

SOCIAL INNOVATION MANAGEMENT BASED ON THE EXAMPLE OF CARE FARMS

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Purpose: The aim of this work is to present and implement social innovation management. The aim of the research is to present the expectations of rural residents in relation to the offer of new social services and their attitudes towards the proposition of farms providing care services. The activity of such farms is consistent with the concepts of social innovation.

Design/methodology/approach: The analysis uses a questionnaire survey conducted in 2019 and completed by 500 farmers from all across Poland. The surveyed population consisted of farming households in Poland, representing each of the six regions (by NUTS classification). The respondents were members of farming households, most frequently the farm owners.

Findings: There is little interest in setting up care farms at present, even though rural residents do recognise the needs of older people. One of the barriers to the development of this new idea is the traditional family model, in which older family members are cared for by younger, fit family members. However, if such a farm were to operate, it would be most important for it to offer professional help with health and care issues. Persons who are considering the possibility of developing their farm to include care activities would need support from the local authorities, especially financial assistance.

Research limitations/implications: The sampling scheme applied, and the sufficiently large sample size met the criterion of quota representativeness for the structure of farm households in Poland in terms of subregions, as well as in terms of the gender of adult members of the surveyed households. It was not, however, a representative sample of the total adult population of rural areas.

Social implications: Management of social innovations such as care farms requires identification in detail of those factors that support their implementation, as well as those that constitute barriers to their implementation. This article presents these findings in regard to entities considering the introduction of care services, as well as the potential beneficiaries of these services.

Originality/value: The research is original due to the early stage of research related to the design of care farms in Poland.

Keywords: older people, social innovations, care farms.

Category of the paper: research paper.

1. Introduction

Innovation is a commonly appearing term and is understood differently depending on the field of science or area of life. It can be very broadly defined as a complex technological process, but it can also simply mean change. Apart from technical, economic or economic innovations, innovations may concern the sphere of organisations which are addressed by management science.

Joseph Schumpeter was the first to point out innovation as a factor in development. He believed that innovations were created in the dynamic process of replacing old technologies with new ones, produced in a linear process from research through laboratory experiments to distribution on the market. According to him, technological innovations are the driving force of the economy, and he ascribed to them a key role in economic growth. He saw them as an innovative combination of capital and means of production. He clearly separated economic policy from social policy, which he treated as secondary (Schumpeter, 2003).

In both Polish and international literature, we can find many different definitions of innovation (Rokoszewski, 2018; Skonieczny, 2015; Wronka-Pośpiech, 2015). The concept of social innovation has been developing since the end of the 1990s, along with the current trends concerning the need to economise social policy (Mulgan, 2007). Innovations are positive social changes, providing an opportunity to improve the welfare of individuals and communities through employment, consumption or participation (Kwaśnicki, 2013). According to James Albert Allen, innovation is the introduction of new products, processes or ways of doing things (Allen, 1966). In Polish literature, noteworthy is the definition of innovation proposed by Zbigniew Pietrusiński – “innovations are changes deliberately introduced by people [...] which consist in replacing the existing state of affairs with others, positively assessed in the light of specific criteria and consisting of [...] progress” (Pietrusiński, 2011, p. 9).

According to Peter Drucker, more attention is now paid to innovations outside the circle of technical innovations. The leading role is played by innovations introduced in management systems, environmental protection, as well as social innovations, which are understood as the predispositions and inclination of members of social communities to move away from the prevailing customs, styles of perception and categories of goals (Griffin, 2004, p. 428). In social innovation, not only do individual qualifications and the personal resources of owners, managers and employees have a significant impact, but the collective actions based on them also have an influence.

More narrow definitions define social innovation as new solutions that respond more effectively to social needs and improve existing social ties or lead to the formation of new relationships. They also provide an opportunity to make better use of existing resources. They serve the common good of the community and improve its capacity for self-development (Caulier-Grice et al., 2012). Social innovation is also defined as new solutions that respond to current challenges, adopted and applied by cooperating individuals and institutions (Hochgerner, 2011).

Experimental social activities aimed at improving the quality of life of people, nations or entire communities that take place in companies, their business environment or natural environment are also considered social innovations. Their experimental character results from the introduction of unique, one-time solutions on a large scale (Budinich, Serneels, 2012).

