

Green Care as opportunity for knowledge systems, learning and collective action across Europe

Dorit Karla Haubehofer^a, Margaretha Blom-Zandstra^a, Ina Kattenbroek^b and Willem Brandenburg^a

^aWageningen UR, Plant Research International, PO Box 616, 6700 AP Wageningen, the Netherlands, dorithaubehofer@wur.nl, greet.blom@wur.nl, willem.brandenburg@wur.nl

^bbeezy@solcon.nl

Abstract: *This paper deals with the topic of green care and several of its interventions, mainly care farming and animal-assisted interventions. It explains the corresponding terminology and definitions and examples of Austria and the Netherlands are described. Further, it focuses on the possibility of national and international cross-interventional exchange, what still hinders such exchange, and also, what such an exchange could bring: opportunities for knowledge systems, cross-interventional learning, and collective action. These developments could have a clear effect on the urban-rural relationship, the EU-intern collaboration, and the linkage of Eastern European countries to the rest of Europe.*

Keywords: *green care, care farming, animal-assisted interventions, urban rural development, international exchange, Austria, Netherlands.*

Introduction

Care farming, in some countries also known as farming for health or social farming, is a health care intervention that can be defined as *“the use of commercial farms and agricultural landscapes as a base for promoting mental and physical health, through normal farming activity. It is a [...] movement to provide health (both mental and physical), social or educational benefits through farming for a wide range of people. These may include those with defined medical or social needs (e.g. psychiatric patients, [...] people with learning disabilities, people with a drug history [...]) as well as those suffering from the effects of work-related stress or ill-health arising from obesity. Care farming is a partnership between farmers, health and social care providers and participants.”* (Hine et al., p.12).

The international discussion about definitions and the development of an unambiguous terminology has yet to be finished, but for simplification and clarification reasons only the term “care farming” and definition above mentioned will be used throughout this paper.

Care farming is one among several styles of so called green care interventions. Green care involves a large range of different health promoting and health enhancing interventions which all rest upon natural elements as their base. Such natural elements could be individual animals or plants, but also gardens, farms, or landscapes (Haubehofer et al., 2010). Typical other examples, next to care farming, are thus animal-assisted interventions, garden therapy, or landscape therapy, only to name a few. Green Care can hence be seen as a rather broad umbrella term which includes a great range of interventions. At the same time it is a booming phenomenon throughout Europe, and also on a variety of other continents, like for instance Canada and the USA, Asia, or South America, as growing numbers of books, networks, and conferences show. As it is further developing it is not surprising that different directions and styles of green care are favoured in different countries. These variations are manifold and depend on the individual economic, ecologic, cultural, social, and political circumstances of each country. In the section to come, Austria and the Netherlands shall be described in greater detail as examples.

Green care styles in Austria and the Netherlands

For the last 10-15 years, the Netherlands have been focusing on care farming. A national as well as regional platforms have been established, quality standards have been developed, trainings are offered, and scientific studies are done. Already more than 1.000 farms provide some kind of care farming service, while the amount is still growing. Care on farms is provided to several client groups and follows various goals, like day time occupation, training, reintegration, rehabilitation, or therapy. The development of care farms was supported by the Dutch government, which funded the national platform to provide the infrastructure services and support to develop care farming. Many Dutch agriculturists search for new sources of income, as they are not big enough to compete with the large agricultural production centres, but at the same time do not have the capacity or will to grow further. Therefore, many open their farm to multifunctional purposes, as for instance bed and breakfast, camping, holidays in the countryside or care farming (Meerburg et al., 2009). Besides that, farm education for children and adolescents with or without a certain diagnosis has been developing as well, although not for such a long time. In this green care intervention daily activities on and around a farm are used for educational purposes (Haubenhofner et al., 2010).

