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Research article

## Agricultural work in European prisons. An exploratory analysis

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**Abstract.** Work in prisons has taken on various meanings over time. In European contexts, it serves as a valuable tool for enhancing inmates' quality of life. Specifically, agricultural work is recognised for its benefits, such as physical and psychological rehabilitation, vocational training, job placement, education, and recreational activities. Some of these aspects align with Social Farming (SF), which attributes a socio-welfare role to agricultural practices. To identify any SF elements within European prisons, an exploratory analysis was carried out, examining experiences in four countries (Denmark, Greece, Italy, and Sweden) using a qualitative approach. The findings reveal that many aspects of these experiences align with the SF framework and contribute to the rehabilitation of prisoners engaged in agricultural work.

**Keywords:** social farming, prison farms, agricultural work in prisons, European prisons.

**JEL codes:** H53, I39, K14.

### HIGHLIGHTS

- Social Farming elements can be found in the agricultural activities carried out in the experiences analysed.
- In European prisons the direct involvement of inmates in agricultural activities is a key element in their rehabilitative path.
- The economic value associated with inmates' work contributes to giving them a sense of usefulness.

## 1. INTRODUCTION AND OBJECTIVES

At international level, work in prisons has been regulated since the 1950s by the United Nations Organisation. During the First United Nations Congress on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Prisoners, held in Geneva in 1955, “Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners” were adopted<sup>1</sup>.

In drafting them, the wide variety of legal, social, economic and geographical conditions in the world was accounted for, and their adoption was unanimously accepted as minimum conditions by all members of the Organisation. With regard to work, the rules prohibit its afflictive nature, requiring – rather – that the occupation represents an opportunity for the maintenance or enhancement of the skills of inmates. In addition, the Organization requires that working conditions (in terms of time and remuneration, as well as security) should be comparable to those generally practised in society outside prison, “so as to prepare prisoners for the conditions of normal working life” (Standard 72-1).

Later, in 1990, basic universal principles in the treatment of prisoners were established. Drafted by the UN OHCHR (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights), these include the resolution according to which “conditions must be created to enable prisoners to engage in meaningful paid employment, that facilitates their reintegration into the country’s labour market and enables them to contribute to their own economic livelihood and that of their families” (principle number 8)<sup>2</sup>.

At European level, the prison system has been regulated since 1950 with the enactment of the European Convention on Human Rights<sup>3</sup>. The document represented a milestone in the path undertaken by the Allied Powers to prevent the most serious human rights violations that occurred during the Second World War. With regard to work (Art. 4), the document reads that no one shall be held in slavery or required to perform forced or compulsory labour.

In 1973, the Council of Europe developed its own Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (European Prison Rules), not binding on the Member States, which were adopted by the Committee of Ministers (Resolutions 73.5) and reformulated in 1987.

European Prison Rules (Art. 26) also state standards regulating work, defining the positive and non-punitive nature of work in prisons, specifying that the work provided by prison authorities must enable them to maintain or improve the prisoners’ skills, with a view to a successful social and labour reintegration upon release. Moreover, the document mentions the need to equate as far as possible the organization and working methods used in detention facilities with the ordinary one used in working life (Art. 26.7). According to this statement, the work must be remunerated fairly and regulated, in terms of daily and monthly working hours, according to national rules or those protecting workers internationally, and the pursuit of profit in the production activities carried out within correctional institutions cannot prevail over interest in the personal growth of inmates.

According to the international and European rules, agricultural work is broadly used to implement training and working programmes inside penal facilities. Agriculture in penal institutions has a great rehabilitation power: firstly, it allows prisoners to work in the open air, restoring a sense of freedom and proximity to civil society (Moran, Turner, 2019; Piccioni *et al.*, 2022); secondly, it allows them to take care of other living beings (plants and animals), activating processes of accountability towards themselves and third parties (Payne *et al.*, 2023), as well as processes of gradual assumption of autonomy; thirdly, since the outcome of their efforts has an economic value, they recover a sense of usefulness and self-realization (Borsotto *et al.*, 2022); finally, it is an opportunity to learn a job and increase inmates’ employability (Ascencio, 2018; Bhuller *et al.*, 2020; Borsotto *et al.*, 2022). The agricultural work carried out inside prisons can be powerful because working on the land can provide inmates with a meaningful and purposeful endeavour (Ciaperoni, 2009a; 2009b). It needs to be underlined that in some cases the inmates work in farms inside the prisons, in other cases they can work in farms located outside, depending on the legal framework and local opportunity. Considering these elements, agriculture in detention centres can be traced back to Social Farming, which links agricultural practices to socio-welfare purposes (Ricciardi, Dara Guccione, 2018; Borsotto *et al.*, 2022).

The aim of this study is to identify the characteristics of agricultural work in European prisons and to highlight elements common to Social Farming that

<sup>1</sup> Approved by the Economic and Social Council in resolutions 663 C (XXIV) of 31 July 1957 and 2076 (LXII) of 13 May 1977. These standards were revised by the General Assembly in 2011. The revision process lasted until 2014. After that, the revisions were approved in Cape Town in 2015 and were named the Nelson Mandela Rules.

<sup>2</sup> “Basic Principles for the Treatment of Prisoners” – Resolution 45/111 by General Assembly of 14 December 1990. <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/basicprinciples.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> Quote from the original 1950 text: [https://www.echr.coe.int/Documents/Archives\\_1950\\_Convention\\_ENG.pdf](https://www.echr.coe.int/Documents/Archives_1950_Convention_ENG.pdf). The most recent version of the Convention follows the provisions of Protocol No. 15 (CETS No.213) as of its entry into force, i.e. as of 1 August 2021, and Protocol No. 14 (CETS No. 194) as of its entry into force, i.e. as of 1 June 2010. Article 4 remained, however, unchanged.

can contribute to the social and occupational inclusion of inmates. To this end, an exploratory analysis was conducted by gathering information from existing literature and various European experiences. Labour and prison regulations were examined to develop a comprehensive framework and to gain a deeper understanding of legislative choices regarding rehabilitation through work. In the second section, we explore the interpretation and definition of Social Farming in the European literature and the value of agricultural work in prison settings. The third section outlines the method used to investigate the phenomenon and select relevant case studies. Finally, the results, discussion, and concluding reflections are presented.