The introduction of innovation as a process change, in the dissemination of which both professional groups and society participate, is an element of social change (Howaldt, Schwarz, 2010; Wronka-Pośpiech, 2015). The European Commission perceives significant benefits arising from the participation of society in the implementation of social innovations and strongly emphasises the possibility of creating new relations and cooperation. This is demonstrated by the definition formulated by the Commission, which reads: “social innovation [is] the development and implementation of new ideas (products, services, models) to meet social needs and create new social relations and collaborations” (European Commission, 2013).

According to Dziembała (2018), the public sector is important in promoting innovation, but the potential of individual countries to create social innovation varies and is determined by many factors.

Panek-Owsiańska (2013) stresses the importance of business cooperating with government and civil society as a sustainable, good-for-business approach with long-term effects. She points out that social innovation is something that goes beyond traditional philanthropy and responds to social needs. It is a new set of business models, procedures, products and services that creates new social collaborations.

Social innovation assumes particular importance in areas that pose social policy challenges and respond to current social needs. One such challenge is the ageing society, generating the need for new solutions to meet the growing social and care needs of older people. As the ageing of the population progresses, it is becoming increasingly important to provide individuals of an advanced age with a pleasant living space where they reside, and so in the area where they feel at home, offering them access to work, socialisation, education, leisure and medical care. This poses new challenges to state and local administrative authorities, as well as to the social welfare system to meet the specific needs of older people, especially as the demographic ageing process of the population accelerates.

According to UN estimates, by 2050 in most developed countries, including those of the European Union, one in three inhabitants will be over 60 years old (Population Ageing 2006...). Globally, the number of people of this age will double from 880 million in 2012 to two billion

in 2050 (Population Ageing and Development 2012...). The increase in the number of older people is related to the increase in the population of sick, disabled, dependent individuals requiring medical, rehabilitation and care services, also on a 24/7 basis. Research has shown that in the population over 65 years of age, the percentage of people requiring permanent support is 28%, and of those over 80 years of age – over 60% (Szarota, 2004).

Actions that can provide opportunities to improve the situation of older people should consider using their great potential in the local environment, helping to keep their lives more active, as well as supporting the employment of people at pre-retirement age. This is because activity increases the chances of older people living independently and provides a sense of satisfaction (Serodocha, 2010).

The implementation of social innovations in rural areas may be facilitated by the existence of good social ties on one hand, but may face various obstacles as well (Skonieczny, 2015). The rich and diverse cultural heritage of villages and their beneficial climate are advantages. Feczko (2015) indicates that the Pomeranian community he studied valued family ties, social ties in the community and social contacts the most. The amount of human resources and their skills and qualifications can be seen as an advantage, but also as a kind of barrier due to poor opportunities for paid employment in the countryside. The economic situation which makes it more profitable to take advantage of social welfare than to seek gainful employment has a clear negative affect on the introduction of innovations. Dworak (2017) stresses that the nation's economic development will be more rapid if society can lose its stereotypes that limit creative thinking. In order for new ideas to develop, society should be provided with information about the losses that result from clinging to old habits.

According to Agnieszka Wojcieszak and Monika Wojcieszak (2018), rural areas have the appropriate potential to provide care for older people. The new idea is to use this capital on care farms. This new concept is addressed to families offering accommodation and services on agritourism farms, but also to those wishing to use care services. Service providers have to carefully plan what kind of people the farm can provide care for and analyse the possibilities for employing people with appropriate qualifications. A properly planned undertaking will generate income for the farm and provide jobs for local residents (Wojcieszak, Wojcieszak, 2018).

The cooperation of local governments seem to be essential in supporting the idea of creating care farms in rural areas. In Poland, there are still no legal conditions for day care for older people in the form of private entities. They are assumed to be run by public entities – local governments, which can enter into a cooperation agreement with public benefit organisations (Kamiński, 2015). A characteristic feature of a care farm is the use of the potential of the farm, its infrastructure and the type of agricultural activity to carry out activities of a therapeutic, caregiving and integrative nature for people in need of support at the given care farm. Currently, it is possible to run a care farm as a part of a small business or as a social enterprise, such as an association, foundation or social cooperative. Farmers may perceive such a solution as

a barrier, but it provides certain benefits, such as the ability to apply ready-made models for operation. Care farms dedicated to older individuals can be organised as a day centre, family care shelter or a 24-hour care facility run as part of a small business (Stępnik, Król, 2017).