Austria has been emphasizing on animal-assisted interventions. Firstly, it's centre of interest was on domestic companion animals like dogs, but in the meantime also larger life stock (e.g. horses) and farm animals (e.g. goats, sheep, and cows) are trained and used. Animal-assisted interventions (AAI) have been described as *“any intervention that intentionally includes or incorporates animals as part of a therapy or ameliorative process or milieu.”* (Kruger and Serpell, 2006, p.25). Nearly any animal species can be used, ranging from insects, amphibians and reptiles, to mammals. Most commonly used are companion animals (cats, dogs, rabbits, etc.), larger life stock (horses, cows, sheep, goats, etc.), and sometimes wild animals (like e.g. dolphins). As AAI is rather popular in Austria, there are several organisations offering trainings and quality standards, Universities and Colleges include education about human-animal interactions and AAI in their curricula, and at many places all over the country, people are engaged practically in this topic, either on professional or voluntary base. Garden therapy has become rather popular and successful in Austria as well. Care farming is also provided in Austria, but not to the same extent as in the Netherlands. No networks or platforms exist, and scientific research is sparse. At the same time, AAI are not common in the Netherlands. Although the use of dogs and horses is known, network activities are only regional and their broad spectrum of possibilities has not been acknowledged yet.

International exchange of green care interventions and their shortcomings

The examples of the Austrian and Dutch situation show, that both countries could learn a lot from each other's main green care intervention. As Austria's focus lies on AAI and the Dutch one on care farming, international exchange of information and ideas on theoretical (scientific) and practical levels could and should be arranged. The wheel does not have to be reinvented, if more simple options are available.

For exchange of ideas about care farming, several international programmes have already been started. For scientific exchange, a Cost Action programme was started in 2006 (Cost Action 866) with the main objective to *“increase the scientific knowledge on the best practices for implementing green care in agriculture with the aim of improving human mental and physical health and the quality of life”* (Action 866 Fact Sheet; see <http://w3.cost.esf.org/>). The Cost Action organizes regular scientific meetings in one of the participating countries and will have its final conference in August 2010. Another international programme – without finishing date and mainly oriented on the practical development of care farming – is the 'Community of Practice - Farming for Health' (<http://www.farmingforhealth.org/>). This programme addresses scientists and practitioners to engage in the enhancement of the scientific and practical knowledge of care farming. An international programme for care farming, which has already been finished, was the so called 'SoFar project' (social farming: supporting EU agricultural policies). It aimed at the support of new

agricultural policies in the Union, delivery of evidence on the theme of care farming (here called social farming) and the formulation of intervention tools and strategic guidelines.

Similarly, the topic of the human- animal bond and AAI are discussed on international level as well. Several examples of involved organizations may be named, like for instance the IAHAIO ('International Association of Human- Animal Interaction Organizations', <http://www.iahaio.org>), who holds worldwide conferences every three years to further develop and enhance the human-animal bond and to discuss various specific topics within this theme. The IAHAIO conference of 1998 in Prague launched a list with special guidelines for AAI. Another international programme is the ISAZ ('International Society for Anthrozoology', <http://www.isaz.net/>), who also meets on a regular base and publishes the quarterly scientific Journal 'Anthrozoology'. The list could easily be expanded, but for conciseness we only name one more programme: A new Cost Action to be planned which will focus on the topic of AAI. Its pre-proposal was submitted to the Cost office in Brussels in March 2010, and is in its reviewing phase at the time of the writing of this paper.

By naming these programmes we want to underline that international exchange within single green care interventions is common and regularly practiced. However, one more step still needs to be done, and is essential to guarantee a permanent implementation of green care interventions: that is, to link individual green care styles, both on national and international level. As described earlier, green care includes different types of plant-, animal-, and nature- based interventions. Although each practice triggers its own development, communication and cooperation among each other is still inadequate. Reasons for this non-existence are manifold, and concern both scientists and practitioners:

- Geographic separation ("out of sight, out of mind");
- Idealistic separation ("our intervention is better than yours"; or "we know what we are doing, we don't need help");
- Competition for funding money, public acceptance, and clients;
- Lack of knowledge (detailed expertise often leads to missing of understanding the broader picture).

