

Case Study

(Em)powering women through energy communities (Greece)



Improving farmers' wellbeing through social innovation



This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 101000797.



FARMWELL!

Discover an inspiring true story of resilience and innovation as **three women's groups tackle shared challenges, transforming their lives and communities**. These groups seek to empower women, bridging the gender gap in decision-making, resources, and training within farming. Their collective quest revolves around a single question: How can the glass ceiling be shattered, giving voice and visibility to women in farming? This story unfolds with a focus on empowering women farmers and enhancing their well-being through three remarkable social innovations: (1) WEnCoop: Europe's pioneering women's energy community fostering equality in the energy sector (2) Women in Olive Oil (WIOO) Greece: A network amplifying women's voices in the olive oil industry and (3) The Women's Agricultural Cooperative of Agios Antonios: Empowering rural women through tradition and local product creation.

How do women's energy communities contribute to **gender equality**?

What role does the olive oil industry play in **empowering women**?

How does **tradition, local product creation, and rural empowerment** intersect in the Women's Agricultural Cooperative of Agios Antonios?

In what ways can initiatives like women's renewable energy communities **address energy poverty and social inclusion** within the CAP Strategic Plans and beyond?



Explore how these innovations intersect through the FARMWELL project, addressing gender disparities and energy poverty. Discover how they collectively enhance well-being and drive social change.

GET INSPIRED!

Read the **longer version** of the FARMWELL case study [here](#)!

Check out **other exciting social innovation** cases [here](#)!



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The story of the power of women's cooperatives





Three women's groups facing similar challenges that influence their overall wellbeing, found innovative ways to inspire women to co-operate and co-create knowledge, incomes, identity and power. Faced with remarkable power imbalances, which is manifested in different arenas, women are not always included in the decision-making process of their farms, are not considered 'real' farmers-entrepreneurs, and have less access to resources and training.



But albeit the challenges they take up inspiring and effective social innovations answering to one common question: **How to break the glass ceiling and give visibility & voice to women farmers and women in farming communities?** This story is about: **How to (em)power women farmers and ultimately improve their wellbeing.** Three inspiring social innovations have been identified to respond to these questions and challenges:

WEnCoop is the first women's energy community in Greece and in Europe - consisting of 66 women entrepreneurs - that encourages equal participation of women in the energy sector. WEnCoop is a great example of a collective energy action that involves citizens' participation in the energy system. Also, WEnCoop valorise its knowledge and cultural assets to improve the social relations and social innovation among farmers.

Highlights of the most innovative aspects of WEnCoop

-  WEnCoop is an initiative with limited risks and anxieties, that requires skills easily achieved by women.
-  WEnCoop contributes to both energy transition and empower women farmers, women in rural areas and women entrepreneurs.
-  One of the most innovative aspects of this solution is the business model of co-production and consumption of energy.
-  New linkages at local level towards a democratised energy sector are created.