The aim of the research is to present the expectations of rural residents in relation to the offer of new social services and their attitudes towards the proposition of farms providing care services. The activity of such farms is consistent with the concepts of social innovation.

The research problems addressed in the paper are formulated as follows:

- 1) What incentives, in the opinion of the respondents, would encourage potential beneficiaries to take advantage of the offer of care farms?
- 2) What are the respondents' attitudes towards new social services in rural areas?
- 3) What services should care farms offer?

The survey was conducted in 2019 using the CATI interview technique among 500 people currently operating farms across Poland. The research is a part of an implemented research project¹.

2. Material and methods

The survey was conducted at the end of May and early June 2019 and was completed by a group of 500 farm owners from all over Poland. The surveyed population consisted of farming households in Poland, representing each of the six regions (according to the NUTS classification). The respondents were members of farming households, most frequently the farm owners, who expressed their willingness to share their opinions on the studied issues.

The sampling scheme applied, and the sufficiently large sample size met the criterion of quota representativeness for the structure of agricultural holdings in Poland in terms of subregions, as well as in terms of the gender of adult members of the surveyed households. It was not, however, a representative sample of the total adult population of rural areas. The survey was conducted using the CATI (Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing) method.

The analysis constitutes an attempt to determine what farmers know and imagine about care farms, as well as the correlation between the studied issues and the socio-demographic characteristics of people interested in running care farms.

The research tool was a survey questionnaire prepared according to the basic requirements for the construction of research questionnaires.

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The questionnaire contained 26 questions. These were closed questions, often called categorised questions, multiple choice questions which required the respondent to choose an answer from a prepared set.

The questionnaire consisted of two parts. The first included questions to determine the views of the respondents regarding the studied issues. The second included characteristics of the respondents. After collecting the completed questionnaires, the empirical material was analysed, resulting in the percentage distributions of responses and the statistical relationships between some variables.

3. Social and demographic characteristics of the respondents

The studied group consisted of 500 individuals – 226 women and 274 men, who constituted 45.2% and 54.8% of the study sample, respectively.

The respondents were divided into five age groups (Figure 1). Most of the respondents, 156 people, were over 60 years old.

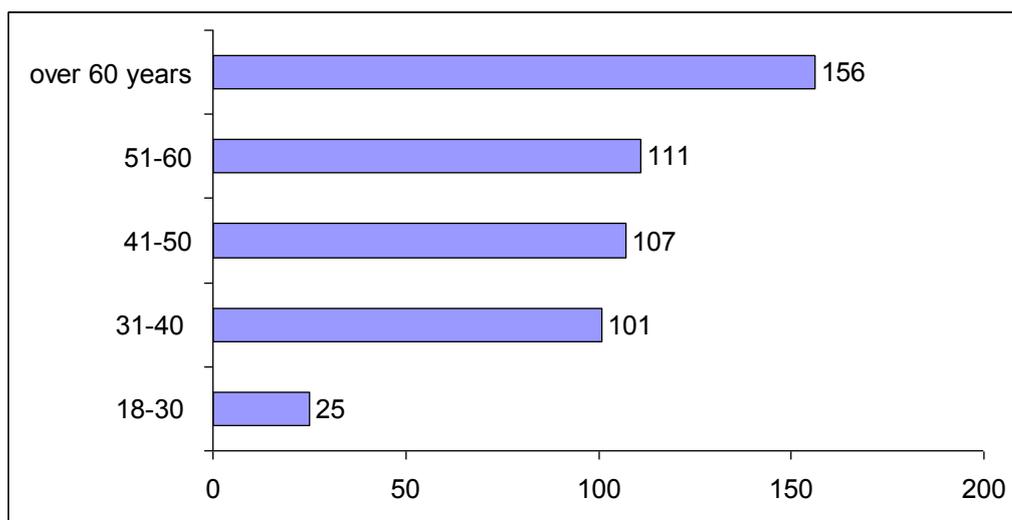


Figure 1. Structure of respondents by age.

The youngest group was the least represented (25 people), which accounted for 4.4% of women and 6.6% of men; the oldest group was the most numerous, which accounted for 35.4% of women and 33.6 of men. The median age was between the ages of 51 and 60. The number of people in the surveyed families operating a farm together ranged from 1 to 12, and the average was 2.69 people.