## 2. THEORETICAL APPROACH

In the last decades, many scholars used the concept of Social Farming (SF) in order to analyse a set of heterogeneous practices taking place in farms having social and ethical purposes in common, generally aimed to offer 1) pathways for the social and/or labour inclusion of people with disabilities, social disadvantage, addiction problems, mental or psychiatric problems, who experience or have experienced periods of imprisonment; 2) care and/or health services addressed to support the public system in their intervention at local level (Di Iacovo, 2009; Di Iacovo, O'Connor, 2009; Guirado *et al.*, 2017; Hassink, Van Dijk, 2006; Hine *et al.*, 2008; Jarábková *et al.*, 2022; Moruzzo *et al.*, 2019; Sempik, 2010).

The European Economic and Social Committee defines SF as follows: “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 (according to the definition used in COST (European Cooperation in Science and Technology) Action 866 – Green Care). 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 furthering their development, making progress and improving their well-being” (Willems, 2013).

On the other hand, the European Economic and Social Committee suggests that it is not useful to include Social Farming in a rigid definition, because of the many forms it can take (Willems, 2013). In fact, according to van Elsen (2016), it would be more correct to think of SF as a broad “concept”, i.e. something in the making that can take on new forms and evolve. As suggested by Di Iacovo (2020), in Europe these practices are identified

with different locutions: “Farming for health”, “Green Care”, “Social Farming”, “Health Farming”, depending on the area in which it is practised, the different welfare models, historical evolution and meaning attributed to these practices. In the European context, two different models of Social Farming can be distinguished (Di Iacovo, O'Connor, 2009): the Northern European one, where agricultural activities are promoted and mainly financed by institutions for therapeutic and rehabilitative purposes (Green Care or Green Care in Agriculture or Care Farming); and the Mediterranean one, where Social Farming initiatives are aimed at population groups with low levels of contracting, i.e. who are unlikely to be employed for work tasks (Borsotto *et al.*, 2022).

Agricultural work in prison was introduced in the 18th century, when in several Western countries prisoners were forced to work, following the Protestant model of “communal living” and the idea of controlling them and imposing better behaviour on them. At first, it took on a punitive value and was implemented as a form of sentence reduction by the prisoner. Only during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, agricultural work became a means of re-educating prisoners (Foucault, 2005).

The literature highlights the contribution of agricultural activity to reducing the risk of recidivism through increased employability skills and the positive impact of working outdoors (Welch, Eldridge, 2020). Studies on the use of plants and animals, focusing on farm animal care and husbandry, are particularly lacking, as Payne *et al.* (2023) show. However, other authors (Artz, Davis, 2017; Fitzgerald *et al.*, 2021) state that, while animals used in therapeutic interventions bring benefits, the interactions with commodified and objectified animals are likely not facilitating empathy and rehabilitation, due to the violence animals have to suffer.

There is also evidence that horticultural therapy (HT), which is considered a declination of SF (Makau *et al.*, 2024), brings benefits to physical, social and mental health, and has a positive effect on inmate rehabilitation and recidivism (Ascencio, 2018). Also, Lee *et al.* (2021) observed positive changes in the health conditions of prisoners participating in the HT programme, i.e. decreased depression and increased self-esteem and life satisfaction. This kind of activity also allows offenders to learn specific skills (growing process, management, etc.) that will increase their employability in fields (Jiler, 2006; Borsotto *et al.*, 2022; Ricciardi, Dara Giccione, 2018). Furthermore, a qualitative study of a horticulture programme in Canadian prisons shows both the positive impacts associated with planting, tending and harvesting, and those associated with donating food to local communities (Timler *et al.*, 2019).

Another important aspect relates to the additional benefits linked to the adoption of organic farming, the benefits of which in prisoning contexts were broadly analysed by Italian researchers in the early 2000s (AIAB, 2007; Ciaperoni, Ferrante, 2008). These authors pointed out that the lower use of synthesis inputs for addressing plant pathologies provides operators with a far greater degree of safety for their health with respect to conventional farming techniques. Moreover, organic farming holds considerable value in terms of re-education, consenting the cultivation of a positive disposition and connection with the natural environment and encouraging a consciousness regarding sustainable practices. Consequently, it improves the sense of responsibility towards other human beings and all living creatures. (Giarè *et al.*, 2017; Guirado *et al.*, 2017; Nicli *et al.*, 2020).

Nevertheless, some authors (Chennault, Sbicca, 2023) provide a critical perspective, as prison agriculture can embody explicit forms of exploitation, highlighting how, in some contexts, the prison population is exploited to produce an economic profit that goes to “repay” the damage that the crime committed by the prisoner has caused to the public community. In the literature, this approach is associated with the concept of racial capitalism (Chennault, Sbicca, 2023; Hazelett, 2023). However, penal systems around the world are quite different, as is the historical and cultural evolution of prison work (Council of Europe Development Bank, 2021).

### 3. METHOD AND DATA

Due to the lack of comprehensive data and information on agricultural activities within European penal institutions, an exploratory analysis was conducted, following a bottom-up qualitative research approach. Exploratory research is a methodology approach aimed at investigating research questions that have not previously been studied in depth.

Data were collected by a literature review on agricultural practices in prisons and using questionnaires and interviews. Four phases were planned, each with an increasing depth of inquiry and information sought: (1) scouting phase, (2) a preliminary qualitative questionnaire, (3) a second qualitative questionnaire, and (4) interviews. The information has been collected in order to have a framework of agricultural activities in prisons and compare them with the main characteristics of SF, as defined in the literature.

