

Case Study

Humus Job

(Italy)



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!

Irregular Work- Humus Job

In recent decades, the Italian agri-food sector has grappled with two significant global trends: Firstly, the sector's increased participation in global markets has necessitated changes in strategies to stay competitive, with a focus on reducing production (including labour) costs. Secondly, there has been a growing dependence on migrant labour, particularly during the economic crisis of 2008-2013. As a consequence, the use of irregular workers in agriculture has become widespread, posing challenges for both farmers and workers, the latter facing vulnerable positions, low wages, and poor living conditions. Humus Job is a social innovation that offers a way for farmers to recruit workers legally, reduce labor costs, and improve mental and social wellbeing for both farm owners and workers while promoting social acceptance of migrants in society.

Why irregular work became widespread in Italy in the past years?

What are the challenges posed by irregular work in agriculture for both farm owners and farm workers?

What is the significance of the Humus Job social innovation in tackling irregular work?

What is the social impact of Humus Job as assessed through the Social Return on Investment (SROI) analysis?



GET INSPIRED!

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

Watch the **'Reap what you saw'** short documentary [here!](#)

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



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The story of Humus Job

In recent decades, two global phenomena have profoundly influenced the Italian agri-food sector. Firstly, the participation of agri-food in global markets, which required companies operating in the sector to change or at least adapt their strategies to respond to increased competition. Cutting production costs has become a structural practice of the agricultural system, often a compromise reached by farmers to support company competitiveness.



Secondly, a growing dependence of the sector on the supply of migrant labour. Since the 1980s, foreign workers have constituted an increasingly large pool of the labour force. This situation has been further aggravated in the years of the economic crisis, between 2008 and 2013, during which the migrant workforce- both from the EU and from third countries - has almost equalled the Italian one. Migrants, who have mostly entered the Italian territory illegally, often end up feeding the ranks of the most vulnerable part of the society, which makes them easily blackmailed.

This has translated in a widespread use of irregular workers in agriculture, which represents a social challenge for both farmers (producers) and workers. The former frequently complain about their weak position and low-bargaining power along the agri-food chain, which required them to lower the production costs, starting from reducing those linked to workforce. The latter face the same wellbeing issues, based on the awareness that they need to accept to work under irregular conditions because of their vulnerable position and consequent have low salaries that lead to the acceptance of degraded living conditions and poor sanitary conditions. In this regard, the emergency related to COVID-19, brought out the difficulty to recruit seasonal workers in agriculture and the strong relevance of the contribution of foreign workers in this sense. The pandemic also highlighted the related critical issues, like poor living conditions and human rights violation of workers.

In the context of the objectives of FARMWELL - to improve farmers' mental, physical and social wellbeing through social innovation - the Italian team ([Coldiretti](#) and [University of Pisa](#)) decided **to focus on the phenomenon of the pressing challenge of irregular work in agriculture that seriously impacts on farmers' wellbeing.**

Read the [Italian Mapping Report](#) of challenges of the FARMWELL project



As the challenge, the solution is also complex and necessarily involves different actors: from the public institutions responsible for various different services that contribute to overcoming the problem, to the actors along the food supply chain, including large-scale retailers, employment centres, farmers, farmers' association, consumers.



Due to the complexity of the problem, the solutions detected during the meetings and the exchanges with stakeholders – within the so-called FARMWELL “practice group” - are also wide-ranging. Some of these are based on the promotion of systems, which allow to legally recruit workforce, as an alternative of the illegal intermediaries which farmers would normally avail of. This is the case with those databases and platforms that aim to link labour supply and demand (e.g. [Job in Country](#)), socio-economic projects with the aim to provide job placement’s opportunities to migrants or vulnerable people (e.g. [X-Farm Agricoltura prossima](#)), job-sharing initiatives wherein local farmers recruit and employ a few workers in rotation on their own farms throughout the year, as the social innovation [Humus Job](#).