Among those completing the questionnaire, people with secondary education were predominant, with 207 people in this group. Respondents with higher education were 127 in number, post-secondary – 32, vocational – 101, primary – 21, and 12 declined to provide any information (Figure 2).

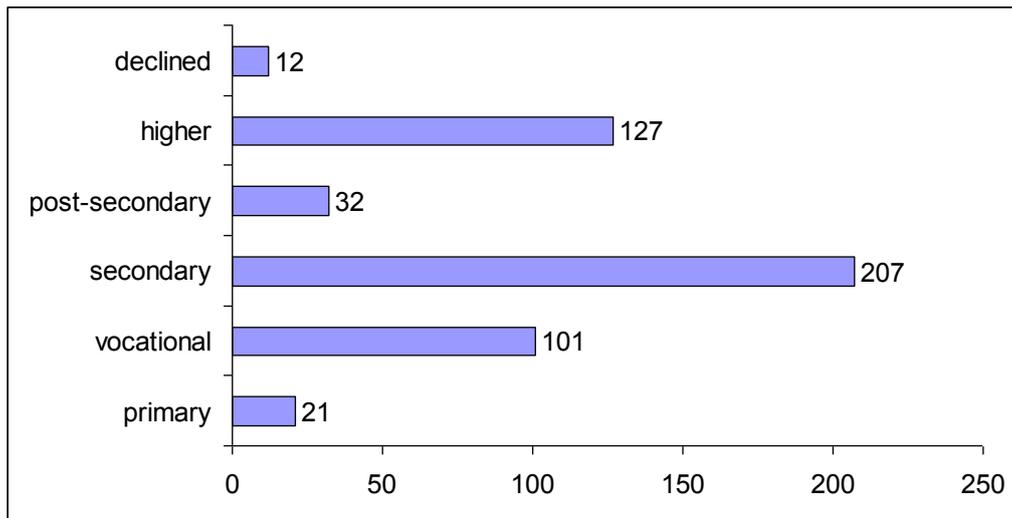


Figure 2. Structure of respondents by education.

The respondents were most often farm owners (199 men and 58 women), less often co-owners (124 persons) or family members (119 persons) (Figure 3).

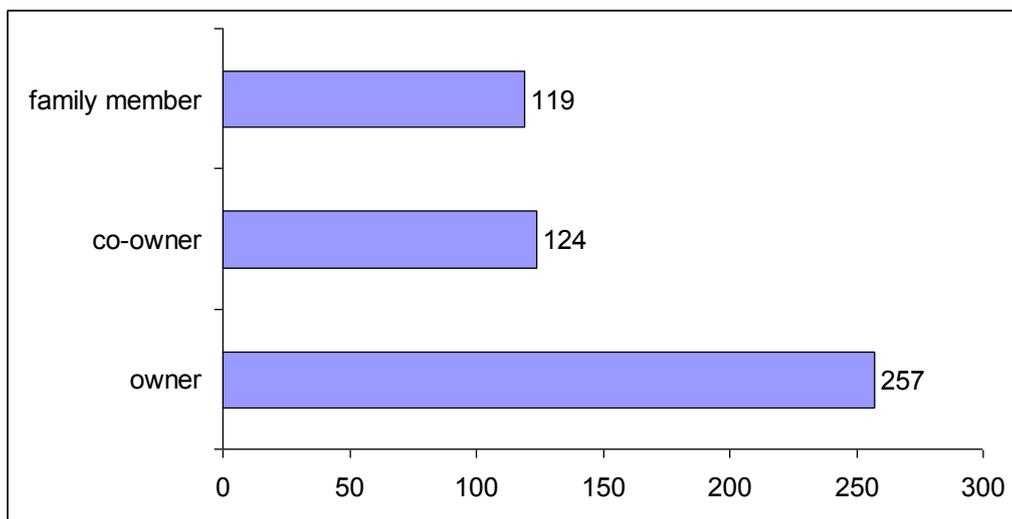


Figure 3. Position of the surveyed on the operated farm.

Regarding the size of the farm, the largest share in the structure was held by respondents with large farms, i.e. over 20 hectares (44.4%), followed by those with an average area (5-20 hectares – 28%) (Figure 4). A small number of respondents (7.6%) declined to provide such information.

