility of participating further, even though they knew the principles from the start. Interestingly, they talked about the situation of the charges more than about their own situation. They claimed that, for the charges, changing overnight from the comfortable conditions of care provided on the farm and the attention given every day, as well as the high-quality meals, was quite difficult. The opinions of the respondents show, from the perspective of the charges, that an important aspect was also the fact that, during their stay, they did not bear any costs of living, which ensured their peace of mind, thus eliminating any household budget fears. Also highlighted were the considerable possibilities of the charges establishing contact with a job counsellor or a psychologist, as they were not previously aware how beneficial such talk could be, nor did they know that they were entitled to this kind of consulting service.

Despite the concerns of both the carers and the charges, the time on the farm passed by in a flash and, as the owners of the farms stated, *we feel disappointed and sad that such projects have been planned only for half a year.* It was also possible to create a good atmosphere with a sense of safety and kindness. *Our charges, as noted by one of the respondents, are braver to perform social actions, to participate in projects. They enhanced the skill of making new contacts.* Moreover, and as added by yet another respondent, *we have built strong bonds we cherish and we will cherish in the future, and it is an amazing value of that project.* These responses point to the exceptional qualities of such projects which can be developed in the future. Even the charges, especially those who still ran small agricultural farms, came up with the idea of organising green care at their locations. All of this points to a high potential but also to demand for such a form of care and for such a kind of enterprise. Besides the above, as seen from the opinions of the respondents (carers), popularising care farms could bring about an effect of synergy, using the human resources potential and the infrastructure close to the farms. The charges would be able to expand their group of friends, and the carers would enjoy an opportunity to share experience and, if needed, to organise a carer replacement. The relevant qualifications, however, are not commonly available yet.

According to the owners of the farms, one drawback was an excessively modest budget for the organisation of trips and for the purchasing of specialist handcrafted materials; indeed, planning for such things was difficult before the charges joined the project, as neither their interests nor their talents were known. The activation ideas were therefore conceived spontaneously. Another indicated drawback of the project was certain logistics problems, which made the transporting of the charges to the farm difficult. As explained by one of the respondents, *We know that if the senior citizens were provided with transport to the farm, there would definitely be more of such people, and mostly the persons with a really difficult situation and who have no chance to go away could attend.* It is also worthwhile to note the respondents' observations about a well-established-in-the-mentality-of-the-charges sense of an obligation to be available to other family members: *Our senior citizens think that they should stay at home because they must be home when the son or grandson comes back home; and it does not have to be like that; they must understand that they also have the right to meet people their age and to spend time with them.* Therefore, the general evaluation result of the care farm operation is, in the opinion of the respondents, positive, and it could definitely be popularised in other provinces. However, the biggest problem is acquiring funds and a possibility of long-term investments on the care farm as the clients, according to the respondents, would definitely not be missing.

### **Perspective of the hosts – the results of the participant observation**

The agricultural farm at which the participant observation took place is located in the Kociewie village of Bochlin, the kujawsko-pomorskie province, in the świecki county, in the Nowe commune. The farm is operated by Ms. Sara Valentini Pstrong and Mr. Arkadiusz Pstrong. A characteristic feature of the farm is its surroundings: a direct neighbourhood of vast arable fields, green agricultural land and woodland as well as an amazing farm menagerie. The farm is known as the Kociewie Tuscany,<sup>9</sup> with the name referring to Sara's Italian roots. What makes the farm special is the farming of donkeys and horses, and no animal is farmed there to be sold or slaughtered. While the horses and donkeys do not literally enter the living room or the dining room,

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<sup>9</sup> Since April 2017 the farm has enjoyed a foundation status.

as stated by the farm owners, *we treat everyone as family members and the animals are our cooperants. Each of them contributes something else to our NGO.* Next to the donkeys and horses, on the farm one will also find dogs, cats, Siberian geese, Vietnamese potbellied pigs and many other animals which have found home there themselves, e.g. swallows, or bats. Another characteristic of the farm is the mostly beyond-average social activity of the owners. It is the Pstrongs who have originated the actions going far beyond the standard green care programme. The programme participants are actively involved in various initiatives, especially onotherapy (therapy supported by the participation of donkeys), works on organic farms, and independent preparation of Italian cuisine meals, not only for themselves but also for the farm visitors. In 2018, it was Poland's first farm which signed another contract related to providing care as part of the green care with MGOPS<sup>10</sup> Nowe, and where some of the charges were employed, via an employment contract, on the farm, which definitely enhanced their self-esteem and self-confidence. The positive results were also confirmed by the psychologist acting as a consultant and controller on the farm. Such an effectively executed idea of the care farm has attracted the attention of the Foundation of Socioeconomic Initiatives (FISE), the representatives of which, in Poland, have offered participation (as the only representatives from Poland) in the international meeting of Social Leaders held by the British Council in London.<sup>11</sup>

Compliant with the evaluation regulations and assumptions, care farms in Poland are monitored in terms of meeting the standards declared in the project by the care farm consultants at least twice a month. In addition to this, once a month the farm is visited by a representative of the Minikowo coordinating team and, also once a month, a psychologist meets the charges and carers, as well as volunteers.