Check out the FARMWELL social innovation database [here!](#)

Among the solutions, Humus Job was highlighted as a social innovation that offers not only promotion but a specific solution for farmers to recruit workers regularly and the opportunity for workers to have more stable jobs, managing a contractual network among farmers based on the sharing (and thus reducing) of the costs for employment and other costs. This helps farmers overcoming one of the obstacles, which pushes them into irregular employment, namely the high production costs to survive in an increasingly competitive market.

Humus Job as a social innovation

Humus Job not only contributes to legal work on farms but also helps:

- 💡 **overcome the mental stress** coming from the high cost of labour for farm owners;
- 💡 **avoid the mental stress** caused by the daily struggle to find trained workers for farm owners;
- 💡 **overcome the social isolation**, boosting the solidarity and the ability for farmers and farm workers to work together;
- 💡 **create for farm workers long-lasting regular contracts**, which help them to have a dignified life;
- 💡 **the social acceptance of migrant workers** and promotes their integration into society.

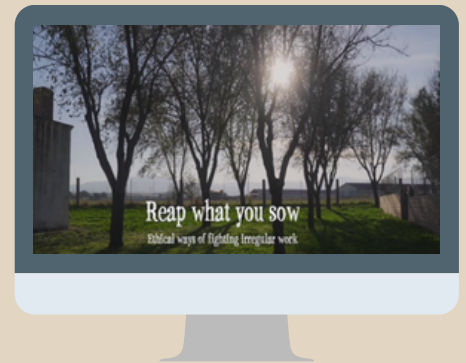
The story of FARMWELL working with Humus Job

During the FARMWELL project, farmers, farm workers, and experts have been engaged in a peer-to-peer exchange where both the challenge of irregular use of workforce in agriculture, and possible solutions have been explored. During the FARMWELL practice group meeting - that aimed at identifying solutions for the challenge of irregular work - the Italian team presented Humus Job, allowing the attendants to directly meet representatives of this social innovation.



Reap What You Sow - Ethical ways of fighting irregular work

Labor exploitation practices harm farmers and farm workers. The episode of the Farm Well video series talks about potential solutions for farmers and farmworkers from innovative organisations all over Italy. The short documentary presents the challenge of irregular work, the reasons behind it and two inspiring solutions that help overcome these challenges.



[Watch the short documentary!](#)

The pilot action, that aimed to better understand the challenge bringing the stakeholders in a territory where the use of irregular work is highly widespread; as well as to bring the social innovation practice closer to farmers and farm workers, through allowing participants to learn more through peer-to-peer exchange about the Humus Job social innovation.



The social impact of Humus Job has been assessed through the Social Return on Investment (SROI) analysis. The SROI found that a range of wellbeing impacts over a 4-year benefit period (2018-22) was generated for 40 farmers and 90 farm workers. The results were categorised into four impact pathways, and it was found that social and community wellbeing had the greatest impact on value generation and positive outcomes. The SROI shows that each euro invested in this social innovation resulted in 2.56 euro benefit.

Over half of the outcome benefits (58% of the total) are derived from distinct improvements in Social and Community Wellbeing for farmers and farmworkers. Two significant benefits arise from these outcomes, primarily consisting of gaining acceptance and respect from farmers in the network and local community farm workers.



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

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

As far as relevant policies are concerned, the opportunity to tackle irregular work is also linked to one of the main novelties introduced by the new CAP, i.e. the social conditionality. The phenomenon of the use of irregular work in agriculture is so widespread and the severity of the consequences on human being is so considerable, that the new approved CAP establishes that subsidies to farmers provided through eco-schemes (part of direct payments, the so called first pillar, linked to ecological agricultural practices) are bound by respect for workers' rights too.

For this, during the pilot, beside introducing and discussing the social innovation, also the EU CAP social conditionality has been illustrated to participants, raising their attention on a mandatory requirement they must comply with in order to receive CAP payments. It has been argued that addressing issues around irregular work can largely contribute to fulfilling the requirements towards social conditionality within the CAP.



FIND OUT MORE!

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

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

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