

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

The Profile of Agricultural Holdings Providing Social Farming Services in Italy

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In recent years, there has been a growing tendency among agricultural enterprises to engage in activities that are connected to their primary production of goods intended for human and animal consumption. Multifunctionality is now regarded as a key strategic approach through which farms can enhance their likelihood of remaining competitive in the market and constitutes a topic of significant contemporary relevance. This concept is based on the provision of services beneficial to the community. It can enhance and protect the environment and territory, conserve biodiversity, manage resources sustainably, contribute to the socio-economic survival of rural areas, and ensure food security. Among these functions, social farming is receiving growing attention, although it remains limited to a relatively small number of farms.

The Seventh General Agricultural Census, conducted by ISTAT with reference to the year 2020, enabled the collection of a comprehensive set of data on the primary sector. Specifically, it provided measurements regarding both the number and types of ancillary activities carried out by Italian agricultural holdings, including, for the first time, social farming.

Social farming encompasses actions aimed at the social and inclusive use of farm-based resources, implemented by agricultural entrepreneurs in accordance with principles of ethical responsibility and environmental sustainability. These activities may offer benefits in educational contexts as well as for individuals experiencing social disadvantage, vulnerability or fragility.

By applying a micro-analytical approach to census data, the study identified the structural features of 904 Italian farms active in social farming as of October 1, 2020. The results show that the profile of agricultural holdings engaged in social farming activities differs significantly from that of the average farm. This type of activity is primarily practiced in Central and Northern Italy by holdings that are considerably larger than the national average. These farms are more likely to adopt organic practices, introduce process or product innovations, participate in sector-specific associations, engage in other secondary activities, derive income from direct sales of their own products, and promote biodiversity.

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From a management perspective, the farm operator involved in social farming is, on average, notably younger and better educated than the general farming population. Nevertheless, the managerial model remains predominantly male-led, as is the case across the broader landscape of Italian agriculture.

Based on the evidence emerging from the Agricultural Census, the article concludes that social farming appears to be a well-defined strategic and operational choice, requiring a markedly different management approach compared to that of conventional farms. This represents a growing phenomenon whose significance is expected to increase over time. Consequently, it would be desirable to obtain updated data on its development before the next agricultural census, scheduled for 2030.

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