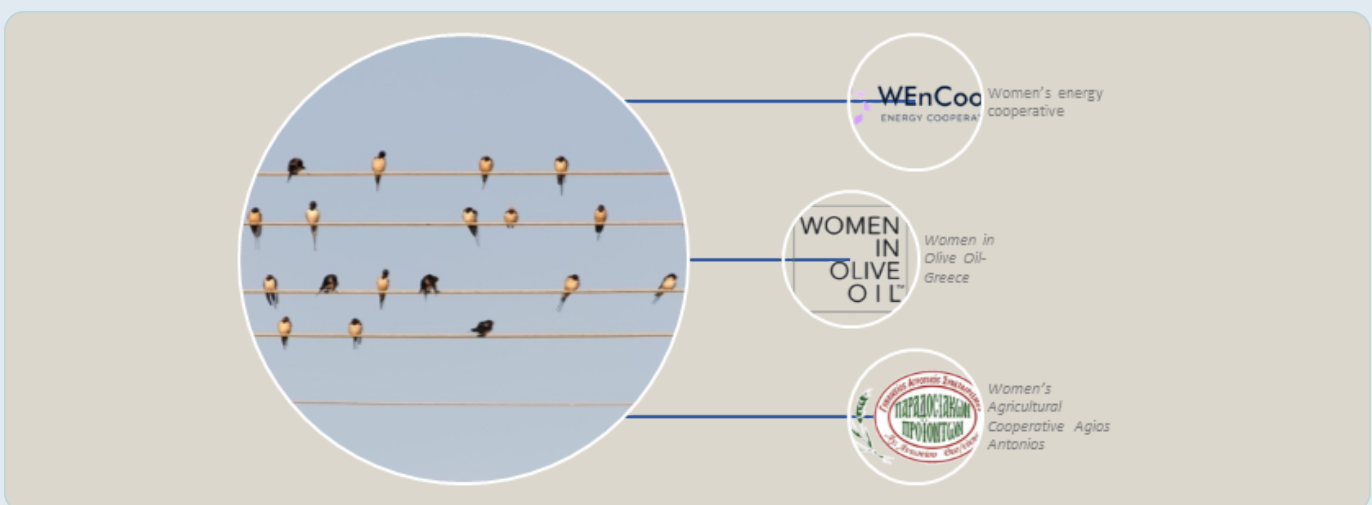
Women in Olive Oil (WIOO) Greece is an informal group of women working on a voluntarily basis in the framework of social economy within the wider global WIOO network. Women who have olive trees, agronomists, processors, olive oil producers, nutrition scientists share a common interest and love for olive oil as well as their life stories within an extremely competitive global environment. They try to highlight the uniqueness and authenticity of their olive products but also the potential of women's entrepreneurship. This network gives women a voice and a forum in which to articulate the challenge they face but also the opportunities ahead.

The goal of the Women in Olive Oil Cooperation

WIOO summarises its goal as “contributing to individual and societal advancement of women through the common link of olive oil”. More specifically:

- Empowering women to inspire positive changes worldwide.
 - Getting to know each other better.
 - Share ideas and vision for a better life.
 - Offer economic opportunities.
 - Develop skills.
- Access to knowledge, innovation and training.

In the mountainous village, with less than 700 inhabitants, **Agios Antonios in Northern Greece**, a group of women run a **Women's Agricultural Cooperative** with great success. The aim of the cooperative is to empower rural women, strengthen their family income and identity, develop the village, preserve and spread tradition through the production of local products. The cooperative produces traditional handmade, high-quality products with recipes that reflect their cultural heritage, while at the same time empowering farm women and revitalising the village.



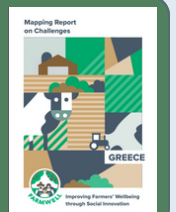
The three social innovations found each other and connected through the FARMWELL project at the same time addressing both the challenge of empowering women and the challenge of energy poverty through the concept of ‘women’s energy communities’.

In line with the challenge of energy poverty - that leads to high costs of agriculture, high cost of everyday living in a rural area, high stress and risk - **the concept of energy community stands** as a new business model (embedded in the values of social economy), where citizens (in our case women) jointly own and democratically control resources and energy efficiency. Energy communities ‘charge’ farmers emotionally and socially, (em)power them by building a community based on solidarity. A women’s energy community empowers women farmers and provides a sense of identity and achievement, self-completion, and overall wellbeing. Gaining more expertise and becoming more skilled on the use of renewable energy sources farm women's understanding on climate and energy issues, their energy literacy, and skills, is sought to strengthen their professional identity and improve their visibility in the energy sector and their social wellbeing in rural areas. The takeaway message was that “it takes more than one swallow to make a summer” - in other words, there is need for cooperation and diverse initiatives to break the glass ceiling and give visibility & voice to women farmers and women in farming communities

