

Case Study

Zala Valley Open Farms (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!

The Open Farm Cooperation Model

This case study presents an **inspiring cooperation of small farmers and tourism service providers around the ‘open farm’** and ‘short food supply chain’ methods in Zala Valley in Hungary, supported by the EU’s LEADER initiative. Creating cooperation among farmers is challenging and it takes a long time to build trust among farmers, especially in Central and Eastern European countries, where the willingness of farmers to cooperate is traditionally low.

Open farm network is a **socially innovative cooperation model**, as it not only helped building new cooperation among individual farmers and other local professionals, but also brought local producers, local service providers and production methods closer to consumers.

How did it all **start**?

How has the cooperation been **sustained** over the years?

What support the local **LEADER** Local Action Group (LAG) provided?

What **benefits** the open farm cooperation brought to its members?

What did **FARMWELL** do to bring this social innovation closer to farmers?



This short case study provides answers to the questions above. It is **for LEADER LAGs , farming organisations and short food supply chain organisers** who would like to induce similar cooperation among local farmers. It is **for farmers** who would like to set up local cooperation or experiment with an open farm network. It is also for all those interested in the open farm model, supporting local short food supply chains and care about farmers’ wellbeing.

GET INSPIRED!

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

Watch the ‘**Open up**’ short documentary [here!](#)

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



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The story of the Open Farms cooperation

The Zala River valley is one of the economically less developed inner peripheries of Western Transdanubia with small villages and beautiful natural features, gentle hills and vast forests. The LEADER community (Zala Thermal Valley Association) has long been committed to help local producers and encourage the consumption of local products. Years of conscious animation activity has resulted in the accumulation of considerable knowledge and social capital in the community: common

understanding around shared goals and interests, growing network of stakeholders working together, and a clarification of roles and responsibilities.



As a result of a study carried out in 2015 **the local community voted in favour of the open farm operation model**. The launch was helped by the AgriShort project in 2017-2018 through trainings, workshops and study tours as well as assistance for preparing the first workplan, the visuals and the IT system needed to run the network. After three years of preparation, 16 founding members signed the **Zala Valley Open Farm Cooperation Agreement** in 2017, and based on this, the Open Farms short food supply chain group was created in 2018.

For becoming a member 4 requirements need to be fulfilled:

- 1) to be a farmer, local food producer or agri-tourism service provider and have a product for sale;
- 2) the activity should be carried out in the area;
- 3) provide suitable conditions for hosting guests;
- 4) commit to organise regular open days and events to give visitors and customers an insight into the production process.

The admission of new members is decided by the membership. When preparing this summary **the Zala-valley Open Farms network had 35 active members**.

The network is **an important source of information and knowledge** by regularly organised meetings and professional programmes with invited speakers. The knowledge, values, and the attitude that the network members gain through the various joint activities (trainings, study trips and lectures, educational programmes, product demonstrations, cultural acts, open hours etc.) contribute greatly to the wellbeing of the farmers involved, and their family members, as well as that of the wider society. Moreover, the existence of **shared values and the regular contacts** with other farmers help to cope with everyday problems. As far as the wider rural area is concerned, not only the network has created economic benefits for its members, but it has largely strengthened the local community.

Highlights of the most innovative aspects



Building a cooperation network between individual farmers, and between the farmers as a group and other local and professional actors is a great organisational innovation.



The role taken by the LEADER LAG such as bringing external knowledge and resources in the launching phase, providing long-term professional animation, management, marketing and administrative background for the network is a significant service innovation.



In addition, the ability to offer a rich territorial 'package' of local products, services and experiences for the local consumers and visitors is also a unique service innovation.

How FARMWELL worked with the Open Farms Model

The FARMWELL project **partners, Institute of Agricultural Economics (AKI) and the Hungarian Social Farm Association (MSZFSZ)** have identified several successful social innovations of which the members of the so-called **Practice Group** - group of farmers, farming organisations, research organisations, policymakers and practitioners - have chosen in a participatory way the Zala Valley Open Farms network as an inspiring social innovation.

The Open Farms model provides new innovative ideas on the creation of a network of local actors addressing grassroots needs, long-term strategic and business thinking, and ongoing stakeholder engagement.