According to the farmers and, at the same time, the carers of the persons staying on their farm, it is important to create possibilities for unassisted and spontaneous relations between people and animals, with safety as the priority. The first experiences were very promising. The patients or clients – although nobody refers to them in this way since, for the hosts Arek and Sara, they are simply guests who require much attention, but still guests – have definitely

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<sup>10</sup> MGOPS, Municipal and Commune Welfare Centre.

<sup>11</sup> British Council is an institution representing the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in terms of cultural and educational cooperation.

enhanced their self-esteem; they started initiating discussions and planning daily activities, while they also became more self-confident, and when they took decisions, nobody would criticise. As such, one of the patients stated: *we feel accepted here, and for us it is very important*. The observations outside the farm, especially of the patients talking to friends and neighbours, also show that the charges became self-confident, as they were more often seen out of the house, doing shopping or taking a walk. Yet another positive aspect is greater self-control of their hygiene; they changed their clothes more frequently, combed their hair, shaved and, mostly, showered more often. Interestingly, even those who are still not convinced of working together in a group find other things to do alone, but close to others; one could say that they work together but alone within earshot. Such behaviour is also thanks to preparing meals for themselves together; they not only cook together and divide the jobs, but even vote on what will be made for dinner the next day. This brings about not only a growing sense of independence, but also a growing sense of responsibility for others. The farm owners continue promoting new forms of activity of their clients who, due to being diagnosed with often serious health and social deficits, require very attentive and responsible care. Although the results of the observations are very satisfactory, at this stage we can only assume that such a form of activation and therapy is more effective than the traditional clinical methods (see Del Sesto 2017).

A definite attribute of the Kociewie Tuscany is a specific social activity, which is multidimensional, as it covers both the care farm group and the frequent visitors who come only to see how to run a care farm. What is astonishing is the fact that the farm owners not only follow the programme, but go far beyond the scope provided for in the care farm contract; they organise trips to the seaside, to the cinema, for shopping, and to visit the salt springs in Grudziądz, etc. In the opinion of the carers, the essence of the care farm is to create conditions not only for daytime stays, but also for development and for an ongoing search for new solutions to support persons in difficult situations, such as those who are excluded and not self-reliant. They see animals as playing a very important role in the therapy, without which the farm would be just a house in the countryside. The engagement of the charges in helping to care for the animals, while at the same time learning organic farming, perfectly coincides with the idea of Green Farm and Social Farm. The programme participants also acquire many new competencies. They learn, e.g., the principles of cooking with Italian cuisine recipes which

are, in principle, cheap, healthy and tasty. However, the most tangible result is an attempt to introduce the charges to the job market. A big opportunity is provided via the possibility of employment for three charges on the farm, who can work in the kitchen, laundry room, and on the agricultural farm. Two persons from the previous group have already found jobs outside the farm, where they are considered fully valuable and able-bodied employees.

The Kociewie Tuscany Foundation and the certified organic farm represent a very interesting mixture of various activities in rural areas which perfectly complement each other, and this can serve as an example for many entrepreneurial people. As noted by my interlocutors,

for us the idea of social farming is where agricultural resources can be used and the rural areas, contact with animals and all the other forms of outdoor activity, get excellently combined with our ideals; both of the foundation and of the organic farm. Our actions in the rural areas have always followed the goal of integrating the residents and promoting the region. Indeed, from the very start, which is since we moved to Poland (the turn of 2009 and 2010), we have been focusing on working with children and the youth from the local commune, where we were trying to show another countryside, an active countryside, where women can and should speak, where dumping rubbish in the woods is not normal, where taking a dog for a walk is an excuse to go out and leave one's own household, where we learn to reach an agreement by talking and meetings.

