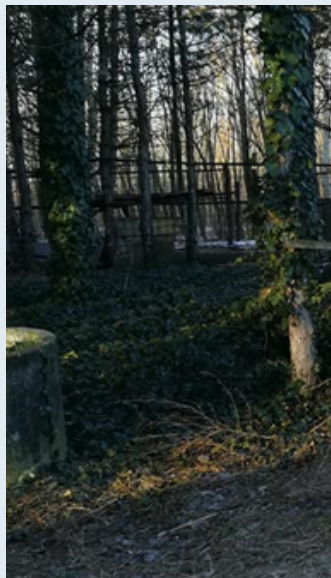


# Case Study

## The Hungarian Social Farm Association & Social Farming (Hungary)



*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!

## Social farming & Social Farm Association

This case study presents the case of **social farming** and **Social Farm Association** in Hungary, and its **impact on the wellbeing of farmers** and the wider rural society. Social farms are proven to have positive impact on farmers in both economic and social terms. However, they are often not as widespread practice as they could be. Firstly, awareness raising is needed among farmers and other social service providers on the benefits that social farms can bring. Secondly, a more favourable legal and support framework is needed to enable the emergence of social farms across Europe. Thirdly, networking is key to learn from each other's practices across Europe and beyond.

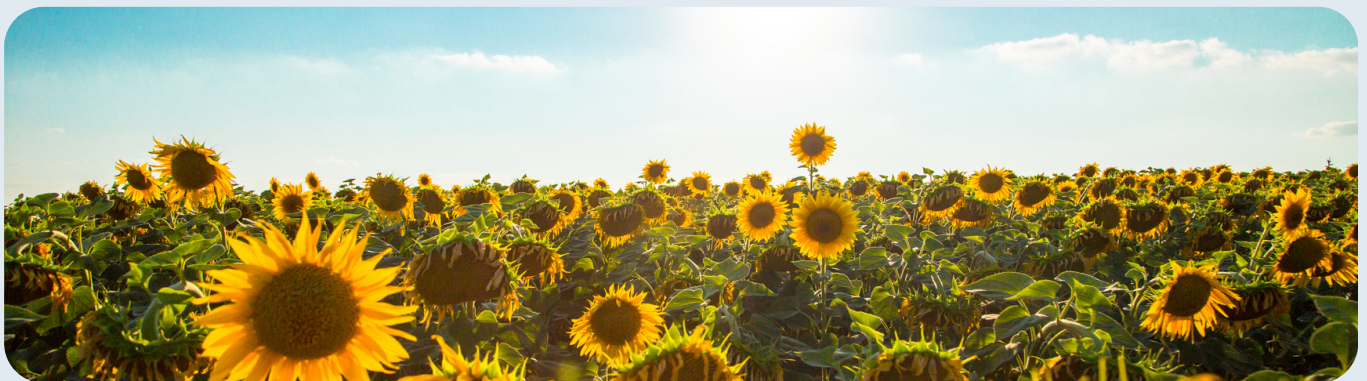
FARMWELL has worked on all of these issues and this case study explains how.

Why is it worthwhile to **start** a social farm?

How social farms are **supported** by the Social Farm Association in Hungary?

How to **make** social farms more **widespread**?

How to make the **legal framework** more favourable for social farms?



## 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 social farming in Hungary

„We are in Miskolc, in the 90s. In one of the alternative schools, the teacher starts a daring pedagogical venture: he created an officially declared integration class, despite the parents' resentment, he enrolled an intellectually disabled child to his class. He sat the "strange" boy at a desk with one of the "spoiled" girls. Half a year later, a "miracle" happened! Without any external pressure, the little girl became a mentor and guardian angel for the little boy (for example she started helping him with his schoolwork). In connection with the positive story, the girl's parents asked how they could express their thanks, how they could help this integration process. The answer was clear! Help us create a foundation that will be able to give this disabled boy a positive future in his adult life.”<sup>1</sup>



The Symbiosis Foundation's social farm started with an instructive story more than 20 years ago. By now, the Foundation has become a national lobby and interest representation organisation for farms, encouraging them to become social farms by employing disabled people. The Hungarian Social Farm Association was established in 2016, and has 38 members. Our aim is to spread the positive, practical - and "not as difficult as it seems" - way of working on social farms. The story shows a good example: working together with mentally disabled people can teach anyone a lot and can change people's behavior in a positive direction.

## What is a social farm and why is it a social innovation?

A social farm is a form of cooperative farming - to achieve social and environmental attitude formation - that carries out agricultural production, processing and provides services with the involvement of disadvantaged people, as well as additional activities, like attitude-shaping towards agricultural activities for a wider group of the society.

The most innovative and powerful part of operating social farms with disabled employees are:





- the method: cooperative agriculture between sectors,
- the process: the way to organise a minimum size social farm, combining agricultural and social elements (sustainable social enterprise), with employees who enjoy working there.

<sup>1</sup> <https://szimbiozis.net/tortenete>

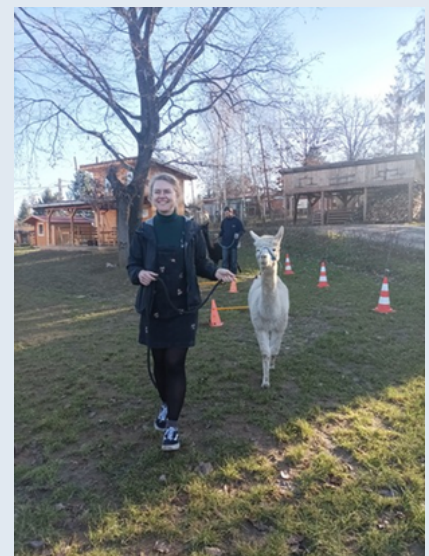


**Social farms are internationally acknowledged sustainable enterprises**, and sustainability provides safety that **contributes to the wellbeing of the workers** on the social farm. The employment of disadvantaged people keeps the farmers in good consciousness that they undertake an outstanding social responsibility every day and contribute to the wellbeing of the employed disadvantaged people on a daily basis.