However, several experts are aware of the danger from such a lack of mutual understanding, knowledge, and interaction: For solitary work much more energy is needed than for cooperation. If one can overcome the thinking in terms of competition, teamwork can step in its place to fight together for a common goal: to be able to provide as many correctly structured green care interventions as needed to saturate the market of demand and request. Two examples of actions to reach these goals shall be named in this paper:

Dutch- Austrian fact finding visits

First example is a trans-country exchange programme as introduced by one of the authors of this paper, Ina Kattenbroek Two successful fact finding visits – as they are called - where organised between the Netherlands and the UK in the past years. Conclusions and lessons learned are quoted below:

'The fact finding visit appeared to be a very successful and important instrument in understanding how the combination of farming and health and social care could work for the Waveny and Southern Broads area in East Anglia, UK'. (Doeke Dobma NCFI Practitioners Group, member Secretary East Anglia Care Farmers Group, Clinks Care Farm Ltd.)

'The study tour was of tremendous benefit to the group in learning how established care farms started and function. Meaningful lessons were learned about structure, best practice, motivation and avoidance of some pitfalls. In particular, the group learnt:

- *That it is advisable to start small and grow naturally.*
- *Farmers thinking about starting care farming will benefit from visiting as many care farms as possible and gaining some care farming work experience.*
- *That care farming can take many forms and flourish on various farm types.*

- *That regional organisations provide vital support for care farmers.*
- *That care farms in the Netherlands have developed because of established and sustainable funding streams.’ (Jon Dover, Care Farming West Midlands.)*

Comparable fact finding visits could be arranged between the Netherlands and Austria, with green care intervention- crossing aims to:

1. Gain broad awareness of animal-assisted interventions (AAI) with farm animals in the Netherlands, based on the Austrian experiences. Such information could be of high interest for Dutch care farmers and other stakeholders who are looking for new models of care farming. Although care farming is rather popular in the Netherlands, new economic niches need to be triggered to ensure that all existing and future Dutch farmers can keep their business alive. Care farming with animal-assisted interventions could be an interesting option as this phenomenon is rather unknown in the Netherlands. Many clients of care farming underline the importance of contact with animals on the farms besides the contact with the farmer and other clients and being in a green environment. These interactions may include every shade from cuddling the farm cat, or playing with the farm dog, to clear out the stables, feeding the animals, horseback riding, or participating in animal production processes (production of milk and mild products, honey, meat, wool, etc.). In traditional Dutch care farming, these interactions happen spontaneously, as the clients are surrounded by the farm animals and participate in their husbandry and agricultural production. To create AAI on a farm, all which is necessary is to consciously trigger and stimulate these interactions. Farmers use animals that are already on the farm. In Austria, education and training in how to use farm animals for therapeutic purposes for clients, is provided by supporting networks (e.g. ‘Austrian Council for Agricultural Engineering and Rural Development’, in one of their project groups about animal assisted education/therapy). The aims of such fact finding visits for the Netherlands are obvious: Dutch care farmers and stakeholders in the field of care farming gain facts, knowledge and experience of how to use farm animals in a therapeutic manner. With this knowledge they can develop AAI with farm animals on care farms in the Netherlands and contribute to the professionalisation of care farming in the Netherlands.

2. Gain broad awareness on how care farms in the Netherlands operate, how services are provided and how they are supported in Austria. Austrian (care) farmers and stakeholders in this field gather facts, knowledge and experience about the development of care farms, as for example different client groups on farms, financial matters, the role of supporting networks, co-operation with care institutes and co-operating care farmers. With this knowledge they can contribute to the development of care farms in Austria. Such knowledge could prove to be essential for Austrian (care) farmers and other stakeholders who want to help Austrian care farming to get a foot on the ground, and to save Austrian agriculture from further shrinkage. Care farming is not only a tool to contribute to the recovery of human beings from physical or mental diseases. It also serves as a mean to distinguish farms from others instead of up scaling. So, the question arises whether the societal functions like care farming, based on agricultural production as primary function, is an opportunity for Austrian farming systems – as well as for farming systems of other European countries - for future survival. It is worthwhile to consider whether a decision tool for farmers can be developed either to focus on the development of conventional agriculture with all its consequences, such as up-scaling or specializing, or to broaden his scope by becoming multifunctional. Although there are surely many more, we will now focus on four functions and their eventually mutual interactions:

- care farming,
- landscape farming,
- agricultural water management and storage, and
- farming and tourism.