#### 3.1. Scouting phase

The research started with a preliminary scouting phase through an online survey, using the same keywords for each European country in the main online search engine (Google): “prison farm”, “open prison”, “agriculture in prison”, “agriculture and detention”. This approach enabled the identification of 32 penal institutions engaging in agricultural activities across Europe (Figure 1). Italian experiences, on the other hand, were identified based on the literature (Borsotto *et al.*, 2022) and direct knowledge. The entire exploratory phase was conducted between February and April 2022.

#### 3.2. Preliminary questionnaire

The second phase involved the development of a structured, standardized and self-administered questionnaire (available in the supplementary material) based on the literature (AIAB, 2009: 45), aimed at gathering information about the activities carried out in prison farms. The questionnaire was delivered to the identified institutions via email, using “Google Forms”, between May and June 2022. A total of 15 responses were collected (Table 1, Q1).

#### 3.3. Second questionnaire

The development of the second questionnaire (available in the supplementary material), which was also

**Figure 1.** Analysed prison farms per country.



**Table 1.** Contribution of the identified European prison farms to the study.

Prison (Country)	Q1	Q2	Interview	Role of the interviewee
Strafvollzugsanstalt Graz – Außenstelle Lankowitz Gutshof (AT)	X			
Justizanstalt Sonnenberg (AT)	X			
Justizanstalt Schwarzau (AT)	X			
Penitentiair Landbouwcentrum van Ruiselede (BE)	X			
Søbysøgård Fængsel (DK)	X	X	X	Danish penal and prison service administrative staff
Sønder Omme Fængsel (DK)	X	X	X	Danish penal and prison service administrative staff
Kragsskovhede Fængsel (DK)	X	X	X	Danish penal and prison service administrative staff
Renbæk Fængsel (DK)	X	X	X	Danish penal and prison service administrative staff
Agrotiko Katastima Kratisis Agias – Grammateia (EL)	X	X	X	Agronomist
Casa di Reclusione Ancona Barcaglione (IT)	X	X	X	Agricultural technician
Casa Circondariale Viterbo Mammagialla (IT)	X	X	X	Legal representative of the cooperative ORTO
Casa di Reclusione Sant'Angelo dei Lombardi (IT)	X	X	X	Penitentiary Police in charge of agricultural activities
Anstalten Rödjan (SE)	X	X	X	Prison staff who manages the agricultural activities
Anstalten Svartsjö (SE)	X	X	X	Farm manager
Sörbyns fängelse (SE)	X			

Please, note that the names of the prisons are reported in the original language.

structured, standardized and self-administered, was aimed at obtaining in-depth, detailed and specific information: the characteristics of the agricultural enterprises in terms of cultivated area; the activities carried out and use of the products; the organization of work activities; the methods for selecting and training inmates for work; inmates' earnings; networking activities conducted by the prison; as well as social aspects, such as the criteria for selecting and hiring inmates. This phase of the research was conducted between July and September 2022, and 10 responses were collected (Table 1, Q2).

### 3.4. Interviews

The respondents to the second questionnaire were invited to participate in a semi-structured focused interview (available in the supplementary material) to gain a deeper understanding of the specific experiences conducted within their respective institutions. The interview guide has been defined as a list of questions (Whiting, 2008; Krauss *et al.*, 2009), in order to direct the conversation towards the research topic (Krauss *et al.*, 2009). The flexible form of the semi-structured interview allowed dialogue during the interview (Whiting, 2008) and the possibility to deepen based on the specific context.

All interviews were conducted online via the "Microsoft Teams" platform, digitally recorded, and transcribed with the participants' consent. Each interview lasted around 60 minutes. This phase of the research took place between September and December

2022; a total of 7 interviews for 10 institutions were conducted as some interviewees were representatives of multiple penal institutions<sup>4</sup>.

The analysis presented in the results therefore considers prison farms in Denmark, Greece, Italy and Sweden, which are the experiences from which we were able to get all the necessary information for the goal of our study. Prison farms in Austria and Belgium have not been included in the study because they replied only to the first questionnaire. Specifically, In Denmark, the interviewee works in the headquarter within the Danish penal and prison service at a political-administrative level and is responsible for the activities that prisoners have to attend while they are incarcerated (DK1). She replied collectively for all prison farms in Denmark (Søbysøgård, Sdr. Omme Fængsel, Kragsskovhede Fængsel and Renbæk prisons). The respondent from Greece is an agronomist (EL1), who leads the agricultural department of Agia prison. In Italy, we interviewed people with different roles, due the variety of situations: the legal representative of the cooperative ORTO, who in 2017 started the social agriculture project "Semi Liberi" in Viterbo prison (IT1), the agricultural technician of the Penitentiary Institution of Ancona (IT2) and a member of the penitentiary police in charge of agricultural activities in Sant'Angelo dei Lombardi prison (IT3). In Sweden, we interviewed the farm manager responsible for all kinds of work for the prisoners in Svartsjö prison (SE1);

<sup>4</sup> Further information on the prison farms analysed can be found in the supplementary material.

and the manager of agricultural activities from the Rödjan prison (SE2).

For a conscious and clear reading of this analysis, it is important to emphasise that the opinions and points of view expressed in the work are not those of the inmates because it was not possible to obtain the required permissions to speak with them. From now on, we will only use the name of the place where prisons are located to illustrate results.

#### 4. RESULTS

As already mentioned, the analysis considers prison farms in four countries: Denmark (4), Greece (1), Italy (3) and Sweden (2). Results are presented by topic in order to directly compare experiences in relation to: general information (4.1), agricultural activities (4.2), use of products (4.3), economic revenues (4.4), organization of work (4.5), inmates' selection and job preference (4.6), training of prisoners (4.7), working conditions (4.8), role of work and agriculture in the legislative system and advantages of agricultural work (4.9), and networking (4.10). Given the exploratory nature of our research, we will be reporting in the results all the aspects that have emerged from the questionnaires and interviews, even when they are not strictly related to our research goal. Later on, in the discussion session, we will highlight the aspects emerging from our exploration that can be linked to SF.