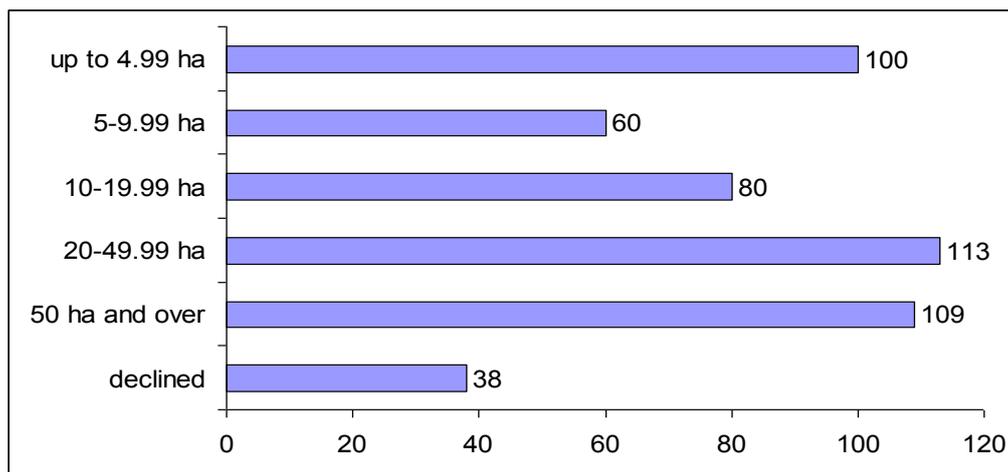


Figure 4. Structure of respondents by farm size.

The main source of income for over 73% of the respondents was the farm (289 people), and 79 declared that apart from running the farm, they had additional work. Moreover, 33 persons worked outside of the farm, 97 were pensioners, and 2 respondents were unemployed.

4. The potential of farms and the demand for care services

Social research uses two basic categories of care needs indicators – subjective and objective. In the conducted study, care needs were analysed on the basis of subjective indicators. The statements of the respondents concerning the need for the care of other people and assistance in everyday activities were taken into account.

To begin with, it was attempted to determine whether there were older people around the farmers who needed constant care. Most of the respondents (52.8%) answered that there were no such people, but also a large number (43.8%) stated they were nearby (Table 1).

Table 1.

Are there older people over 60 years of age requiring constant care in your immediate vicinity? Distribution of answers by region (NUTS)

Response	Region						Total	
	Central	Northwest	South	Southwest	North	East	N	%
	% of N in column							
Yes	36.4	36.8	47.9	43.3	40.6	63.5	219	43.8
No	62.8	60.3	47.9	52.2	56.2	30.2	264	52.8
Don't know	0.0	1.5	0.0	2.2	1.6	4.8	7	1.4
Difficult to say	0.8	1.5	4.3	2.2	1.6	1.6	10	2.0

Such people were most often seen in the eastern region; 63.5% of the respondents in this region responded positively, followed by 47.9% in the southern region and 36.4% in the central region.

The distribution of answers to the question whether the respondents see these persons as possible clients of care farms is more diverse (Table 2). The number of respondents answering this question was 236.

Table 2.

Could such a person possibly benefit from spending time each day at a care farm operating in your village?

Response	Region							Total	
	Central	North-West	South	South-West	North	East	N	%	
	% of N in column								
Yes	22.2	40.7	26.5	30.2	32.1	22.7	66	28.0	
Rather yes	22.2	0.0	16.3	14.0	14.3	13.6	34	14.4	
Rather no	20.0	22.2	18.4	11.6	17.9	18.2	42	17.8	
No	15.6	14.8	20.4	16.3	17.9	15.9	40	16.9	
Don't know	6.7	14.8	6.1	11.6	7.1	13.6	23	9.7	
Difficult to say	13.3	7.4	12.2	16.3	10.7	15.9	31	13.1	

In the eastern region, only 36.3% of those surveyed who saw people with care needs answered “yes” or “rather yes” that such persons could possibly benefit from a daily stay, while in the central region, 44.4% answered affirmatively. Therefore, while the needs of older people are perceived in the area, it is not expected that these needs would be met by a farm operating in their own village.

The respondents themselves are not very interested in using the services of care farms, and only 206 persons would be personally inclined to do so (Table 3). More interest is observed among inhabitants of urban-rural communes than in rural ones.

Table 3.

Is the respondent personally inclined to use the services of a care farm?