In terms of the care farm, the interlocutors declared that: *The idea of care farm, which originated from the initiative of the Kujawsko-Pomorskie Centre for Agricultural Consulting in Minikowo, should have succeeded perfectly, however it is still too great of an idea and it is too much ahead of Poland's potential. Imitating such countries as Italy, or Holland, is not a risky solution. Those countries are better economically developed and the people there trust one another a lot. Personally, we believe that it is only a matter of time until we are ready enough to copy such models, but it is still not now. It seems to us that it is not just a matter of time for such innovative solutions in terms of care and support for the socially-excluded or the persons who simply do not want to live alone, but also a question of a change in mentality. What we have in mind here is the people trusting such care solutions and not considering such activity as a business, a way to make money, although it is, indeed, not reprehensible. In*

*the meantime, our society is not as wealthy as the societies of the countries of Western Europe, and without the support of state institutions such actions will not be lasting, as those who need such care most simply cannot afford it.*

The care farm run by the foundation officially ended its operation compliant with the contract for participation in the project. Despite this, it is the only farm which has established cooperation with the local GOPS and which has been continuing to take care of the selected charges, albeit there are not so many today, with only 2 to 4 people a month compared to 9 and even up to 12 people previously.

As explained by the hosts,

The project of “care farm” we participated in was a great adventure for many of us; the farms which opened their doors to the unknown, the farms which allowed themselves to be led to try new possibilities, to give more to their community. In our case, from the beginning we tried to propose something which would make us different, which would immediately associate care with a specific place. Thus, we focused on zootherapy, and mostly onotherapy – a supporting therapy involving donkeys. With time, we also started organising training sessions for donkey breeders we refer to as Donkey ABC. That donkey metaphor was also very accurate, especially for our charges, who wanted to take part in taking care of those exceptional animals. However, as in every project, also in that one the contract term came to an end and we faced a difficult decision and mostly a question about the further care of our charges, and what will happen to such a promising project, the effects of which are seen not just by us but also by many people who have still been coming to see how it functions with their own eyes. We are already used to the control by various institutions which entrust us with their charges and those which control the execution of the project tasks, including the financial issues. There have never been any reservations so when the project formally ended, we held talks with GOPS and we took a decision to continue. Thus, with satisfaction, we can announce that we are probably the only farm which continues its mission of green care even beyond the project. Now the source of financing is simply GOPS.

As far as KPODR Minikowo knows, there are still a few farms in the kujawsko-pomorskie province which are continuing their care activity, using various sources of financing.

For the operation of such farms, advertising in the media is also essential; it makes the idea of care farms more popular, while it is also an award and makes one more convinced that a job has been well done and about its socially important role and sense. Indeed, Mr. Arkadiusz Pstrong stated, with regard to advertising, that

One must also note a very important function of the media, which publicised the idea of care farms and showed such farms in a very positive light. I guess there was no single month without journalists coming from TV or radio stations. Such publicity and advertising have had a good impact on us as we somehow felt honoured and appreciated. Before we came to Poland and settled down in the countryside, when still in Italy, we used to be volunteers and to provide help to the homeless, combatting alcoholism, drug abuse and other difficult life situations. It is thanks to that work that we have learned to look at people differently and, most importantly, we got to understand that reaching the so-called bottom is not always a result of the choice they made. In front of us, some of them have managed to get out of that difficult or even hopeless situation, but we also realise that it would not have been possible without support from the institutions. Thus, the idea of care farming immediately triggered our eagerness to act. And since we were so eager, we decided to engage others; our first charges. Our goal was care through activity. Not even for a moment did we see any chances of success for the model of care associated with the time spent with a cup of tea and a piece of cake. We love both the tea and the cake, but mostly the cake which can be made by us and eaten in a spare moment between different jobs to do. Each of the charges used to choose their own duties and we simply kept supporting them in their actions. They appeared, or even revealed themselves, as gardeners, chefs de cuisine and confectioners, who, most importantly, through their own work, heard a scream of someone who needs them. With time we started to consider one another as a team, which also had its managers. Maybe it is too much to say, but indeed one can say that from the kitchen, through the field, and even the cowshed and enclosure with animals, everyone enjoyed their own little kingdom where he or she was a boss.

He added that

as we operate even beyond the financial support programme from the Centre for Agricultural Consulting, we interpret or define the term NGO



differently. For us and for our charges, the NGO stands for Niezwykłe Gospodarstwo Opiekuńcze (which translates as Extraordinary Care Farm). It is thanks to regular work and transparency that we have managed to develop something like a model of cooperation between us, the commune, the local authorities, the county and other supporting institutions. It does not mean that now all is ideal and easy. It will probably never be like that as such a farm incorporates ongoing changes and a process which, I guess one can say, we keep on learning. In our opinion, it would be much easier if there were permanent financial support and if different support models could be combined.