These interactions are represented in Fig. 1 and can be summarised as follows: The relationship between farming and care (nr. 1) has already been existent for several decades and has proved to be successful in different countries, as described in this and other articles (Blom-Zandstra, 2009). Besides, there is a relationship between care and tourism in terms of wellness (nr. 2) and a relationship between farming and tourism (nr. 3). The latter is well established, e.g. by farmhouse

camping places. Tourism and landscape (nr. 4) have a tight relationship as well. It comprehends also the relationship between farming and landscape (nr. 5) and forms a part of the cultural landscape. A special aspect may be the urban agriculture as part of the cultural attraction to visit cities. Furthermore, water plays an important role within landscapes. In response to climate change farming may play a role in the adaptation of the water management and storage (nr. 6). In this respect, added value may be created through relationships as represented by nr. 7, nr. 8, and nr. 9. The relationship between landscape and care (nr. 10) is derived from the one between farming and care (nr. 1) and reflects more or less rural estate farming systems in a park landscape.

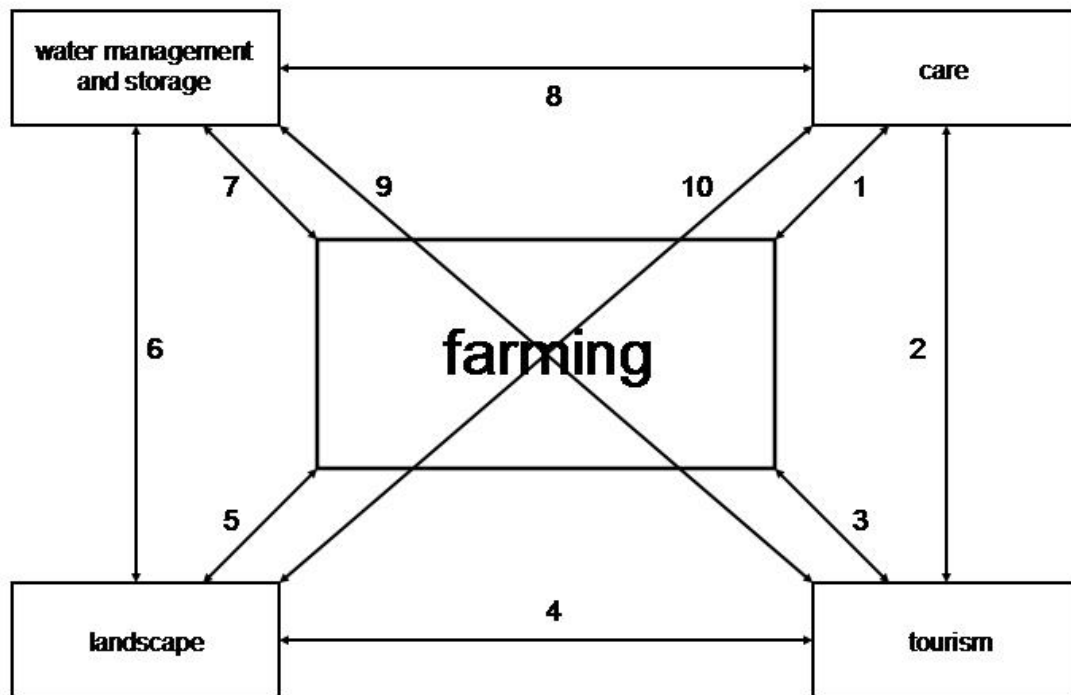


Figure 1. Graphical display of different interaction- types between four of the main functions within agriculture. The single interaction- types of Fig. 1 are numbered from 1 to 10.

