

Case Study

Farmers taking charge in the energy crisis: Myrmidones Energy Community (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!

Myrmidones Energy Community

Being a farmer today is rather stressful, especially with climate change effects and high energy prices. Agriculture has a strong connection with energy consumption since most of the cultivations consume a lot of energy (especially for irrigation, drying). This case study is about how to overcome these energy-related challenges, through the cooperation of farmers. The case study describes the story of Stevia Hellas a local farmers' cooperative of stevia growers that joined forces in 2011 and recently further reinforced their cooperation through setting up the Myrmidones energy cooperative to tackle the new challenge of the energy crisis and rising energy prices.

How the cooperative turned its attention to **setting up an energy community**?

How FARMWELL helped **farming cooperatives to learn** from Myrmidones?

What **economic & wellbeing benefits** the cooperation brought to its members?

What should be done **to enable a more supportive framework** for farmers' energy cooperatives?



GET INSPIRED!

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

Watch the '(Em)power Up' short documentary [here](#)!

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



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The story of the Myrmidones Energy Community

Being a farmer today is rather stressful, especially with climate change effects and high energy prices. Agriculture has a strong connection with energy consumption since mechanical and electrical energy and all direct and indirect energy needs are connected with high productivity. On the other hand, EU promotes collaborative schemes across Europe, as the future model of farming, thus most of our farmers are looking for cooperative models.



In Greek mythology, the Myrmidons (or Myrmidones; Ancient Greek: Μυρμιδόνες) were an ancient Thessalian Greek tribe. In Homer's Iliad, the Myrmidons were the soldiers commanded by Achilles and were as fierce and hardy as ants, and intensely loyal to their leader. Ants are supposed to be hard workers and work in collective forms/groups. This energy community is formed originally by Stevia Hellas Coop plant growers. Stevia Hellas is the farming partner organisation of FARMWELL in Greece. Members of the stevia cooperative used to be tobacco growers that turned to alternative solutions to face the decline of their crop in Greece hence their turn to the crop of stevia. They organised themselves during 2011 within a farmers' cooperative to achieve economies of scale and deal with this new product (stevia).

Some years later, in 2020 a small group (5-6 people) of the farmers of the “Stevia Hellas Coop” had to tackle yet another challenge faced in their lives: the rising prices of energy that have raised even more the costs of farming and has led to higher anxiety and stress levels (especially those from small family farms). Since the hard-working group of farmers in Lamia-Central Greece had already the experience of working together in Stevia Hellas Coop; they decided to establish another socially innovative cooperative, with other rural dwellers and co-produce their own energy. The “Myrmidones” energy community was formed.



(Em)power Up - Farmers taking charge in the energy crisis

The Myrmidones energy coop is featured in an inspiring short film created by FARMWELL partner, Dutch Company New Heroes. The film presented the initiative through the farmers' eyes exploring the main benefits that the community has brought to its members



“When you are a farmer, you need to be resilient and flexible especially when confronted with environmental challenges and nowadays with the energy crisis” – tells Panos, a founding member farmer of the energy coop in the video.

Thanasis the president of Myrmidones Energy Coop advocates on “the shared vision that goes beyond reducing energy poverty, it builds on synergies for a constellation of challenges farmers face today. In the energy cooperative we co-produce energy, we co-create, we co-manage in a democratic way.”

[Watch the short documentary!](#)

Through working closely with farmers of Stevia Hellas in FARMWELL, **the challenges of rising energy costs, related economic pressure & stress and energy poverty in farming have gradually been highlighted as important challenges that FARMWELL in the Greek context was requested to deal with.** The energy crisis currently poses great risk for the maintenance of farming and living conditions of the farm family, and consequently has a strong negative impact on farmers economic and social wellbeing (among others causing anxiety).

Highlight of the the most inspiring aspects of the Myrmidones Energy Community social innovation



New business model (embedded in the values of social economy) that is introduced, where citizens (in our case farmers) jointly own and democratically control resources and energy efficiency;



It is not only about making money from energy production, it is not just making new investments but it's a **bottom-up effort of farmers and connecting different stakeholders** with different levels of trust;



Example of how to decentralise-democratise the energy system and raise awareness and educate farmers and local communities.

