PERCEPTION SOCIAL FARMING IN CZECH REPUBLIC AND GREAT BRITAIN

MARCELA HROMADOVA1, HELENA HANUSOVA2, MILADA STASTNA1
1Department of Applied and Landscape Ecology
2Department of Life Science
Mendel University in Brno
Zemedelska 1, 613 00 Brno
CZECH REPUBLIC
xhromad@node.mendelu.cz

Abstract: This work deals with the current state of a social farming in the Czech Republic. It explains and defines this concept, theoretical bases, specifications and sources of funding, moreover, it ponders over the benefits for rural development and local communities. The work includes an analysis of the current state of social farming in the Czech Republic and Great Britain and, a SWOT analysis of the Czech and British care farms. The subsequent comparison results in many similarities such as the perceived strength, the benefit to society, or the common feature of the lack of salary valuation of workers who work with people with a health or social disadvantage.

Key Words: Social farming, care farming, green care, Czech Republic, United Kingdom

INTRODUCTION
Social farming (SoFar) creates a new outlook on agriculture and agricultural activity. In the Czech Republic, the term sociální zemědělství has started to be used for these activities. It is the equivalent for English terms Social Farming, Green Care Farming, Farming for health, Social Agriculture and Farming Therapy. This is one of the possibilities how to integrate health and socially disadvantaged people into society. These people can be employed in the agricultural environment, furthermore, it can also help reduce their health or social problems. Simultaneously, there is also an opportunity of diversifying the income of farmers who make affords to create conditions that enable disadvantaged people to engage in normal farm activities for the purpose of securing their development, support and improvement of the physical and mental state (Hromadová 2016).

The exact definition of SoFar has not yet been established as there is not any legal definition or basic text that would determine what can still be included in social farming and vice versa. The basis for defining social farming is the Own-initiative Statement of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) published in 2012 based on the COST Action 866 Health Benefits of Green Care report and can be expressed as a sum of agricultural sources, both livestock and plants, in order to create social services in rural or suburban areas. The relatively new concept of social farming has a close connection to multifunctional agriculture and fully fits into the concept of rural development as it enables farmers to diversify their income. Moreover, it brings contribution to society since it provides social services and improves current services for rural residents by using agricultural and rural resources (NAT/539 2012).

Multifunctional agriculture links the production of commodities, non-commodities and pluriactivity of agricultural farms. We understand the production of commodities as services and goods (e.g. animal products or cereals) for which we have a market. On the other hand, for non-commodities, such as landscape or biodiversity, the market does not exist. They also include "damage" such as soil degradation or water pollution. Pluriactivity of the farm can be understood as an offer of another services and products of the company and diversification of the income portfolio of the farm (Ratinger 2011).
Social farming belongs to the activities called green care. This term involves all activities that share the experience of natural elements that improve or maintain the mental and physical state of humans (Chovanec 2015). All the subsequently listed activities such as social farming, social and therapeutic horticulture, animal assisted interventions, movement – physical exercise for therapeutic purposes, ecotherapy, wilderness therapy and nature therapy are the part of the green care (Sempik 2015).

Social farming has a wide range of target groups. It might be people who are disadvantaged on the labour market, as defined by Act No. 435/2004 Coll., on employment. However, the largest group involves people with physical, mental, psychic, sensory or combined disabilities, and persons at risk of social exclusion, as defined by Act No. 106/2008 Coll., on social services. The social farms also target on the general public (children, youth, adults and seniors) and serve for pedagogical purposes or become a meeting place for the local community (Moudrý et al. 2015).

There are many social farms abroad especially in Western European countries. These farms on the high-level can be found in countries such as the Netherlands, Finland, Norway, Belgium, Great Britain, France, Italy and Germany (Hine et al. 2008).

The aim of social farming is to create new jobs, services, educational activities, and to implement different types of therapies for a wide range of people with a health or social disadvantage by using available agricultural resources at the particular site. In addition, social farming creates and offers commodities same as other agricultural companies.

The farm environment has a beneficial effect on human psyche due to the structured activity with regular daily/seasonal rhythms and a rapidly visible result of work. It mediates contact with nature which can be a source of stimuli, interest and joy for individuals. People also learn responsibility through plant or animal care. There are the following studies that looked at the positive effects of a social farm on individual target groups such as people with mental disorders, drug addicts or addicted in another way, people with mental, health or combined disabilities.

For example, according to the study by Jan Hassin conducted in the Netherlands to evaluate the benefits of a social farm to young people with raising problems, it has become clear that thanks to the work and stay program the parents’ relationship with these young people improves as well as spending of their leisure time, moreover, their self-confidence and self-acceptance increased (Elings 2012). The book Pillen, praten en bewegen describes that physical activity assists to improve mental health. Fresh air exercise helps people with mental disorders (Van der Stel, 2005 by Elings 2012). According to the study by the University of Essex in the UK, the time spent engaging in various farming activities across different target groups significantly reduces feelings of anger, confusion, depression, tension and fatigue while it helps them to feel better (Hine 2008). In the Netherlands, the quality of care and life of people with dementia were in the study compared to traditional nursing homes, small-scale living facilities and green care farms. It has been proved that a social farm is a valuable alternative to traditional facilities (Boer et al. 2017).