Response	Rural commune	Urban-rural commune	Total	
	% of N in column		N	%
Yes	39.3	45.4	206	41.2
No	39.6	32.9	188	37.6
Don't know	7.8	5.9	36	7.2
Difficult to say	13.2	15.8	70	14.0

Women (43%) more than men (40%) replied affirmatively more often. Younger respondents seem to be more open to the service offered. In regard to age, the distribution is as follows: 84% of the youngest respondents answered yes, while 45% in the age range of 31-50 and only 34% in the group of people aged 51 and above were interested in taking advantage of such an offer. This result is in line with the traditions in society of older parents being cared for at home by their loved ones and the feeling of seniors that it is the best for them to be at home.

This distribution of answers may be influenced by a number of elements. An attempt was made to determine to what extent various factors influence the decision to use the services of a care farm. The study took into account the low cost of services, good organisation and trust in the farmer in charge; all three of these factors had a significant impact on the decision.

It was sought to determine the degree of influence of these factors on a five-point scale, where 1 is a lack of incentive, and 5 is the highest degree of incentive. The highest average score of 4.42 was obtained by the factor of trust in the farmers providing care services, with as many as 80% of women giving it a value of 5. In second place, with a score of 4.33, was organisation. Low cost received an average score of 3.93, but in the group of women, as many as 60% gave this factor the highest score. Men did not rate it so highly; only 47% of them gave a value of 5. The respondents suggested that there could be other issues of lesser importance, e.g. good location and convenient access to the farm, pretty surroundings or an attractive programme and the rehabilitation treatments or medical assistance offered, as well as appropriate company.

What then might be discouraging? To a large extent, it is the social belief that it is the family who should help older people, and it is the family that has a duty to take care of them; such a belief was stated more often by men (58%) than women (42%). The respondents are also not sure that such services would be provided at the appropriate level. The distribution of this answer in terms of gender is comparable, but it is more clearly differentiated by the education of respondents. Such concerns are more often expressed by people with at least secondary education. Another psychological factor is a blockade, namely the sense of there being a lack of discretion. The respondents indicated several other barriers, among them costs, the rigour of life on the farm or a lack of comfort or poor conditions. Another group of reasons includes answers such as the absence of state aid, high costs, as well as an aversion or negative opinion to new things.

The respondents assessed the importance of the elements described in the questionnaire concerning the offer of services in rural areas on a five-point scale. The respondents expect such a farm to provide assistance in caregiving and medical matters first and foremost: 365 people assessed this as very important, and 87 as important (Figure 5).

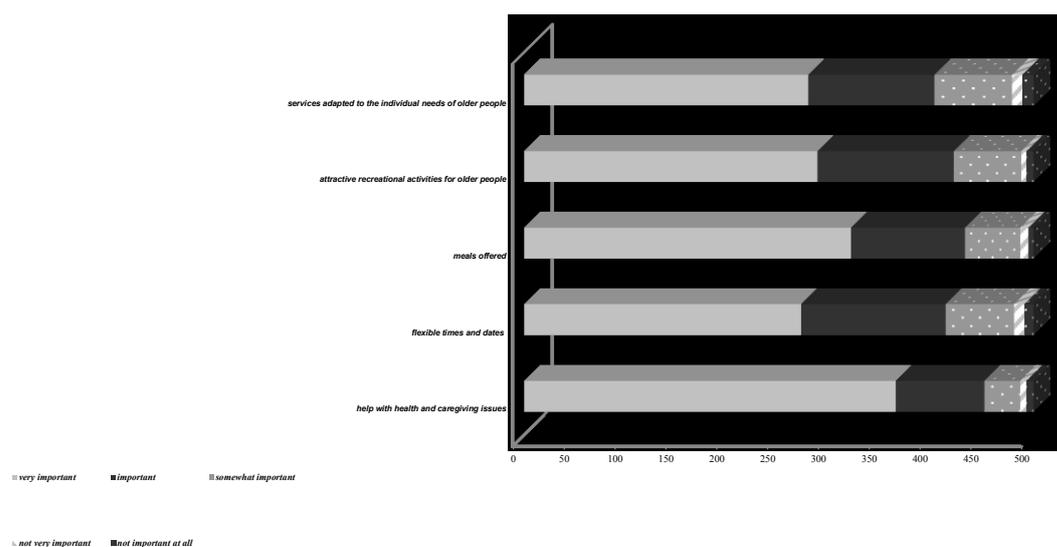


Figure 5. To what extent should the provision of care services for older people in rural areas include the following elements?