The case study describes the story of how the Greek team of FARMWELL worked closely with farmers to enable learning and transferring practices between farming groups on how to establish and operate energy communities in farming.



The story of FARMWELL working with Myrmidones

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 (at regional level) was the “STEVIA Hellas Coop-agricultural cooperative” located in Central Greece and the other 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 FARMWELL process started with the mapping exercise for challenges. The challenge raised by the energy crisis was not originally identified as one of the main challenges, but recent critical events on the energy sector shifted the project partners – especially that of Aristotle University of Thessaloniki - attention towards the challenge of ‘energy poverty’. Energy poverty is strongly connected with the wellbeing of farmers as it relates to the economic and social sustainability of rural areas and overall wellbeing of farmers posing 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’](#)



Through the engagement of farmers, FARMWELL aimed to understand the root causes of energy poverty. Root causes identified included rising energy prices, dependence on external factors and global trends (climate change, energy security, etc.) and vulnerability of farming businesses and farmers due to these changing circumstances. Such trends have negative impacts on farmers both economically and socially, including high costs of farming, high demand for land to become “energy fields” creating unfair competition and many leaving farming. These stress factors cause a lot of anxiety for farmers and their families.



The next step in the FARMWELL process was to identify opportunities and solutions that address this specific challenge. 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 offering a “window” of opportunity to farmers to change their practices and adapt to the challenges, raising their income and addressing energy poverty effectively.

Two social innovations were identified: the “Myrmidones” energy community that forms the basis of this case study and the “WEnCoop” women’s energy community that along with the Women in Olive Oil Group form the 2nd case study for Greece.

The FARMWELL piloting aimed to bring the energy community closer to other members of farmers’ cooperatives from other rural areas in the country and especially from Evia, a severely hit place from forest fires during last summer that caused several challenges to local farmers. The pilot tried to communicate the wider range of positive effects on farmers’ (and farmers’ families) well-being, the energy community was presented as a scheme that serves contemporary farmers.




[Read more on the Pilot Exchange!](#)

For this case study we collected 3 types of Journey of Social Change (farmers members of Stevia Coop, non-member farmers of the cooperative /rural residents, other stakeholders) and basic data for the use of the Evaluative Social Return on Investment (SROI) tool, which tries to quantify both economic (tangible) and social (intangible) outcomes. All farmers - members of the Myrmidones energy community were interviewed on a basis of an online questionnaire prepared in collaboration of Aristotle University of Thessaloniki and UGLOS team to assess all possible benefits and outcomes of an energy community.

SROI shows that wellbeing impacts over a 2-year benefit period (2020-22) were generated for a range of stakeholders including farmers and farming families (214), cooperative members (257 plus 28 business members) and wider local community members/consumers (556). Some outcomes (such as empowerment) related specifically to 114 female cooperative members, of which 68 are farmers, other outcomes relate to all cooperative members, and/or to those living in the wider community.

Almost half (49%) of the value generated by the project can be categorised as ‘social and community’ benefits, including, for example, improved reputations of farmers and sense of trust among community members, increased awareness of networking opportunities, greater involvement in community activities and increased prominence of female farmers in the agricultural community. In terms of value, the largest contribution, almost one third (31%), is generated by a widespread ‘improved sense of trust and belonging’ experienced by cooperative members and local residents.



Every euro invested generated (on average) 3.49 euro social, economic and personal wellbeing benefits for farmers and other stakeholders.

Check out how the SROI method works!

In terms of the legal environment, the current laws related to Energy Communities are seen as a barrier to the creation of farmers’ energy communities. As one farmer stated, "The legal framework is complex and confusing, which makes it difficult for us to create our own energy community." A policy or institutional support instrument should address this by simplifying the legal procedures and providing clear guidelines for the creation and operation of energy communities.

Further challenges are linked to the lack of incentives (especially for farmers), the lack of available land for investments for the energy community, the conflicts between local farmers and external - to the community - 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.

The legal framework for farmers’ energy communities needs to be simplified and made steadier and more reliable over time. Targeted support for legal, financial, technical, and aspects of setting up energy cooperatives is needed to allow farmers to invest effort and money in local energy communities, resulting not only in economic but also considerable wellbeing benefits.



FIND OUT MORE!

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

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

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