



## SOCIAL AGRICULTURE

### case study

## FEDERATIE LANDBOUW & ZORG (FEDERATION OF CARE FARMERS)

The Federation of Care Farmers, The Netherlands is the national organisation representing and supporting 15 regional member organisations that represent 853 Care farms in the Netherlands. Care farms are farms that provide programs and facilities for people with a wide range of disabilities. The federation provides a national quality system, a national clients' centre, national knowledge exchange and advocacy on a national level. The federation and its regional members organise courses and training for care farmers to provide good quality care.

*"As soon as you label a care farm as a place for cheap labour, it is a totally different concept. It is not fair. Work on the farm is a means to an end, that is why we say we need to pay the farmer fully for the time he is with the client, as he cannot produce during that time. We pay the farmer fully for the work with the client, because what 6 people do on the farm a farmer can do in half an hour, so it is not farming, it is healthcare. Once you treat people with disabilities as employees it is a recipe for trouble. That is why what farmers do is the healthcare service and should be treated as such."*

Maarten Fischer, Managing Director

### MODEL IN A NUTSHELL

**Website**  
[zorgboeren.nl/overons](http://zorgboeren.nl/overons)

**Social channels**  
[Facebook.com/  
FederatieLandbouwEnZorg](https://www.facebook.com/FederatieLandbouwEnZorg)

**Country**  
The Netherlands

**Contact us through Alliance**  
[greenforcare.eu/joing4c/federatie-landbouw-en-zorg](http://greenforcare.eu/joing4c/federatie-landbouw-en-zorg)

**Main sector**  
Public

**Specific sector**  
Healthcare,  
Agriculture,  
Labour integration,  
local development,  
social inclusion

**Stage of development**  
Incorporated

**Our work in SDGs**



Federatie  
**Landbouw  
en Zorg**

## FROM FEW TO MANY

A handful of small farmers with a strong social vision started their own cooperative realizing that they couldn't expect the government to support them continuously. From this, these farmers with their care farms created the **National Dutch Support Centre for Agriculture and Care**, also to be independent of both the agricultural and healthcare sectors. This Support Centre started in 1999 in a time when the Ministries of Agriculture and Health Care and Social Wellbeing were looking to bring both agriculture and care into society more. In 2010 the Dutch care farmers united themselves in the **National Federation of care farmers**. The Federation was founded out of the National Dutch Support Centre for Agriculture and Care.

In the Netherlands, each region has its own cooperative of care farmers and those regional cooperatives are united under the National Federation. At the moment, we are located in the centre of the Netherlands and we represent **850 farms**, providing service to **25,000 people**, employing 5000 people and **20,000-30,000 volunteers** involved in the farms. There are about 22 indirect (outsourced) personnel including an official board of 5 members with Secretary and Coordinator/Director and the rest of the staff are in quality control and are all outsourced (independent staff members).

The Federation acts as expertise centre for care farming in the Netherlands; people or care farms that are looking for information can contact us or search for information on our website. We are closely working together with researchers from Wageningen University and Research, gathering research data and implementing research results. We are the discussion partner for our national government, health insurance companies and the association of all Dutch municipalities.

People who use the services of care farms are called participants, not clients. Besides participants the beneficiaries of our initiative are **the farmers** themselves, who receive continuous support and training. Also, we facilitate health insurance companies, government entities in healthcare, the stakeholders involved in rural development and volunteers working in the farms.

## FROM IDEA TO ACTION

Specialization of the farms in certain types of production became more serious in the 1950's: farmers were more focused on producing food but were losing their connection with nature, society and the community surrounding them. In 1980's people with disabilities were re-introduced to the farms as a charitable activity. Soon it was realized that this was actually very high value-added for farms and also for the healthcare sector and business models got developed around the concept. At the same time, our Government saw that the income from agriculture was diminishing, and that small farms struggled to keep up with large scale industrial production.

Care farms were an **innovative way** in which providing care to **vulnerable people** could take place in society, on a farm just around the corner of the city or village. Also providing care on a regular farm that is part of society was an innovation in health care that matches the policy of the government. However, by the late '90s during their college years, the federation founders (farmers themselves) noticed that there were a lot of care-oriented farms with weak business models but with good intrinsic motivation and great social value. They made it their goal to come up with improved business models for care farms and in **1999** they founded a national cooperative of agriculture, the **National Dutch Support Centre for Agriculture and Care**. It was the **first cooperative** to combine and support not only social care farms, but also childcare farms, agritourism, education on farms, regional products, landscape and nature management schemes. After some years of advocating, this got supported by EU- rural development, agriculture economy and innovation- funding. This helped transform the sector from the niche that it was into an almost one-billion-dollar sector in the Netherlands today. EU funding was met with support from the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Health Care who also began to financially support the National Dutch Support Centre for Agriculture and Care.

Following the financial support also from the ministries, in 2010 the Dutch care farmers united themselves with the National Federation of care farmers to form the Federation as it is today.

The main activities of the federation include the following:

- Lobbying
- Stakeholder engagement and consultation
- Consulting (future) social farmers in starting their business
- **Consulting and training** social farmers in filling in an approved quality system.
- Monitoring client satisfaction for our members. We developed satisfaction surveys for different client groups and for their representatives.
- Writing and updating the handbook '**Social Farming**' and making it available to all member farmers.
- Organising **network meetings** with social farmers in which they can advise each other, share their experiences and discuss research results.

Member care farms of the Federation are monitored and **every second year there is an audit**. A care farm that is a member of the Federation is obliged to have the quality mark of care farming. All of that is done in a very lean way. Members represent **600-million-euros in revenue**, and our business model is based mainly on annual membership fees. That said, we remain small, because we think the power of the concept should remain with the farm.

## FROM OLD TO NEW

Our Federation was founded in 2008 as an extension of the government to stimulate care farming in the Netherlands. But it was innovative in a way that we could provide healthcare and agricultural services together. The innovative part of our initiative was that **farms remained relatively small**, but together with the federation they had **the economies of scale**. Entrepreneurship and most of the ownership are with the farms, we as a supporting organization take very of the "cake". In some other countries it is not like this, there are too many overheads, and the care farms become just service providers and lose entrepreneurship and innovation potential. If the farm owns it and is very much into the business, it is better. I guess you could say that our innovation is that we found a business model to play an important role in such a big sector while remaining small.

## FROM NOW TO THEN

Our vision is to continue showing that farms can combine economy, ecology and services for society. We also want to showcase that the phenomenon of care farms can continue to grow and develop while staying rooted in the grassroots social enterprise of family farms. We also want to continue to grow in number of members. The idea is to continue promoting the concept of care farming and helping other countries in adopting their own models.

Our current needs are **capacity building of existing farms and involving other care farms** that are not part of our federation and are not monitored for quality.

The external challenges we face are demographic changes, market access to available government funding and grants and tax cuts: people get the sickness funds only when they reach a certain level of disability or sickness. Receiving funding at a later level, makes it difficult for some people to be physically active and to address them, farmers need certain specialized knowledge or expertise, and we hope to bring it to them.