To recapitulate the long hours of talking, the participants were asked whether it was possible already now to sum up somehow the operation of the care farm. There were more than just two sentences, but we have chosen the following thought:

Looking at all that from a time perspective, we think that our success was affected by very many factors. The care farm has not only been a place where different generations and people with various needs meet, but also a place tourists come to visit, in addition to school trips, and a place where training sessions are held as well as the location of camps for children taken care of by the GOPS. And all that surrounded by various animals, which is quite an effective therapy. It is also a success that, with time, some of the charges have become the employees of our Kociewie Tuscany Foundation and, in a way, they are becoming colleague-like carers or guides for the successive charges.

As seen from the above, the operation of the Kociewie Tuscany, as a care farm, in many aspects does not deviate from the standards of such farms which have already been operating for a long time in the EU countries. The essential difference between the care farms in the western countries of the European Union and in Poland is the lack of a formal status. The other elements are very similar. Farms similar to the Kociewie Tuscany can also be found in Holland, Belgium or in Italy. However, there they already enjoy their tradition, legal grounds and a well-established place in the welfare system. In Poland such farms are still a novelty and innovation which will have to struggle for many years to obtain their status by ensuring the operation of green carers and organisers as well as a lot of potential benefits.

## Perspective of the charges

The last element of the diagnosis is examining the entire programme from the perspective of its most important beneficiaries, namely the care farm charges. Achieving this meant following a strategy of attentive listening to the discussions, starting the ball rolling about the topics related to their lives, looking at one's own situation, and evaluating their possibilities of being activated once the project participation ends. This fragment is, therefore, a brief summary of the notes from the field – informal talks with charges which lasted from the first days of their participation in the programme until the moment immediately before the end of the project.

First of all, one must note that, at the beginning, none of the interlocutors considered a long-term perspective or, in other words, nobody was thinking ahead, wondering what benefits could result from the participation in the programme, or even what their objective was. For them the entire situation was new enough that they simply enjoyed the possibility of participating in the programme day after day. The group satisfied their need for affiliation, and, with time, also the need for recognition, on top of their new, recently discovered, competencies, especially cooking, making cakes, organising guests' visits, taking care of the livestock, taking the farm animals to their looseboxes in sheds, and being responsible for paying attention to other charges. Moreover, in that aspect one could see an emergence of lasting bonds, but mostly the discovery of one's own empathy and sensitivity. Exclamations such as *I must keep an eye on him* were heard more often than *I am glad that someone here pays attention to me*. Those roles were spontaneously created and nobody had to be appointed to assume them. The skill of evaluating the scale of responsibility for the initiatives taken was also astonishing. Moreover, quickly there was established a hierarchy in the kitchen or on the farm which was not even questioned by anyone, while nobody was blaming anyone that it was today that someone chose the task of doing nothing. These completely informal roles intermingled without any comments, malice and without any impatience regarding the fact that someone was not working on that day, giving other participants a full right to be simply in the group, without a role, and without a task to do. The tasks selected by the participants had an autotelic value for them, specifically because they were not differentiated by positions and earnings but only by recognition within the group and a kind

word said by the guests visiting the farm. Similarly, the main heroes of a given event stayed backstage, e.g., in the kitchen, while the others, as they went about laying the table and offering pizza or a hot yeast cake, stressed that, *It was made by Arek; good, right?* Only when the project was coming to an end could one sense some tension, resulting from a concern about something important and good in their life just coming to an end, although as they often stressed themselves, *we will keep visiting and supporting each other*.

Therefore, looking through the charges' eyes, it can be concluded that the participation in the programme had an overwhelming impact on the level of their social activity. They might not have been able to specify, or even describe, the changes they found in themselves, but they noticed a positive effect from the care farm; by looking at the other participants they could see themselves just like in the mirror. Thanks to spontaneous relations and cooperation, they were becoming more self-confident, fighting their anxiety, and also started to reprimand others. What I refer to here is a situation in which they changed from an attitude of withdrawal and passivity, to daring first to ask for help and then to assign tasks to others and even to assess their performance. The discussions made it possible to state that participation in the programme had a positive effect on them, despite the fact that the effects of the results were perhaps not always those expected. There were also cases where, for a charge, participation in the programme was only a break in their lifestyle, and once their stay ended, they continued to live the same way they lived before – withdrawn and even addicted. The care farm, in that case, was not a therapeutic success, but it was definitely an oasis of peace and quiet, even though the objective was also to trigger a process of change. It is perhaps true, although there is no convincing evidence, that, for those people, the participation in the programme was simply too short.

