

Assessment of key competences for Social Farming in Hungary

Csaba BÁLINT – Paulina JANCOSVSZKA – Apolka UJJ

Szent István University, 2100 Gödöllő, Páter K. u. 1.; E-mail: balint.csaba@gtk.szie.hu

Keywords: social farming, competence, knowledge, skill, education

Introduction

Social Farming adopts a multifunctional view of agriculture that combines farming with social services/health care at local level. It can help to improve social and environmental awareness, in accordance with social and solidarity principles. Even though social farming comprises a very wide range of activities, they always have two elements in common: a) the activities take place on a farm or market garden and b) they are designed for people who – either temporarily or permanently – have specific needs, including educational needs. Social farming could thus be provisionally defined as a cluster of activities that use agricultural resources – both animal and plant – to generate social services in rural or semi-rural areas, such as rehabilitation, therapy, sheltered jobs, lifelong learning and other activities contributing to social integration. In this sense, it is about – among other things – making farms places where people with particular needs can take part in daily farming routines as a way of maintaining their state/condition or furthering their development, making progress and improving their well-being. (Tulla et al. 2018)

Materials and methods

To identify key competences necessary in Social Farming, interviews were made with stakeholders (2 social workers, 2 organic farmers and 1 agricultural engineer working with disadvantaged public workers) about relevant key competences in various professions working in Social Farming, following a qualitative approach, while the designation of questions followed a deductive-inductive loop, based on a mixture of open questions afterwards analysed through a given table with topics and competences. The chosen topics were grouped by the following topic headers: farming, social work (competences related to the general professions), farm economics, Social Farming (competences related directly to Social Farming), personal competences. In this case competence means that one needs certain knowledge of the subject and is able to apply related skills. The partners chose to base their understanding of the terms “knowledge” and “skills” on the definition used in the context of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), where knowledge is described as theoretical and/or factual and skills are described as cognitive (involving the use of logical, intuitive and creative thinking) and practical (involving manual dexterity and the use of methods, materials, tools and instruments).

Results and discussion

The respondents mainly stated that the purpose of the training should be precisely defined. Will it be its purpose to make the agricultural engineers sensitive or to teach the sensitive ones to agriculture? Do we intend to promote the establishment of social farms where farmers produce for market with the help of disadvantaged people (clients/helpers) or do we want to create a meaningful agricultural activity for disadvantaged people, so the therapy is the main goal and not the production? According to the interviewees’ opinion, during

the planned social farming education, students need to learn how to share their knowledge and how to collaborate with disadvantaged people (e.g. people with learning disabilities, or with mental disorder). The basic agricultural knowledge is also very important, but not exclusively the theory (e.g. Latin name of plants), but more dominantly the practical knowledge. So, the practice-theory ratio within the training is an important issue. More practice would be preferable, even though there are certain subjects that can be taught through lectures (e.g. National regulations on SF). The summer farm practice – when students stay at social farm for a longer period – would be also advisable to see operating social farms with their everyday activities and to figure out which target group the student can work with. Interviewees underline the importance of the ‘good practice visits’, namely the visits of farms that are created by farmers (so real production is realized) and not only the visits of social institutes where agricultural activities are offered for their clients with the purpose of therapy. (For the latter the level of production and the quantity and/or quality of production are not among the primary goals). It is also true for Hungary, that elder farmers in many cases do not have the knowledge of the latest innovative cultivation/production technologies, so education has an important role to familiarize the students with the most effective and innovative agricultural techniques. (That is also valid for future social farmers, as they have to know about innovative agricultural solutions and techniques for the successful operation of the farm). Apart from agricultural knowledge, there are certain training elements (skills) that interviewees find extremely important. They believe that these skills can be improved by modules embedded in the training: system approach, teamwork, problem-solving ability, empathy, knowledge of local circumstances and communication. The unanimous opinion of the respondents was that the teamwork is extremely important in the case of social farming, as a good professional manager must cooperate with a practical social worker.

Conclusions

Social Farming adopts a multifunctional view of agriculture that combines farming with social services/health care at local level, in rural or semi-rural areas, using agricultural resources. To identify key competences necessary in this field of activity, interviews were made with experts in various professions. The main finding of the interviews is, that, in addition to the agricultural knowledge, in order to manage disadvantaged people, a set of general and specific skills must be developed in the framework of organized education.

Acknowledgement

The creation of these resources has been (partially) funded by the ERASMUS+ grant program of the European Union under grant no. 2017-1-DE01-KA203-003583.

References

- Tulla, A. F. – Vera, A. – Valldeperas, N. – Guirado, C. (2018): Social return and economic viability of social farming in Catalonia: a case-study analysis. *Europ. Countrys.* · Vol. 10 · 2018 · No. 3 · p. 398-428 DOI: 10.2478/euco-2018-0023