In second place is the issue of offering meals to clients. For 321 respondents, this was very important, and for 112, it was important. Less important were offering flexible times and dates and the attractiveness of activities. In general, all these elements are very important; their average ratings range from 4.3 to 4.6. Only rarely were the lowest ratings of 1 or 2 given, most often to the question of adapting the offer to individual needs, although one would think that creating an individual daily care and activity plan for each person would be a good solution.

The idea of care farms is to combine agricultural activity with care for people in need of support. It is therefore important to use the potential of a farm for the social activation of people staying there. When asking about the forms of activity which should be provided by the farm, a four-point evaluation scale was applied. The respondents considered contact with consultants regarding health issues and improving their physical condition as the most important. As many as 463 people indicated that such support is needed (Chart 6). 94% of respondents from rural communes and 91% from urban-rural communes gave this response. Providing professional consultations is connected with the necessity of building a lasting relationship with a doctor or physiotherapist. This in turn entails the possibility of creating new jobs in rural areas.

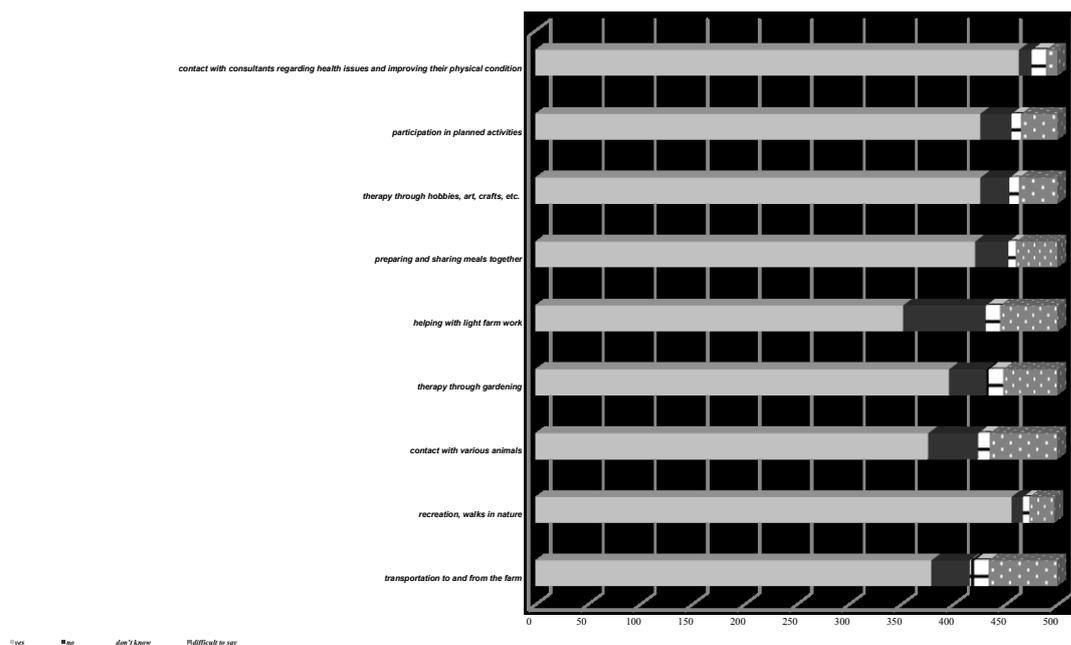


Figure 6. What main forms of activities/support should care farms offer?

The second highest number of affirmative answers (92.4% of the respondents) was given to recreation and walks in nature, i.e. a service that is rather easy to organise. This was more often indicated by inhabitants of rural communes. Next were therapy through hobbies and organised activities consisting in preparation of shared meals and light work in the garden. Less important was contact with various animals (76%), which could be quite easily provided in the

countryside. Interestingly, help in performing light farm work was least frequently regarded as the main form of activity (71% of respondents).

Care farms run by farmers may differ in the types of service they provide. They may offer services to older people, to disabled adults or to children requiring special care. On a scale of 1-5, respondents assessed the importance of several of the indicated initiatives. The highest ratings were given to the usefulness of care farms in rural areas offering services for older people (Table 4). The average score was 4.1, and they were the least varied (28% variation).