The story of FARMWELL creating linkages between the women’s cooperatives

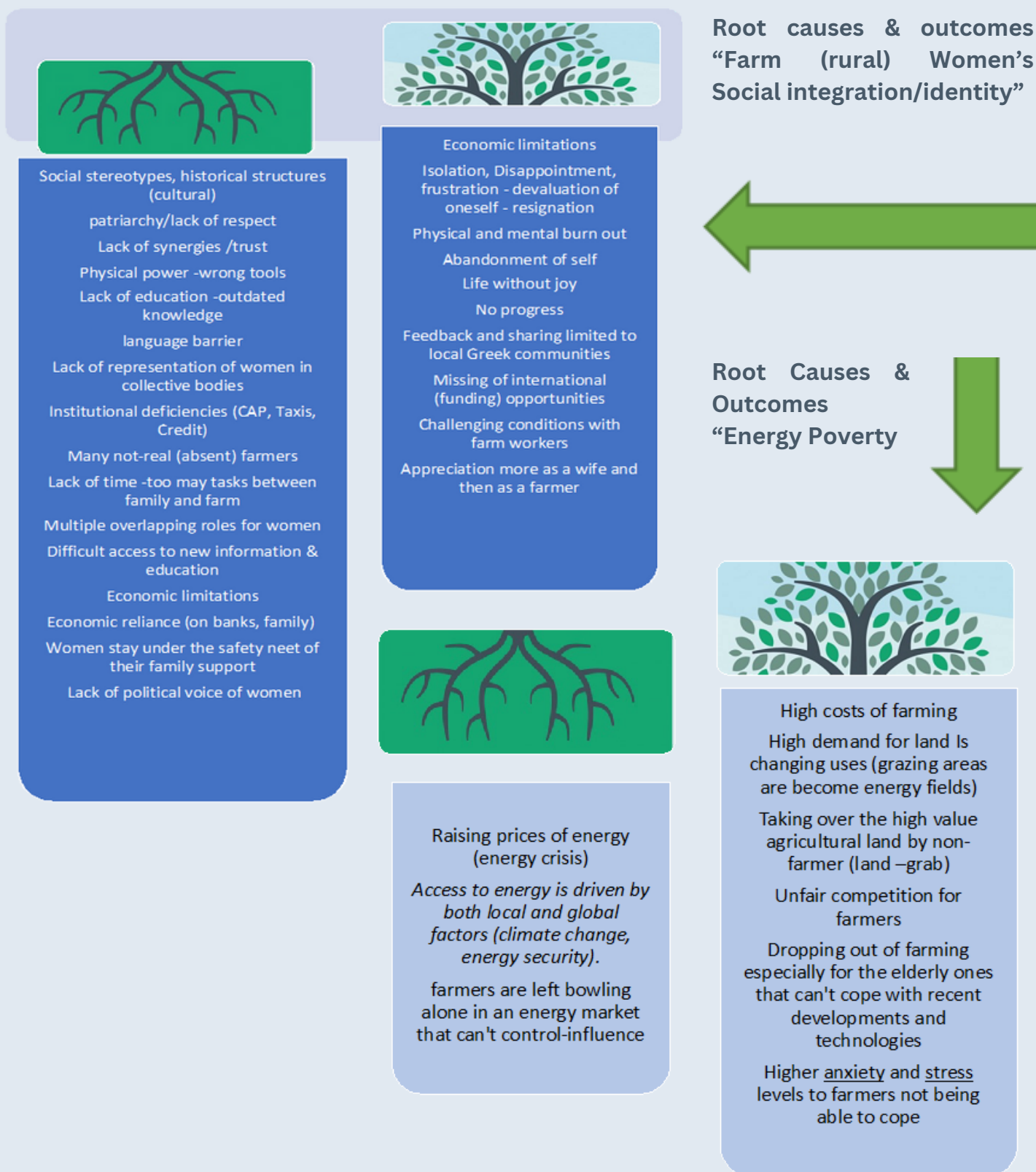
The FARMWELL process started with the mapping exercise for challenges. One of the challenges identified was the hidden and undervalued dynamic and contribution of women in agriculture and in rural areas with consequences leading to lack of their social integration. Along with this challenge, the challenge of ‘energy poverty’ has been identified, that became even more prominent in the light of the recent energy crisis. The latter challenge relates to the economic and social sustainability of rural areas and overall wellbeing of farmers as it poses great risk and anxiety to the maintenance of farming and living conditions of the farm family