##### 4.1. General information

The agricultural activities conducted within prisons vary in terms of the number of prisoners involved,

which can range from 2 to 150, due to differences in the organization, size of the farm, and available working opportunities. The study considered only male prisoners. The exploratory analysis of the participating prisons highlighted that the farms associated with these institutions are of different sizes: the total agricultural area (TAA) varies between 0.4 and 1,100 hectares, while the utilized agricultural area (UAA) can take on a value ranging from less than 1 hectare up to 600. Table 2 summarises information about prisoners and agricultural area per prison analysed.

##### 4.2. Agricultural activities

The production orientation (Tables 3a and 3b) is in line with the agriculture of the examined countries. Northern European prison farms are characterized by large extensions and focus their activities mostly on cereals, forage, forestry and livestock. Instead, among the Southern European prisons, Italian farms have a rather small TAA and UAA, which they valorise with niche productions with high added value, such as small fruits in Ancona Barcaglione (IT), aloe vera and aromatic herbs in Viterbo (IT) and sericulture in Sant'Angelo dei Lombardi (IT). Differently, the Greek prison is characterised by productions typical of both small and large farms. The number of inmates employed in agricultural activities is generally higher in the north proportionate to the higher UAA.

The prison farms are involved in diversification in non-agricultural activities (Table 4), such as direct sale, food and wood processing. Direct sale is typical of the Italian prisons, and is also done in Rodjan (SE). Product processing is rather widespread everywhere, while wood processing is more common in Northern Europe-

**Table 2.** Number of prisoners and agricultural area (hectares).

Prison (Country)	Total prisoners	Prisoners working in agriculture	TAA (ha)	UAA (ha)
Søbysøgård Fængsel (DK)	3,600*	150*	230	200
Sønder Omme Fængsel (DK)			1,100	950
Kragsskovhede Fængsel (DK)			1,000	600
Renbæk Fængsel (DK)			200	160
Agrotiko Katastima Kratisis Agias – Grammateia (EL)	85	2	138	101
Casa di Reclusione Ancona Barcaglione (IT)	80	5-10	2	2
Casa Circondariale Viterbo Mammagialla (IT)	503**	5	0.4	0.3
Casa di Reclusione Sant'Angelo dei Lombardi (IT)	180	10	1.2	1.15
Anstalten Rödjan (SE)	107	35	387	387
Anstalten Svartsjö (SE)	120	35-40	400	400

\* Total for all Danish prisons.

\*\* Data taken from the Italian Ministry of Justice website (09/09/2022), because the answer to the questionnaire was 5.

**Table 3a.** Agricultural productions by prison.

Prison (Country)	Cereal	Forage	Fruit	Horticulture	Olive	Aromatic herbs	Forestry	Livestock	Gardening
Søbysøgård Fængsel (DK)	X	X				X	X	X	
Sønder Omme Fængsel (DK)	X	X				X	X	X	
Kragsskovhede Fængsel (DK)	X	X				X	X	X	
Renbæk Fængsel (DK)	X	X				X	X	X	
Agrotiko Katastima Kratisis Agias – Grammateia (EL)		X	X	X	X	X		X	
Casa di Reclusione Ancona Barcaglione (IT)				X	X			X	
Casa Circondariale Viterbo Mammagialla (IT)			X	X	X	X			
Casa di Reclusione Sant'Angelo dei Lombardi (IT)			X	X	X	X			
Anstalten Rödjan (SE)	X	X		X			X	X	
Anstalten Svartsjö (SE)	X	X						X	X

**Table 3b.** Agricultural productions by prison.

Prison (Country)	Firewood	Beekeeping	Floriculture	Edible sprouts	Aromatic herbs	Aloe farming	Viticulture	Sericulture
Søbysøgård Fængsel (DK)		X						
Sønder Omme Fængsel (DK)		X						
Kragsskovhede Fængsel (DK)		X						
Renbæk Fængsel (DK)		X						
Agrotiko Katastima Kratisis Agias – Grammateia (EL)			X					
Casa di Reclusione Ancona Barcaglione (IT)		X				X		
Casa Circondariale Viterbo Mammagialla (IT)			X	X	X			
Casa di Reclusione Sant'Angelo dei Lombardi (IT)		X					X	X
Anstalten Rödjan (SE)								
Anstalten Svartsjö (SE)	X							

an countries. The prison of Rodjan (SE) is the only one producing energy. Table 5 summarizes the agricultural method used in the prison analysed.

In Denmark, the move towards organic farming in prisons started in the 1990s. The EU organic certification was obtained with the support of a consultancy agency, which provided information on EU rules, regulations and financial aspects (i.e., access to fundings). The interviewee underlined the importance of this support as she claimed that bureaucracy in organic farming can sometimes constitute a limitation. The Danish administration pays great attention to sustainability and in the past promoted the analysis of the sustainability potentials of prison farms in Denmark, with the support of external consultants. Different aspects of sustainability are included, such as saving water, energy, biodiversity, life quality, economics management, soil management and animals.

In Agias (EL), efforts are generally made to minimise fertilisers and other inputs to be as environmen-

tally friendly as possible, but organic certification is only obtained for vegetables and herbs because it is considered too expensive (i.e., excluding forage production, fruit farming, olive growing, livestock and floriculture).

None of the analysed Italian prisons complies with the EU organic standards, mainly due to the low production quantity and the difficulty in managing the administrative procedure on behalf of the prisons. Nevertheless, all the interviewees report a minimal use of chemical inputs, which can result in lower production. The interviewee from Sant'Angelo dei Lombardi claims that this low-input choice is both for environmental protection and because the final aim of the agricultural work that they do “*is not to produce and make money but to re-educate and train prisoners*” (IT3).