A look into the future – plans of a new ‘Platform Green Care Austria’

As was shown in the previous example, the mere establishment of more care farms is not enough to make care farming successful and sustainable. Whether it can help European agriculturists survive depends on its national implementation as well as its international appearance. In Austria, a first step was done in 2009, when the idea was born to create a national ‘Platform Green Care Austria’. Its development is triggered by Dorit Haubenhofner and representatives of the Hochschule für Agrar- und Umweltpädagogik, the Bundesanstalt für Bergbauernfragen, the Geriatriezentrum Wienerwald, the Österreichische Gartenbau-Gesellschaft, the Österreichisches Kuratorium für Landtechnik und Landentwicklung, and others.

All representatives feel the need of such a national platform in Austria to overcome the barriers in the above listed development, which causes a slowing-down of the process and turns out to be a waste of energy. And there is a second motive for a rapid action in Austria: Green care is a fast developing concept in the Western and Northern parts of Europe and just steps onto the Southern-, and Eastern-European ground. Due to its geographical position and economical developments, Austria can be the entrance gate for green care from the Northern and Western countries towards Eastern-European countries and become their role-model.

Therefore, the planned Platform “Green Care Austria” will follow three different goals:

- Link itself internationally;
- Appear as an umbrella platform for all organisational and individual stakeholders on the field of green care within Austria and link supply and demand;
- Trigger and implement scientific studies on green care including national and international cooperation.

The establishment of the ‘Platform Green Care Austria’ will be done via a plan by several stages. A first step will be the release of an own website and a periodical. This will help to reach new stakeholders and to create a network. The representatives hope that this goal will be accomplished within one year.

Conclusion

As emphasised in this paper, communication and cooperation should be the base for the development of a national and international green care agenda and should link all various styles of green care interventions. The definite goal of all interventions should not be solitary power, but the possibility to provide the adequate form of green care intervention to everybody who asks for it. At the same time, green care is a great training- and occupational- opportunity for those who (want to) offer it.

Therefore, we want to suggest for both practitioners and scientists following: To actively look for interaction and linkage whenever possible, both within one’s country and abroad, and also with other parties and at places that may not be evident at first sight.

Acknowledgements: We want to express our gratitude for having the opportunity to present our cross- interventional ideas of an internationally linked green care community to the public. It can be very interesting to use the framework of an international conference like the one of IFSA in July 2010 to create interest and support among farmers and other stakeholders for such international fact finding visits and networks, and to mobilise individual people and organisations to help organise and take part in them.

References

- Blom-Zandstra, G. (2009) Priority areas and innovation strategies for further developing Social farming in Europe. In: F. Di Iacovo and D. O’Connor (eds.) *Supporting policies for social farming in Europe. Progressing multifunctionality in responsive rural areas*. Firenze: Arsia, pp. 175–202. ISBN 978-88-8295-107-8.
- Cost Action 866 (2010) *Action 866 Fact Sheet*. For download via http://w3.cost.esf.org/index.php?id=181&action_number=866; visiting date March 14th, 2010.
- Haubenhofner, D.K., Elings, M., Hassink, J. and R. Hine (2010) The development of Green Care in Western-European Countries. *To be published in the spring-issue of Explore*.
- Haubenhofner, D.K., Hassink, J., van der Meer, I., van de Kamp, N., Schreurs, E. and Y. Schuler (2010) Farm education in the Netherlands. In: I. Darnhofer (ed.) *Proceedings of the 9th European IFSA Symposium, 4-7 July 2010*. Vienna, Austria.
- Hine R., Peacock, J. and J. Pretty (2008) *Care farming in the UK: Evidence and Opportunities*. Report for the National Care Farming Initiative (UK). Essex: University of Essex.
- Kruger K.A. and J.A. Serpell (2006) Animal- Assisted Interventions in Mental Health: Definitions and Theoretical Foundations. In: A. Fine (ed.) *Handbook on Animal- Assisted Therapy: Theoretical Foundations and Guidelines for Practice, 2e*. San Diego: Academic Press, pp. 21-38.
- Meerburg B.G., Korevaar, H., Haubenhofner, D.K., Blom-Zandstra, M. and H. van Keulen (2009) The changing role of agriculture in Dutch society. *Journal of Agricultural Science* 147: 511-521.