Read the Greek Mapping Report of challenges of the FARMWELL project, or the extract on the challenge of ‘Women’s social integration and identity’ and ‘Energy poverty’



The Greek partners (Aristotle University of Thessaloniki & STEVIA-Hellas Cooperative) set up **two practice groups** to engage two specific groups of farmers, one at regional level and one at national level. One of the groups of farmers selected was a female group working with olive oil (producers, agronomists, distributors, nutritionists etc.), which is an informal community (part of an international network) called “Women in Olive Oil (WIOO) Greece”. The second group was the Stevia Hellas Coop presented in another case study.

The practice group meetings with female farmers aimed to elaborate **on root causes and outcomes** of challenges. The root causes for both challenges (energy poverty and gender imbalances) are a constellation of personal, institutional, social factors that create impact to both farmers (male and female) but also to their families and the overall rural society (see the following visualisations).



The next step was **to identify opportunities and solutions** that address the identified challenges. For energy poverty social innovations do emerge, especially after the recent legislation at EU and national level towards a more democratic, decentralised energy system, which increasingly utilises Renewable Energy Sources and energy saving technologies and offering a “window” of opportunity to farmers to change their practices and adapt to the challenges, raising their income and addressing energy poverty effectively. The three most relevant social innovations identified were Women in Olive Oil-Greece, an informal group of women with olive trees and olive oil production, the Women’s Agricultural Cooperative Agios Antonios, producing local-artisanal food and the “broad-based” Women’s energy cooperative (WEnCoop), with a great percentage of women farmers members, were identified as social innovations (Sis) co-creating power; metaphorically but also literally!



These three SIs crossed their paths during the **piloting of the energy community**. The need to make these innovations more accessible in response to the identified challenges was evident. In the pilot, FARMWELL tried to bring the “energy communities” social innovation closer to farmers, especially focusing on members of farmer’s agricultural cooperatives and women farmers. FARMWELL piloted the Women’s EnCoop with participants from the Women in Olive Oil Greece, while involving also the Women’s agricultural cooperative Agios Antonios.

In an intensive two-day event women gained knowledge on practical information on how to create an energy community, gained hands-on experience through peer-to-peer learning and knowledge sharing amongst them, not at least enjoyed themselves and networked with other women.

In order to understand the potential impact of WOOI engaging in a renewable energy community, FARMWELL used the forecasting social return on investment (SROI) methodology. A range of wellbeing impacts over a forward looking 5-year benefit period (2022-27) were generated for members of the Women in Olive Oil group (120) – 50% of whom are farmers – and an estimated 156 members of wider communities.



364% return on investment:

[Check out](#) how the SROI method works!

Initiatives such as women’s renewable energy community could be supported under the CAP Strategic Plans (with particular in the context of social inclusion) - including the LEADER/CLLD and smart / energy villages concepts and beyond..]

Despite the fact that for the first time, a legislative framework permits citizen’s participation in the energy system a number of key policy issues refer to:

- the lack of incentives for farmers,
- the lack of representation of women within energy communities,
- lack of available land for investments for the energy community,
- the conflicts between local farmers and external investors,
- lack of public awareness on the multiple benefits of an energy (democracy) community and the high competitiveness between small and big “players” in the energy market.



Targeted policy programmes and measures should help to overcome such challenges



FIND OUT MORE!

Check out the full case study: [here!](#)

Check out the FARMWELL Toolbox for more information & inspiration [here!](#)

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