The two Swedish prison farms produce under the Swedish organic certification KRAV; the Rodjan (SE) detention centre is one of the oldest farms that acquired the certification in the late 1980s. KRAV is a certifica-

**Table 4.** Activities related to agriculture by prison.

Prison (Country)	Direct sale	Product processing	Energy production
Søbysøgård Fængsel (DK)		X	
Sønder Omme Fængsel (DK)		X	
Kragsskovhede Fængsel (DK)		X	
Renbæk Fængsel (DK)		X	
Agrotiko Katastima Kratisis Agias – Grammateia (EL)			
Casa di Reclusione Ancona Barcaglione (IT)	X	X	
Casa Circondariale Viterbo (IT)	X	X	
Casa di Reclusione Sant'Angelo dei Lombardi (IT)	X	X	
Anstalten Rödjan (SE)	X	X	X
Anstalten Svartsjö (SE)		X	

**Table 5.** Agricultural method by prison.

Prison (Country)	Organic	Conventional
Søbysøgård Fængsel (DK)	X	
Sønder Omme Fængsel (DK)	X	
Kragsskovhede Fængsel (DK)	X	
Renbæk Fængsel (DK)	X	
Agrotiko Katastima Kratisis Agias – Grammateia (EL)		X
Casa di Reclusione Ancona Barcaglione (IT)		X
Casa Circondariale Viterbo (IT)		X
Casa di Reclusione Sant'Angelo dei Lombardi (IT)		X
Anstalten Rödjan (SE)	X	
Anstalten Svartsjö (SE)	X	

tion more restrictive than the EU organic one, since there are more rules and controls<sup>5</sup>. Consequently, it is a strong brand, and its products are sold at higher prices with respect to EU organic certification.

#### 4.3. Use of products

The interviews highlight that products obtained in prisons are both self-consumed (except for Viterbo prison) and sold, as shown in Table 6.

In Denmark, the meat is sold to “Danish Crown” and the dairy products to ARLA, which is a large dairy production company, through periodic and structured contracts. They also sell to large scale distribution and specialized shops. The interviewee specified that they

<sup>5</sup> For more information, see the following links: <https://www.kravse.cdn.triggerfish.cloud/uploads/sites/2/2022/12/krav-standards-2023-1670933646.pdf> (KRAV standards); [https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/farming/organic-farming/legislation\\_en](https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/farming/organic-farming/legislation_en) (European ones).

sell to big companies because they can manage the strict regulations of organic farming.

Also, in Agia prison part of the production is sold and part of it is self-consumed. Prisoners and employees can buy the products made in prison. The rules establish that first of all these products should be used to supply the prison, then the employees and finally the free market. Prisoners have the possibility to cook the food that they buy (and produce) in the central kitchen. Organic products are sold to specialized shops while not certified products are sold to any buyer in the free market. They only sell raw products and not in large quantities. They don't have a registered brand.

In Italy products are generally sold to companies or cooperatives that participate in tenders organised by the Ministry of Justice but they can also be used for self-consumption in accordance with the provisions of the national Law<sup>6</sup>. In Viterbo, products are sold to farmers' markets, specialized shops, online, and in the shop located outside the prison. In Ancona prison, part of the production is for sale, which takes place through a registered trademark “Fattoria Barcaglione”, partly at the farm shop and partly at farmers' markets and Christmas markets. The production from the prison voluntary social garden (about 0.3 ha) is given free of charge to the inmates; the excess of the social garden is distributed to needy families in the area indicated by the Social Services of the Municipality of Ancona. This activity is supported with the contribution of the Marche Region Department of Agriculture, the Regional Guarantor

<sup>6</sup> Law no. 354/1975, art. 20, paragraph 12: “Prisoners may be allowed to engage in the activity of producing goods for self-consumption. A decree of the Minister of Justice, in consultation with the Minister of Economy and Finance, establishes the procedures for carrying out the activity for self-consumption, including through the use of prison administration goods and services”. For more information see: Troncone, P. 2014. *Manuale di Diritto Penitenziario*. Torino, Giappichelli Editore.



**Table 6.** Use of products.

Prison (Country)	Use of products				Brand
	Self-consumption	Direct sale	Large-scale distribution	Local retailer	
Søbysøgård Fængsel (DK)	X		X	X	
Sønder Omme Fængsel (DK)	X		X	X	
Kragsskovhede Fængsel (DK)	X		X	X	
Renbæk Fængsel (DK)	X		X	X	
Agrotiko Katastima Kratisis Agias – Grammateia (EL)	X		X	X	
Casa di Reclusione Ancona Barcaglione (IT)	X	X		X	X
Casa Circondariale Viterbo (IT)		X		X	
Casa di Reclusione Sant'Angelo dei Lombardi (IT)	X	X			X
Anstalten Rödjan (SE)	X	X	X	X	
Anstalten Svartsjö (SE)	X		X	X	X

of the prisoners and local nurseries. In Sant'Angelo dei Lombardi, the horticultural products are partly used in the prison canteen, where about seven inmates work, and a part is sold at the farm shop. As for processed products such as wine, honey, jams, they are sold under the brand "Fresco di galera" at the farm shop and in specialised shops, such as the e-commerce "Economia Carceraria" and the related shop Vale la Pena.

In Svartsjö prison (SE), a very small part of the greens is used for self-consumption. Products are sold in the open market to the company "Lantmännen", which is a cooperation between farmers, while cows are sold to a slaughterhouse (SCAN). The production is also sold to the food industry and large-scale distribution under the trademark of the company and under the KRAV brand. In Anstalten Rödjan (SE), sales are made to a farm shop (store located in prison), the food industry (crops to big warehouses, milk to large industries, animals to external slaughterhouses), and local supermarkets (wheat flour).

Regarding promotional activities, the examined experiences generally don't carry out marketing and products promotion activities, except for Svartsjö, Agia and all Italian case studies where some marketing activities are organised by the prison staff. In particular, in Italy, inmates who are under a specific regime (Article 21 Law no. 354/1975) that allows them to go outside, can participate in some promotion activities and local events where their work is valued and publicised.