### **Key target groups of social farm activities are:**

-  social farmers - 'traditional' farmers (knowledge transfer)
-  farmworkers (from an underprivileged, vulnerable group, mainly with reduced capacity to work)
-  farmworkers' family members (real support after the school to reach an independent life)
-  wider society (products with social added value, social responsibility)

Working on a social farm improves the mental wellbeing of the farmer (social responsibility as an inner need, engaged farmworkers, family-like linkages with the employees) and the social wellbeing of the farmer (increase of social capital, new linkages with the underprivileged farmworkers' family members, new linkages with the socially responsible customers, new linkages with other farmers on the market). The social farmer has a prestige in the community because of their commitment, resulting in recognition, donations, customers within the wider community, who appreciate the social added value of the product.



The Hungarian Social Farm Association integrates (1) **farmers committed to social responsibility** and (2) **social/occupational rehabilitation organisations for disabled/disadvantaged people**. In the framework of the association, the members can get help from each other, as well as teach and learn from each other and share their experiences. The association represents a collaborative structure and mutual support among its members. This was also demonstrated during the project: there was always someone to turn to for information and support during the various activities (such as research or events).

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

# The story of FARMWELL with social farms

In the FARMWELL project the Hungarian Social Farm Association aimed to spread not only domestically, but internationally, the message that operating a social farm - as a special way of farming - is not difficult, and it has many advantages not only for the disabled but for each employer and employee who work on the farm.

The **lack of cooperation among farmers as well as other organisations (such as social service providers) has been identified as one of the key challenges** in Hungary. The example of the Social Farm Association not only demonstrates the benefits of the social farm methodology, but also the power of cooperation and farm associations.

Read the [mapping report on the challenges of the Hungarian farmers](#)



We started the FARMWELL project with the determination that **we want to take steps towards creating a more inclusive society**, where the number of social farms and the wellbeing of farmers increase, resulting in a safer and more sustainable workplace. It quickly became clear that the situation in Hungary is not the most advanced in terms of the number of social farms, but there are also many countries where the concept of social farms is much less known. Therefore, participation in the international project offered a great opportunity, not only for spreading the good example of social farms widely, but also for learning from others.

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Our 2-day **pilot programme** was held in January 2023 with 13 participants with farmers who are open-minded about starting to operate their already existing farms as social farms or just interested in this form of working, and how it helps farmers' wellbeing. There were more participants than we expected, from various parts of the country. The main aim of the pilot was to spread the idea of operating a social farm and get to know its benefits not only in financial terms but also for mental health.



Our pilot helped in the process of achieving our goal to encourage as many farmers as possible to start to operate social farms. We hope, that our 2-day pilot programme was an icebreaker for the Hungarian farmers, who were already considering trying to operate their farms as social farms. We tried to be as practical as we could, and the opportunity to meet each other in person helped us a lot.



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Value generation arising from the social farm innovation is fairly evenly spread across four kinds of wellbeing - Social and Community Wellbeing (23%), Relational Wellbeing (20%), Economic Wellbeing (30%) and Personal Wellbeing (25%). Environmental wellbeing also features (1%) through the increased understanding of food production and farming life expected to be generated by the social innovation for the wider community.

**Check out how the SROI method works!**

**Every euro invested generates €2.54**



The economic wellbeing benefits that are forecast to be generated for farmers arise through not only prospective increases in farm revenue as a result of social farming and diversification activities, but also the additional opportunities that are likely to be generated through the social farming innovations – for farmers in the form of learning, innovation and access to training and other sources of knowledge, and for farm workers in being more readily able to join or be retained in the local labour market.

Despite the inherent social focus of this innovation, the potential for it to improve the lives of farmers, their families and their workers shows up strongly in the findings – with personal and mental wellbeing impacts in the form of confidence, engagement, purpose and self-esteem helping to confirm the case for investing in social farming as a grassroots innovation to address the challenges around farmer wellbeing.



On the one hand, the FARMWELL process showed the power of social farms in improving both the social wellbeing of farmers as well as benefits generated for the wider society. FARMWELL raised awareness about the social farm methodology among other farmers, with the expectation that more farmers will engage in such activities.

On the other hand, one of the main messages of FARMWELL has been the importance to create favourable legal conditions for social farming. The legal framework for the implementation of the complex model of the social farm is currently not suitable to support this kind of farming in Hungary and in many other countries.

**The key challenges in making the social farm model more widespread in Hungary are related to the:**

- Definition of social farm: Legal incorporation of the social farm's definition
- Recognition of "social farm service" as an agricultural (supplementary) activity
- Recognition of the Social Farm community as a group performing agricultural activities operated by organizations/institutions bringing together social and other vulnerable groups with the involvement of the target group (for example: community of small producers of disadvantaged people with special legal status = rehabilitation farm)
- The solution to the land use and land utilization of the Social Farm community - which creates opportunities for the operation of social farms

**Policymakers should help establish a favourable legal environment to social farms - creating a new system of economic tools** - which in turn benefit both existing farmers and organisations that assist disadvantaged target groups as well as perform other basic social activities.



**FIND OUT MORE!**

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

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

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