Table 4.
Importance of initiatives in rural areas

Type of initiative	Average score	Standard deviation	Coefficient of variation
Suitability of rural care farms offering care services for older people	4.1	1.137	28%
Need to extend care services to include those with disabilities at risk of social exclusion and others requiring care and support	3.9	1.323	34%
Possibility to combine activities for different age groups (e.g. older people and children) as part of the activities of care farms	3.5	1.532	44%

Source: Own work.

The second highest assessment (3.9) was given to the need to extend care services to include people with disabilities at risk of social exclusion, and as the least important, they assessed the possibility of combining activities for different age groups within the framework of one farm.

For care farms to become widespread, appropriate legal solutions are required, which are necessary due to the specific nature of the services they provide and for the safety of older people. There is no doubt that financial support for farmers is necessary for care farms to operate properly. Raising the funds to establish and operate a farm is not easy. Currently, it is possible to apply for co-financing from various programmes, which depend on the legal formula under which a care farm will operate. When asked about the possibility of cooperation with local authorities to obtain support, the majority (52%) answered that they do see such a possibility. However, only a small part of the respondents (12.4%) affirmed that they would be interested in setting up a care farm, and in this group, 62 people declared that cooperation with local authorities was possible (68%).

5. Summary

The implementation of social innovations in rural areas is connected with overcoming various barriers and removing various types of difficulties. The sources of these difficulties are different; they can be external and internal, and they can relate to the environment or the subject.

This study, which was carried out on farms all over Poland, made it possible to identify several factors hindering the implementation of innovations and to learn about the expectations of potential clients.

Recently established care farms in the countryside are an additional source of income for farmers. Their activity is in line with trends in social innovation. They can be created on the existing basis of agritourism farms whose services are no longer attractive enough to generate satisfactory income. They can also be born as new, attractive business ideas on farms whose owners did not find agritourism appealing in its pure form. Offering care services entails proper preparation of the farm, often linked with the need to educate the owner and to obtain the right qualifications, as the expectations of potential customers can be very high. The issue of appropriate legislation is also important, because at present, care services in the day care system cannot be provided by individuals. Appropriate assistance from local governments also seems to be necessary, because the idea of farms offering day care to older village residents is not yet widespread. This requires wide dissemination and demonstration of positive examples of experimental farms. Some of the respondents know older people who need care in their local environs, but at the same time, they think that a care farm is not the right place to help them. Among men, 58% believe that older people should be looked after by their closest family. Most of the respondents also do not see themselves as potential beneficiaries of such farms. Most often, respondents from the youngest age group declared their desire to use such services in their village in the future. The factors which could most strongly influence a positive decision in this respect include trust in those providing care services and good organisation. The price factor was the least significant. Additionally, a good location of the farm with convenient access and an attractive programme for older people seems to be important. The biggest barrier is the belief that care should be provided by one's own family and the fear of indiscretion. Respondents expect that such a farm would primarily provide assistance in caregiving and medical matters, with the issue of providing meals in second place. It turns out that offering older people flexible times and dates and the attractiveness of activities are less important. When asking about the forms of activities which should be provided by the farm, the respondents indicated contact with consultants regarding health and improving physical condition as the most important, with recreation and walks in second place. The following were mentioned as next: therapy through hobbies and organised activities consisting in preparing shared meals and light work in the garden. Less important were contact with animals and assistance in performing light farm work.

There is no doubt that financial support for farmers is necessary for care farms to operate properly. When asked about the possibility of cooperation with local authorities in the area of obtaining support, the majority (52%) replied that they see such a possibility. However, only a small part of the respondents (12.4%) affirmed that they would be interested in setting up a care farm and in this group, 62 people declared that cooperation with local authorities was possible (68%).

Care farms run by farmers may differ in the types of service they provide. They may offer services to older people, to disabled adults or to children requiring special care. Respondents evaluating the importance of several indicated initiatives listed as most important the usefulness of care farms in rural areas offering services for older people, the need to extend care services to people with disabilities at risk of social exclusion placed second, and as the least important, the possibility of combining on one farm activities for different age groups (e.g. seniors and children).

Care farms appear to be a worthwhile alternative to nursing homes. Their success is conditioned by appropriate state policy, the support of local governments and, at the level of the farms themselves, proper management.

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