#### 4.4. Economic revenues

The management of the farm budget is different in each case study analysed. Particularly interesting is the

experience of Denmark, where the prisons have a single farm budget, thus realizing economies of scale in the purchasing department, as well as in production and distribution. The interviewee for the Danish prisons reported that every year there is a deficit in the farm balance but this does not constitute a concern as "*earning money is not the point. It is important that the farm works commercially so that it resembles a real job and it is more meaningful for inmates, with the goal of creating a meaningful environment where people work for something that they actually sell*" (DK1).

In Greece, economic revenues are allocated to the central state, in particular to the Ministry of Protection of Civilians, which in turn funds the prison.

In Italy, the income is paid to the central prison administration, which also manages investments, because of specific norms about production and commercialization. In the case of Viterbo prison, activity, income and expenditure are managed by a cooperative (which, by definition, cannot make profits). Revenues are used to give a supplementary treatment of wages to inmates and to give inmates tutors a refund of expenses.

In Svartsjö prison, the farm budget is directly managed by the prison, reinvesting the income deriving from the sale of products. Instead, in the other Swedish prison farm (Rödjan), the income earned from the sale of products is managed by the head office of the Swedish Prison and Probation Service.

#### 4.5. Organisation of work

The organisation and management of agricultural work activities are heterogeneous (Table 7), due to the

**Table 7.** Organization of work.

Prison (Country)	Prison staff	External actors	Inmates
Søbysøgård Fængsel (DK)	X		
Sønder Omme Fængsel (DK)	X		
Kragsskovhede Fængsel (DK)	X		
Renbæk Fængsel (DK)	X		
Agrotiko Katastima Kratisis Agias – Grammateia (EL)		X	
Casa di Reclusione Ancona Barcaglione (IT)	X	X	
Casa Circondariale Viterbo (IT)		X	
Sant'Angelo dei Lombardi (IT)	X	X	
Anstalten Rödjan (SE)	X	X	X
Anstalten Svartsjö (SE)	X		X

diversity of the personnel in charge and actors involved. In general, the administrations of the single penal institute are responsible for the organisation and management of work and choose the figure (prison staff, external contractor, inmate) who leads the activities. In Italy, for instance, in the case of external contractors there are stringent regulations in this area, the working relationship is between the inmates and external companies, e.g. social cooperatives, which manage the work activity. While the relationship of the latter with penal institutions is defined by specific conventions (Art. 15 Law no. 354/1975.)

Some interviewees (Rödjan and Svartsjö (SE)) highlight the importance of the active involvement of prisoners in the management and organization of agricultural work. In Svartsjö, the staff involves inmates by displaying the planning of activities and the timing, so that inmates have a long-term vision of what they have to do. Moreover, the interviewee from Svartsjö reported that “we use the skills that prisoners have, for example mechanics, and they can plan their own work for themselves, order the materials, organize themselves under the supervision of their experts” (SE1). This is an extremely important aspect, not only because it makes the work of the inmates more interesting and gratifying, but above all because it activates a process of responsibility and helps to develop and increase organisational and management skills. In addition, the engagement is fundamental to the re-educational process and for future reintegration into work once the sentence has been served.

#### 4.6. Inmates' selection and job preference

As for the inmates' selection, each penal institution refers to its own national legislation in force on the

matter. Although these regulations are very different from one another and give rise to different strategies for the rehabilitation of inmates, they all have a common denominator. Indeed, for access to work they generally consider the low level of dangerousness of the inmates, which implies a low level of security. In addition, the inmates have the possibility of expressing a preference regarding the type of job to be employed in.

In Denmark, social workers evaluate inmates against psychological criteria. According to this evaluation, inmates are assigned to the activities available in the prison they are in. Members of organised crime gangs or terrorists are the only ones not allowed to work with other inmates. Groups consist of inmates both with high competency level and with lower ones, in order to favour the resocialization and integration (Statutory Declaration n. 1333/2019, Chapter 8, Section 29).

The legislation in Greece provides that all prisoners are assigned specific tasks according to the type of offence committed, work experience, skills, preferences and health status. Prisoners with a high level of security are not allowed to work outside prison. In Greece, each day of work is associated with three days of sentence reduction (Greek Penal Code, Art. 42).

In Italy, prisoners' wishes and attitudes must be considered for the job assignment (Art. 20 Law no. 354/1975 modified by Law no. 663/1986 & Art. 21 Law no. 354/1975); other priority criteria for work assignment are: length of time unemployed during detention, family burdens, professionalism, previous and documented activities carried out and those to which the prisoner will be able to devote himself after release.

In Sweden, as one interviewee reported, “the main criterion for being selected to work on prison farms is to require the lowest level of security. However, short sentences are not desirable for agricultural work because there is often not enough time to teach prisoners the work, but above all a prisoner is obliged to carry out or take part in the occupation assigned to him” (SE2).

Moreover, according to the Rödjan interviewee, prisoners can express a preference for the specific activity they want to do and they are assigned to that activity “if they show to be responsible” (SE2). In Sweden, the job is compulsory and there are no specific written criteria for accessing it.

#### 4.7. Training of prisoners

Training is an essential element in the inmates' empowerment path as it allows them to acquire skills and knowledge that they could potentially be able to exploit after the detention period (Bhuller *et al.*, 2020; Council of Europe Development Bank, 2021).

In Sweden and Greece, the training of prisoners follows a practical approach; dedicated staff working in agriculture teach them and show them how the tasks need to be done and prisoners learn by doing. Moreover, prisoners are trained also according to their specific inclinations towards specific tasks.

In the case of Denmark and Italy, the approach is both theoretical through courses after which inmates get a participation certificate, and practical in the fields. In the case of Ancona and Sant'Angelo dei Lombardi, courses are carried out in collaboration with the regions where the prisons are located (Marche and Campania, respectively). Giving inmates a participation certificate is a tool to formalise the skills acquired and increase the chances of finding a job after the detention, and therefore have an easier reintegration into civil society.

