

## Long Abstract – Monographic Section

*SOCIAL AGRICULTURE BETWEEN NEW AND OLD SOCIAL WORK PRACTICES, THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES AND POLICY INNOVATIONS.*

*edited by Angela Genova and Tiziana Tarsia*

---

*Mental well-being in the agricultural sector and rural areas: the possible role of social agriculture*  
Patrizia Borsotto, Francesca Giarè, Francesco Basset

Agriculture is often idealized as a wholesome activity carried out in natural environments and at a healthy pace. Yet, it conceals numerous critical issues related to mental well-being and quality of life for those who work in the sector. People employed in agriculture face complex challenges: economic instability, social isolation, heavy workloads, lack of support, and difficulties with generational renewal. These challenges are further intensified by the impacts of climate change and regulatory transformations, which heighten feelings of precariousness and vulnerability. In this context, social farming emerges as an innovative model that combines agricultural production with therapeutic, educational, and socially inclusive functions, thereby contributing to mental health, community cohesion, and environmental sustainability.

Linked to the One Health approach—which recognizes the interconnection between human, animal, and environmental health—social farming stands out as an effective tool for addressing the multidimensional challenges faced by rural areas. Sustainable agricultural practices, contact with nature and animals, and the active involvement of vulnerable individuals generate tangible psychosocial and physical benefits, ultimately improving the quality of life in rural communities. This work presents a review of national and international literature on mental well-being in rural and agricultural settings, highlighting key risk factors such as isolation, lack of services, economic pressure, and poor working conditions. At the same time, it identifies protective factors including a sense of belonging, individual resilience, social support, and public recognition of the farmer's social role.

The empirical section of the study offers an exercise in measuring mental well-being at the national level in Italy, using official 2021 data from the Italian National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT). A composite indicator is developed, considering the incidence of deaths due to psychological disorders and suicides, the occupational weight of the agricultural sector, and an index of territorial fragility. The analysis adopts the typological classification of rural areas in Italy employed in the implementation of the CAP, distinguishing between urban contexts and different types of rural zones, both with and without experiences of social farming.

The results show that while the presence of social farming practices does not significantly affect general territorial fragility or the relative weight of the agricultural sector, it has a marked impact on reducing mortality linked to psychological distress. Specifically, rural areas with social farming practices exhibit a significantly lower mortality index compared to those without such experiences, suggesting a direct positive effect on the mental health of people living and working in these settings.

**Long Abstract – Monographic Section**

*SOCIAL AGRICULTURE BETWEEN NEW AND OLD SOCIAL WORK PRACTICES, THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES AND POLICY INNOVATIONS.*

*edited by Angela Genova and Tiziana Tarsia*

---

In conclusion, the study highlights the importance of promoting social farming as a lever for territorial development and collective well-being. Policy implications include strengthening social and healthcare networks in rural areas, developing specialized training for practitioners, and raising awareness among local communities to improve service accessibility, combat stigma, and foster integration across agriculture, health, and social inclusion sectors.

*Cite me: Patrizia Borsotto, Francesca Giarè, Francesco Basset, “Benessere mentale nel settore agricolo e nelle aree rurali: il possibile ruolo dell’agricoltura sociale” in Welfare e Ergonomia (ISSN 2421-3691, ISSNe 2531-9817), 2025, 1”, pp. 37-49.*

*Doi: 10.3280/WE2025-001003.*