



Social Farming for the Elderly



Module 2.1 Social services on a farm for different kinds of older people

Module outline

Introduction

There is not just one group of older people in which everyone has the same wishes and needs. For this reason, there cannot be only one service for older people, but several, which are oriented towards the respective needs.

In this learning unit different options for social services on farms are presented. Although all of them are aimed at older people, they can differ greatly in form and scope. The services are each illustrated with examples taken from the FarmElder case studies.

Learning objectives

At the end of this unit you will be able to identify different forms of social farming for older people and relate them to specific target groups.



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A group of five men in various work clothes and caps are standing in the doorway of a wooden barn. They are smiling and have their arms around each other's shoulders. The man on the far left is wearing a blue shirt and dark overalls. The man next to him is wearing a white t-shirt with a logo and a red cap. The man in the center is wearing a dark blue polo shirt and a red cap. The man next to him is wearing a grey t-shirt and a red cap. The man on the far right is wearing a white t-shirt and green overalls. A red broom is leaning against the barn door on the left. A wheelbarrow is visible in the background on the right.

1 Different target groups lead to different services



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The service varies with the target groups

Work



Recreation



Care



Different target groups → different services

Farms can offer a wide range of services for older people. These vary according to the needs of the specific target group and the framework conditions and capabilities of the farm. This framework includes overall considerations regarding the farm, it is easy to reach, the availability of rooms for overnight accommodation and other factors.

The services can be classified according to

- their duration (Are the guests only on the farm for a few hours or do they stay there permanently?)
- the type of target group (are they physically and mentally fit, want to learn and experience new things or are they ill and need individual care and attention?)
- the type of service (from education, social and cultural activities to care and nursing)
- the type of provider (does the farmer offer the service independently or in cooperation with a social service?)

Furthermore, should be added that the individual elements cannot always be clearly separated from each other. Rather, they are often interdependent or complementary. The services presented in the following will confirm this.



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First find out for yourself and your farm: Where are my strengths? What suits me? Then go out and get yourself the right partners.

Anni Hindelang, Hoimahof farm (Germany)





2 Day-structuring and leisure time activities



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Day-structuring and leisure time activities



Short-term services for active seniors

When we hear the words seniors or elderly, many of us first have images of aged and frail people in our minds. In fact, people all over Europe are getting older, but they are also staying fit, physically active and mentally active for longer.

These young elderly are interested in learning something new, in social exchange with others.

What can farms offer to this target group?

- Educational events that give an insight into agricultural production, from tours of barns and fields to practical information and skills around the products we eat every day.
- Social events that overcome isolation and promote sociability and interaction. Possible activities include craft afternoons with natural materials, nature experiences and cooking and baking courses.
- Connection to farming life which may be familiar and reassuring to them.





An example:

ŠTORKLJA – večgeneracijski center (Slovenia)

Štorklja (Stork) is a renovated traditional farm where intergenerational bonding and social integration of the elderly who live in the local countryside takes place.

In the house, under professional guidance workshops are held on various topics related to the interests of the participants.

The participants are still vital enough to live independently and come to the farm or attend workshops.

Learn more about Štorklja in the FarmElder case studies.



Short-term services as therapy for older people

Day services can also be a sensible option for older people who are ill or in need of care. Day-structuring offers help to single older people in particular to combat loneliness and relieve the burden on their caring relatives.

- People in need of care rarely have the opportunity to leave their everyday surroundings. A visit to a farm therefore represents something special.
- The visits are a form of therapy and can be complemented by services such as garden therapy or animal-assisted therapy.
- At the same time, they are an opportunity for family carers to exchange experiences.

Services of this kind definitely require trained staff or professional support. "And you really shouldn't do it without, because as naturally and calmly as it runs one moment, it can be something different every minute. You should not underestimate that" (Doris Kettner, Alzheimer Society).





An example:

Hoimahof (Germany)

The Hoimahof in Bavaria is a working family farm.

Since 2020, afternoon events for older people suffering from dementia and their relatives have been held on the farm several times a month.

As a cooperation partner, the Alzheimer Gesellschaft Lechrain e.V. provides professional and administrative support for the events.

Learn more about the Hoimahof in the FarmElder case studies.



3 Living on the farm



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Living on the farm



Residential services on the farm

In some European countries, farms already offer different housing options for older people. In these housing services, the persons concerned have a permanent residence in the buildings of the farm. A tenancy agreement regulates the living on the farm. The conditions of the flats are adapted to the special needs of the elderly.

Some questions to consider are

- **Do I have enough space on the farm?**
- **Is the daily work on the farm compatible with the residential offer?**
- **Will there possibly be high investment costs for the age-appropriate conversion of the buildings?**

And above all:

Can I imagine having "strangers" on the farm all the time?