From a general point of view, we can say that social farming benefits society and fits into the concept of sustainable development. It can complement well with ecological farming. As demonstrated by Hassink (2006), European farmers dealing with social farming are also farmers who are involved in the environmental protection, leisure and educational events.

In the Czech Republic, there are 27 farms and therapeutic gardens, which claim to use the concept of social farming. Among them is a farm Biostatek whose leadership through participation in the international project M.A.I.E. brought the concept of social farming into the Czech Republic. Other farm operators, who are social farms today, were doing same work without realizing that it is a concept of social farming and are now discovering the possibilities that can bring them to be in this category. With the intention of starting a social farm, the Sociální farma, s.r.o. and farm Kálal, z.s. have been established.

Most of these farms in the Czech Republic, in addition to social farming, are also involved in other activities such as ecological or biodynamic agriculture (Malonty, a. s., Svobodný statek na soutoku etc.) or environmental education, upbringing and raising (e.g. Toulcův dvůr, Biostatek). Some of them do not exactly match the definition of social farming. The social farm is to be located in the countryside, however, Toulcův dvůr or Lipka – school facility for environmental education,
are located in the cities. Zahrady u splavu, Terapeutická zeleninová zahrada, Prevalco, o.s. and Lipka are therapeutic gardens. Svobodný statek na soutoku, o.p.s. is very specific mainly as it follows Camphill Česke Kopisty which is part of the Camphill community. Usedlost Nad Prameny, Farma Wenet broumov, z.s., Farma Kářal, z.s. also run agrotourism. The common feature of social farms in the Czech Republic is the fact that the operator is a non-governmental non-profit organization. Another common feature is participation in the environmental education, upbringing and raising of public awareness.

In the Czech Republic, people with health or social disadvantage are entitled to get a protected job. The employer receives a contribution for the protected job from the Labour Office which also contributes 75% of the actual expenditure on wages and salaries including social security contributions and state employment policy and public health insurance, but not more than 8 800 CZK. However, this contribution will be received only by an employer who employs more than 50% of the total number of people with health or social disadvantage.

Care Farming UK is a professional charitable company accountable to its members, and is led by care farmers and care farming supporters. There are approximately 250 care farms in the UK and another 35 in the Republic of Ireland at this moment. Majority of care farms, counting also prospective care farms, are usually commercial farm businesses, charities, Community Interest Companies (CICs) (all at 24%), or charitable companies limited by guarantee (22%). Subsequently, 13% are Social Enterprises (SE), 9% private limited companies and 18% are oriented towards other organisational arrangements, namely: sole trading, education centres, therapeutic communities, community groups, independent provident societies etc. The farms count, although it varies, 35 attending clients per week on an average. Services for the clients, provided by most of the UK Care Farms, include people with learning difficulties (93% of care farms), autism spectrum disorders (86%), adults with mental illhealth (70%), people with physical disabilities (53%) and young people excluded from school or with behavioural issues (50%). Care farms in the UK also prepare day sessions for their clients which usually cost around £52. Sessions happen regularly between 1-3 times a week, for 8 months to a year (Care Farming in the UK and Ireland 2017).

**MATERIAL AND METHODS**

**Description social farming in Czech Republic and Great Britain**

We used the own field survey in this study to describe the current state of social farming in the Czech Republic. The main source of information about the Czech social farms was acquired via the excursion survey which was part of the accredited course of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports - Introduction to Social Farming, and a three-day educational stay in POMOC Týn nad Vltavou z.s. with a visit to the apple orchard in Temelín and the composting plant JAROŠOVICE, s.r.o., operated by SoFar. We also visited Farma Ledce, which employs mentally disabled people, and Toulcův Dvůr, oriented towards people with disabilities.

There have been many interviews with job assistants, social workers, workers in social services, managers of the organization and the users of social services and social farming. We used semi-standardized interviews questioning the strengths and weaknesses of social agriculture, moreover, the strengths and weaknesses of their farms and perceived opportunities and threats.

British farms were selected by comparison with the Czech farm. The reason for this choice was the long tradition, the large representation of social farms in the UK and their precise mapping by Care Farming UK. About two hundred farms were approached by e-mail. Everyone was asked the same questions about the strengths and weaknesses of their farm and perceived opportunities and threats. Of the aforementioned number of farms, eleven respondents replied, the remaining respondents either did not respond, referred to the Care Farming UK website, or did not want to answer as they were no longer concerned with social farming. We made a comprehensive view of social farms and SoFar in the UK from the data obtained.

A SWOT analysis has been used to evaluate data from the semi-standardized interviews and internet questionnaire.
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

On the Czech side were mentioned as strengths benefits for society as a whole (prevention of criminal phenomena etc.), followed by improving the quality of life of disabled persons or socially disadvantaged, since it improves the mental and physical health of disadvantaged people. Also, thanks to SoFar, health and socially disadvantaged people can get new experience and skills which they could not obtain anywhere else. Furthermore, diversification of farms income, although this diversification is currently not entirely clear, positive contribution to the local community in the form of employment of disabled or socially disadvantaged people from the surrounding area, positive effects on the quality of life of the disabled person's whole family as it offers services directly at the place where the person resides, farm products etc.