From the interviews, it emerged that agricultural work has the peculiarity of having a wide range of tasks that require different skill levels, allowing the prison staff and administration to find specific tasks for everyone. However, the possibility of using skills acquired in the agricultural sector can depend on the context inmates go to afterwards; interviewees in Sweden, indeed, claimed that a very small number of inmates have found work on a farm after detention, as most came from an urban area where there are not many farms and other sectors are more attractive.

#### 4.8. Working conditions

In Northern European prisons, inmates work for longer hours, with work taking most of their day, while in Italy and Greece daily hours range from 2 to 5 (Table 8). However, these data do not correspond to the situation in all prisons in the countries examined, since there are different organisations, opportunities and actors involved in the realization of work inclusion pathways.

As for the reward, in Denmark the hourly wage for incarcerated individuals is € 1.49, but it can increase over time, based on the skills acquired and consistency in work. Denmark is the only country in which the legislator has established the hourly rate for revenues; in the other case studies this choice is left to the competence of the prison administrations. In fact, the legislation only established that prisoners are entitled to compensation for the work performed. Therefore, the values indicated in table 8 for Sweden, Italy and Greece were reported directly by the interviewees. In more detail, in Sweden, prisoners get a monetary reward for their work of 13.00 SEK per hour (€ 1.15/h). In Viterbo prison (IT), in the case of the "Semi Liberi" project, inmates receive a minimum salary from the administration (€ 4.00 per

**Table 8.** Working conditions.

Prison (Country)	Daily hours of work	Revenues/ hour (€)
Søbysøgård Fængsel (DK)	~8	1,49
Sønder Omme Fængsel (DK)	~8	1,49
Kragsskovhede Fængsel (DK)	~8	1,49
Renbæk Fængsel (DK)	~8	1,49
Agrotiko Katastima Kratisis Agias – Grammateia (EL)	4	1.76
Casa di Reclusione Ancona Barcaglione (IT)	5	4.30-6.32
Casa Circondariale Viterbo Mammagialla (IT)	2	4.00
Casa di reclusione Sant'Angelo dei Lombardi (IT)	4	10.00
Anstalten Rödjan (SE)	7+	1.15
Anstalten Svartsjö (SE)	7+	1.15

hour, net of contribution to expenses) and a flat-rate remuneration from the cooperative. In Ancona (IT) prison, inmates are rewarded for their work with a minimum of € 4.30 and a maximum of € 6.32 per hour. In Sant'Angelo dei Lombardi prison (IT), inmates are paid €10 gross. In Greece, work is rewarded with a symbolic amount of € 1.76 per working day (4 hours).

#### 4.9. Role of work and agriculture in the legislative system and advantages of agricultural work

According to our findings, work and training activities acquire different meanings. Primarily, work is seen as a means of providing prisoners with skills and abilities useful after the period of imprisonment, so that they can lead a life free of crime. Moreover, it is a way to train prisoners' ability to handle difficulties and problems which they might meet in civil society. The goal is to train them to be responsible, getting up, going to work on time, getting an instruction or taking feedbacks on their social skills. The Swedish legislative system summarizes this concept with the expression "bättre ut", which translates to "better out". The respondent for Swedish prisons said that: "*The meaning is that an inmate, during the detention period, should be more motivated to live a life that does not include criminal behaviour and have more tools to handle difficulties. They should be prepared to handle life and problems out in the real world and life outside prison. For prisoners, the feeling of being proud, accomplished and do difficult things is what makes them grow*" (SE2).

One of the main pieces of evidence gathered from our interviews concerns the empathetic attitude that

agricultural tasks require from prisoners, as stated by another interviewee: *“These guys [administrative staff responsible for the agricultural activities] are very, very professional and I believe that actually, they also have a very positive impact on the inmates because they just care about their craft very, very much. And it’s not building a shed or building something. It’s handling an animal, handling nature, we have fields, we have everything. And the way that you had to attend these things and it’s something that happens outside of your control. You have to work with these things with nature. With the animals, you have to do this in a very attentive manner”* (DK1).

Moreover, in accordance to previous studies (Auty, Liebling, 2020; Hill, 2020; Lee *et al.*, 2021), work is considered a resocialization factor and a way to maintain a relaxed and safe environment. According to the point of view of prison staff, engaging in a structured daily regimen, characterized by the temporal patterns of employment, facilitates the reconstruction of an environment akin to that experienced in the external societal context: *“When you have a big prison and then people just sit doing nothing, then this creates quite a violent environment because grown men mostly [...]; the fact that the prisoners have somewhere to go, every day and something to do helps to create what we call “dynamic security”. It’s not so much something you can call the security of prison guard, but it’s a security of keeping the inmates sort of busy, part of a structured and respectful environment, meeting them respectfully etc.”* (DK1).

This approach is in line with the European Prison Rules and with the Recommendation of the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers Rec (2003)23, 18.a: in particular, so-called “dynamic security” is defined as “the development by staff of positive relationships with prisoners based on firmness and fairness, in combination with an understanding of their personal situation and any risk posed by individual prisoners”. The phenomenon has also been analysed by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime in the Handbook on Dynamic Security and Prison Intelligence (Bryans, 2015). It is a broad concept, but we would like to report some institutionally recognised key elements. The UN considers that dynamic security is based on:

- Positive relationships, communication and interaction between the staff and prisoners
- Professionalism
- Collecting relevant information
- Insight into and improving social climate of the penal institution
- Firmness and fairness
- Understanding personal situation of the prisoner

- Communication, positive relations and exchange of information among all employees<sup>7</sup>.

The participants in our exploratory study confirmed the positive value of the dynamic security approach, as suggested by the above-mentioned guidelines.

Regarding the value of work, a respondent stated that the main reason why prison farms are still in service is that they can always offer a job to everyone and train prisoners’ social skills: *“The goal is to train them [inmates] to be in a work place: get up, go to work, get an instruction, take feedbacks so that you train their [of inmates] social skills. It is important for them to feel needed and that they do meaningful work because what they do is for their customers. It is important that they feel what we feel outside, to be needed and useful and meaningful, not that they produce things that go to the garbage”* (SE1).