Housing options for different target groups

The actual design of housing as a social service on the farm depends on the physical and mental conditions of the respective target group of older people. Possible forms of housing differ in the level of support needed and thus also in the different degree of commitment and necessary engagement for the farmer.

Self-organised housing and house community

In the self-organised housing and house community, housing units on the farm are rented or sold to older people. The farm thus only takes on the role of landlord. This form of housing is particularly suitable for older people who are healthy and value their independence, but who also want mutual support and a lively living environment. Community life is organised by the residents themselves. The elderly can help each other in everyday life.



Housing options for different target groups

Service Living

Service living is characterised by the fact that the farm offers additional services in addition to housing units suitable for the elderly. These are, for example, household support, an emergency call system, a driving service and leisure activities. This form of housing is aimed at older people who, due to their existing or expected limitations, would like safety and support without giving up their independence completely.

Long-term care living

This form of housing is aimed at elderly people in need of care and/or increased need for safety, for example due to dementia. In this context, the older people are enabled to live on the farm until old age or the end of their lives. Care staff must be on site on an hourly or even permanent basis.





An example:

Mohorko Farm (Slovenia)

The Mohorko family farm has shifted from tourism to social farming for the elderly.

The owner of the farm, Matjaž, gained work experience in a small rural home for the elderly in Austria, where he learned about the specifics of elderly care.

By adapting the premises and introducing a service for older people to live on the farm, the Mohorko farm improved its occupancy rate and developed a range of new services.

Learn more about the Mohorko farm in the FarmElder case studies.





4 Other

Other services for or with older people



Elderly employees of a sheltered workshop

In some countries, people with disabilities have the opportunity to spend their working lives in sheltered workshops. These include many green, agriculturally oriented facilities. However, many of these facilities are not only a place of work, but also a place of residence and thus a place of life.

But what happens when these people get older? Until a few years ago, it was common for elderly people with increased care needs to move in with their relatives or into a retirement home.

However, many older people want to stay in the familiar environment of the sheltered workshops, where they have sometimes lived and worked for decades, until the end of their lives. Many communities are now trying to overcome the social-legal, financial and organisational hurdles that arise in this process.

In the meantime, there are some institutions and communities that are successful in this endeavour and could be a model for others.





An example:

SOS Dorfgemeinschaft Hohenroth (Germany)

In the SOS village community of Hohenroth in Bavaria, people with cognitive impairments live and work.

For the older of them, a new "Centre" was built in 2021.

This residential house enables them to remain in their familiar surroundings even in old age, to be active in agriculture according to their abilities and to participate in the life of the village community.

Learn more about the SOS village community in the FarmElder case studies.



Do farmers get old, too?

Yes, some even get very old, but they never lose touch with farming, they want to stay up to date and pass on their own experiences.

Because of their background, older farmers, both men and women, are a natural target group for social services in agriculture. This applies to their role as providers as well as recipients.

After handing over the farm or when their own family members move away from home, social engagement and interaction with others can be a rewarding task. Hosting people with disabilities on the farm and using their farming experience to help others increases their sense of self-confidence and self-efficacy.

Older farmers are also an important target group as recipients of social services in agriculture, e.g.

- in the context of residential services on care farms specifically for farmers who can no longer stay on their own farms but wish to remain in familiar farming surroundings, or
- at day events on farms that provide older farmers with information, exchange of experience and socialising and prevent isolation.





An example:

Breeda O'Sullivan (Ireland)

After Breeda's adult children had all left the farm, she started hosting people with disabilities.

This volunteer work is facilitated and supported by Kerry Social Farming.

Kerry Social Farming's primary target group was people with disabilities, but a secondary target group were local farmers, especially those who were older, due to concerns regarding rural isolation.

Learn more about the Breeda's farm and Kerry Social Farming in the FarmElder case studies.



Non-farm service providers

In social farming, agricultural resources are used for social purposes. However, this does not necessarily have to be the responsibility of the farmers themselves or take place on a farm.

Providers can also be associations, social service providers or educational institutions. In this case, the individual farm is a partner of these organisations and takes on agreed tasks.

These can be, for example, in the field of education for sustainable development or intergenerational learning and exchange.





An example:

Centro de Educação Ambiental do Município de Vale de Cambra (Portugal)

A main objective of the centre is environmental education. This also includes intergenerational knowledge exchange.

The work is intended for the community in general. There are elderly groups and other groups formed by children and young people.

Learn more about the educational centre in the FarmElder case studies.



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**Empathy for the elderly means
that you also empathise with
your own future.**

Štorklja centre (Slovenia)



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