Read the [mapping report on the wellbeing of Hungarian farmers and the challenges of the FARMWELL project](#).

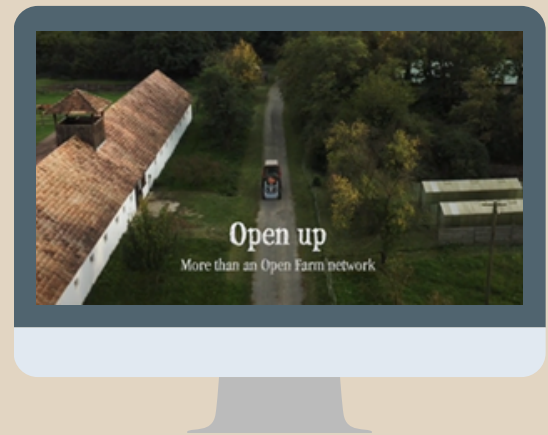


The way the LEADER LAG has been animating the process from conception to the (hoped) self-sustainability is **unique, innovative and exemplary for others**.



Open Up - More than an open farm network

Zala-Valley Open Farm network is featured in an **inspiring short film** created by FARMWELL partner, Company New Heroes. The film presented the network **through the farmers' eyes** exploring the main benefits that the network has brought to its members. *“When you move to a new area, you are looking for new contacts, you are looking for new good people, and you are open to everything.”* – tells Peter, a founding member farmer of Zala Valley Open Farm network, who used to be a newcomer in the area. **“Members apply together, invent different activities together, present themselves together.”** – he continues. The network ensures regular contact among local farmers in a disadvantaged rural area, organise joint programmes and meetings. The network helps to ensure *“that we are more aware of each other, knowing who is doing what, what problems and successes others have”* – explains Erzsébet from the LEADER LAG.



[Watch the short documentary!](#)

The Open Farms cooperation offers both social and economic benefits for farmers. However, while economic benefits are easier to measure, the considerable **wellbeing benefits** that the network has brought to its members is intangible and usually go unnoticed. Even members and supporters often do not understand the magnitude of change they have made in farmers' lives.

The Social Return on Investment (SROI) method was used in the FARMWELL project to quantify (in monetary terms) the benefits that social innovation practices generate. The results show that the investment in the Zala Valley Open Farm network represents a **423% return on investment** to individuals, communities and society with respect to wellbeing impacts for a range of stakeholders, including farmers. These results have helped the initiators to understand the value of their work and value of the change they make.

423% return on investment

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



How to make sure that successful practices like Zala Valley Open Farms network are set-up and sustained across the country and beyond, more small farmers are reached and ultimately farmers' wellbeing is improved? In the framework of the **FARMWELL pilot**, members and supporters of the Zala Valley Open Farms Network in the Western part of Hungary were brought together for a **lively peer-exchange** with members of the similarly successful and inspiring initiative of Chamber-tour Association located in central Hungary.

More than 30 participants, farmers and network coordinators shared their thoughts, doubts and suggestions concerning the everyday challenges and future goals of their networks. Together they were looking for a motivation on how to make the networks economically stable, how to maintain members' activity. As a result of a very lively and practical discussion, the differences and similarities identified led **to conclusions on the short and long-term goals of the Open Farms cooperation as well as some of the concrete steps to be taken to achieve them.**



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

The operation of Zala Valley Open Farms network is **supported by the staff of the Zala Thermal Valley LEADER Association**, and network members' small-scale investments are financed from the local LEADER fund through application. The outcomes of the SROI analysis (above) demonstrate that beside the economic benefit, the initiative has also brought considerable social benefit: for every euro spent, €4.23 social return was generated in the local community. This demonstrates that investing in networks, such as the Open Farms network is **public money well spent.**

Supporting networks such as the Open Farms cooperation under the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) Strategic Plans (e.g. cooperation intervention, including LEADER) is not only **paying off economically and socially**, but can also help policymakers **achieve the social conditionality** requirements of the CAP.



FIND OUT MORE!

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

Watch the 'Open up' short documentary: [here!](#)

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

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