## **Conclusions and recommendations**

Care farms have demonstrated that they are a noteworthy initiative which is not only an excellent part of the health care idea of green care, but also an assistance to develop and to promote a farm, even once the participation in the project has ended. Green care has also frequently attracted the attention of newspapers, radio stations and TV journalists. The owners stressed the role of social media and good photography, which popularised what

they do even more, as is seen from the interest triggered by care farms in professional photographers, e.g. Dariusz Bareya, or Tymon Markowski. The experience acquired during the project makes the owners of almost every second farm consider the possibility of establishing a foundation or another type of day care activity. However, there are no long-term effects guaranteed, as those who decided to start a foundation soon realised how difficult it is to find sources of financing. Here of key importance was content-wise and professional support from the Commune Welfare Centres, which, even when the project was completed, continued to declare their support and helped with promotion of social farming among potential charges and with the acquisition of funds. The most-needy persons simply cannot afford such an experience. In that case, of particular importance is to develop law solutions which will legitimise a formal functioning of care farms and to acquire public funds for the care services provided. The EU funds described in the article are not permanent. A few pilot projects financed with those funds have allowed for a positive verification of the agricultural farms which can, after some preparation, render care services successful. However, it is necessary to build a permanent system of institutions, which has already been started thanks to the GROWID research and implementation initiative, executed by the National Centre for Research and Development.<sup>12</sup>

Although their participation in the project has come to an end, the charges are still in touch with the carers. One can say that there has been developed a lasting bond between them, supported by a sense of responsibility for the life of the charges. Moreover, it is not just a usual curiosity which comes with a laconic question such as *what is up?*, but a real concern, e.g. a concern about someone we are close with – a family member. According to the respondents, the stay on a care farm provided the charges with a sense of security which their own family could not provide them with. However, thinking about the helplessness in terms of the acquisition of funds to continue the care services becomes quite a mental burden for the carers, which is also affected by the experience of the death of charges (5 cases in the one-stay group). Hence, the conclusion is that the psychologist's assistance should also be provided to the carers, as there appears a conviction and a sense of guilt that interrupting the therapy could have accelerated the death of the charges, e.g. due to a loss of control over the regular administration of medications. The experience

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<sup>12</sup> <https://growid.pl/>.

of green care work also opens up the prospect of other forms of assistance. One of the farms has transformed, e.g. into a foster family, and accepted three children. As explained by one of the female respondents, *the decision has, at least slightly, helped us to stifle a sense moral hangover that the therapy had to be interrupted*. Moreover, and as he added at the end of the interview, *looking back it is a superb idea for such an initiative. However, since the end of the project, our former charges have been often asking whether it is possible to return to the form of staying on our farm*.

In conclusion, we are of the opinion that:

1. In Poland care farms are still a pilot project, although we consider popularising the knowledge about care farms as extremely important, both for the development of non-agricultural functions and for the care and therapeutic support.
2. The specific care farm operation requires experience, maturity and specialist competencies. With that in mind, it is easier to launch green care for farmers who are already experienced in running an agritourism farm, practise as volunteers, and have experience in taking care of persons threatened by social exclusion. Many farmers are, therefore, persons aged 40+. Considering the fact that the highest rate of unemployment in the rural areas is observed in young people aged 18–24 and the greatest proportion of non-agricultural professional activity is seen in persons aged over 40, one should take actions to encourage young people to create care farms.
3. The data collected shows clearly that the care model combining work on a farm with therapy is a very good alternative over other forms of support offered to the socially-excluded or those threatened with exclusion. In addition to this, the positive social effects are unquestionable, even if the costs of such an operation are considerable.
4. Care farms can successfully undertake more difficult challenges, especially care and social reintegration of the intellectually disabled. Such experiences open up quite new possibilities for the development of green care in Poland.
5. The example of Kociewie Tuscany demonstrates that care farms can successfully combine many functions: the promotion of the region and social services and so, at the moment, it is difficult to allocate them to a specific statistical category. Besides this, at the present time

care farms are very few in number, despite the fact that, as seen, the demand for this care model is huge.

6. Care farms in Poland, given the growing social acceptance and interest of many public institutions, should be legitimised, while stable sources of financing should be determined.
7. Pilot programmes have shown that the farms perform their mission well, although this is while working closely with a network of supporting and controlling institutions, e.g., the Commune Welfare Centres or Branches of Agricultural Consulting. At the moment it is difficult to know whether similar results could be expected if the family farms were separated from the above-mentioned institutions and only exposed to free market mechanisms.

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