Weaknesses are scattered activities, an insufficient salary, burnout syndrome and psychological difficulty in the work of social workers, workers in social services and work assistants, furthermore, the reduced work performance of employees (clients) as a result of their disability and a risk of an accident at work and indifference towards the farming.

Opportunities include the social farming support by the Ministry of Agriculture of the Czech Republic, forthcoming social enterprise act, social farming program PGRLF, as, Rural Development Program 2014–2020, the Employment Operational Program, the Integrated Regional Operational Programme (IROP), substitute payments.

Threats can be seen as a lack of employees (clients), adverse weather, government's unwillingness to help develop social farming, lack of product and service as well as a trust in solidarity and appreciation of the role of the entity and its contribution to society.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STRENGTHS</th>
<th>WEAKNESSES</th>
<th>OPPORTUNITIES</th>
<th>THREATS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Diversification of farm activities</td>
<td>Scattered activities</td>
<td>Ministry of Agriculture of the CZ</td>
<td>Lack of employees (clients)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contribution to the society</td>
<td>Burnout syndrome</td>
<td>Social farming program PGRLF, a.s.</td>
<td>Adverse weather</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of client’s life improvement</td>
<td>Psychological difficulty</td>
<td>Rural Development Program 2014-2020</td>
<td>Lack of product and service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive contribution to the local community</td>
<td>Insufficient salary</td>
<td>Sale of farm products</td>
<td>Government's unwillingness to help develop social farming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The quality of life of the disabled person's whole family</td>
<td>Risk of an accident</td>
<td>Employment Operational Program</td>
<td>Lack of appreciation of the SoFar role</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Indifference towards a farming</td>
<td>Integrated Regional Operational Programme</td>
<td>Adverse weather</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Complicated administration</td>
<td>Substitute payments</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Many factors in the SWOT analyses of the British side did not differ from those of Czech. This can be clearly seen in strengths and weaknesses. The opportunities and some of the threats were more pronounced. Among the opportunities, we can name project grants as well as volunteers willing to work on a farm. The threats mentioned in the questionnaire were the lack of clients, inadequate financial support from the state, constantly changing legislation, UK’s quitting the membership of European Union, as a leaving from the EU may mean the absence of some grants, complicated
negotiations with the authorities and a lack of appreciation of the role of the entity and its contribution for the society.

The mentioned weaknesses were the weather dependence, the possibility of unsuitable work on the farm for every person, the low salary evaluation of employees who work with people with health and social disadvantage and the cost of providing security aids for them.

Table 2 SWOT analysis social farming in Great Britain

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STRENGTHS</th>
<th>WEAKNESSES</th>
<th>OPPORTUNITIES</th>
<th>THREATS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Diversification of farm activities</td>
<td>Burnout syndrome</td>
<td>Support for mental health that appears to be worsening in the UK</td>
<td>Lack of employees (clients)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contribution to the society</td>
<td>Psychological difficulty</td>
<td>Project grants</td>
<td>Adverse weather</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of client’s life improvement</td>
<td>Scattered activities</td>
<td>Volunteers</td>
<td>Lack of product and service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive contribution to the local community</td>
<td>Risk of an accident</td>
<td></td>
<td>Inadequate financial support from the state</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Membership in Care Farming UK organization</td>
<td>Indifference towards a farming</td>
<td></td>
<td>Changing legislation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farm products</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Leaving UK from European Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of appreciation of the role SoFar</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CONCLUSION

SWOT analyses of the Czech and British social farms results in more similarities than differences. Both SWOT analyses show that a strength is a contribution to the society, but at the same time it can be said that the Czech and British farmers feel a lack of appreciation of their work by the wider public. Among the weaknesses on both the British and the Czech side, there is an insufficient salary assessment of workers who help people with a health or social disadvantage. Logically resulting is a uniformly perceived threat which is the dependence on the weather.

For a comparison with the Czech farm, a British farm was chosen which picture is drawn from a questionnaire survey. It is clear from the fact that farmers find the benefits for society since it improves the mental and physical health of disadvantaged people. SoFar positively affects the quality of life of the whole family of a disabled person as it offers services directly at the place where the person resides. Also, thanks to SoFar, health and socially disadvantaged people can get new experience and skills which they could not obtain anywhere else.

Social farms in the UK have the advantage of an established Care Farming UK organization and a greater awareness of social farming, although there is a lack of appreciation of the farms activities. For social farming in the Czech Republic, it might be an inspiration to found an organization to help individual social farms in their development or to give instructions for those interested in social farming. It could simplify the administration regarding the acceptance of persons with health or social disadvantage in social farms, which is today a significant weakness of Czech social farming, and to increase overall awareness of the Czech society about the social aspect that agriculture can have. Moreover, volunteering should not be neglected as the source of farm development in the Czech Republic, which is positively reported by British farms.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
The research was financially supported by the project IGA_FA_IP_2017/016 Social farming and its future in the Czech Republic.

REFERENCES