Again, the Danish interviewee claimed that: *“Work is resocialization. It is so because we also incorporate work and skill training in the work, but it is also just being a part of a workplace, having this structured routine to have a resocializing effect”* (DK1).

Lastly, interviewees reported that work is a means of empowerment because prisoners are entrusted with important work execution and planning tasks and in particular, agricultural work, that involves caring for plants and animals in a professional manner, which contains this empowering value and activates processes of gradual assumption of autonomy and responsibility. An intriguing moment emerged during the interview, when one participant articulated: *“Sometimes it’s hard for us to understand as well, and people don’t always agree, but with the example of farming, you would say our farms are commercial. I mean, they are there for a reason, they have to have a high quality, they have to sell the milk to ARLA...[big buyer], so it has to have a certain level of quality. And the belief is that if you do this commercially it resembles more a real job and it’s more meaningful for inmates to work in this environment than if they were just to do something that wasn’t meaningful or create something that you can just throw away [...]. So, they are actually able to use this economic flow and use it to organize their work”* (DK1).

#### 4.10. Networking

SF initiatives that adopt an inclusive paradigm also leverage networks to provide beneficiaries with the

<sup>7</sup> Prison Administration, Ministry of Justice, Republic of Croatia, Dynamic Security in Penal Institutions, Presentation at 7<sup>th</sup> conference of European Penitentiary Training Academies, 25-27 June 2014, Barcelona, Spain.

chance to engage in and cultivate positive interactions with entities external to the organisation (such as farms and various stakeholders within the food supply chain, social cooperatives, consumers, etc.). This choice has two main effects: the recipients can expand their network of relationships; social stigma around diversity can be reduced. However, our experience suggests that in the case of prisons, networking can be particularly difficult due to the specific context. In the examined experiences, the prisoners are only involved in the marketing of products, as in the case of Viterbo prison (IT), where the collaboration with the cooperative O.R.T.O. includes the involvement of experts and agronomists from the University of Tuscia, particularly about the processing of raw materials.

Another interesting experience is the social garden initiative in Ancona (IT), that receives support from the regional administration and a professional agricultural organisation. The respondent testifies that during some events, such as the Christmas holidays, inmates with a low level of security can participate in village markets, having a chance to have direct contact with society outside the prison. According to the Ancona interviewee, the search for work outside prison should be increased, favouring companies that hire prison labour.

The Sant'Angelo dei Lombardi prison has developed several collaborations with local public bodies, such as the Federico II University in Naples for some courses, and with two institutes: the Vanvitelli in Lioni (hotel management) and the De Santis in Sant'Angelo (accountancy) that give lessons to inmates who are unable to leave, while the art. 21 inmates can go to the institutes themselves.

## 5. DISCUSSION

The results showed two different approaches to agricultural activity in prisons, both also characterized by a strategy of economic and value return: the first, specific to North-European prisons analysed, is characterized by large-scale productions; the second, present in the Mediterranean experiences, regards niche productions. Although the specificity of production is not mentioned as a crucial element of SF, our study reveals and confirms that it can take on specific value and thus have a special effect on inmates.

When it comes to sales channels, Northern European prisons target the large scale, favouring supermarkets, the agri-food industry and wholesalers. In the Mediterranean countries, on the other hand, prisons sell their products mainly through farm shops, spe-

cialized shops, farmers' markets and prison economy e-commerce. The market they rely on is certainly niche, compared to Northern European institutions that are more open to the competitive market. The two sales models are adapted to the quantity of products and possible commercial outlets in that given area. Only three of the prisons analysed are selling their products under a trademark that allows them to make their products recognizable in the market. Among the sale channels, local retailers are those preferred by all prisons analysed except for Sant'Angelo dei Lombardi (IT). As demonstrated in the existing literature (Giarè *et al.*, 2018), this suggests the great importance of creating links with the local context for the inclusion of prisoners in the local community where the prison is located, reducing the isolation that often characterises prison settings. Similarly, the representative for Ancona Barcaglione (IT) prison testifies that promotion activities and events where inmates meet the local community are "*occasions of work and have a high emotional impact*" (IT2).

From the interviews, it emerged that the awareness that they receive economic income from their work – even if it is managed by the prison administration – gives inmates a sense of usefulness and responsibility for their occupation. It can also show them that they are contributing to and committed to a real business. Thus, also economic revenues can represent an important element referable to SF.

With regard to the work organization and selection process of inmates, in some experiences, such as for Rödjan and Svartsjö prisons, inmates' engagement in the management of agricultural activities promotes feelings of responsibility and self-esteem in them. At the same time, when selection criteria also include personal skills and attitudes, the likelihood of inmates' improvement and active involvement in work activities is greater. Both factors contribute to a higher quality of life for prison inmates.

Similarly, working conditions are mainly set by national standards and are not specific to agricultural activities. Nevertheless, it is possible to highlight how the interviewees have placed emphasis on the rehabilitative purpose of prison work (in compliance with international and European guidelines) and the re-socialization power of working conditions, such as daily working hours and inmate pay (even when merely symbolic).

Training and the role of agricultural work activities for prisoners verified that in the experiences considered these represent two important factors useful for prisoners' rehabilitation and are also included in the concept of SF. Training programmes – which can be theoretical and/or practical – are viewed with high regard, as is

work engagement: all representatives involved confirmed that these elements can contribute to inmates' feelings of meaningful efforts.

On the other hand, agricultural work in the prison context differs from SF in others because it is less able to engage recipients (inmates) in relationship-intensive activities, such as direct sales, events with local communities, participation in fairs or exchange with other farmers, etc. In fact, with the exception of the Italian experiences examined, characterised by collaboration with social cooperatives and a few sporadic opportunities for inmates to meet with external actors (local markets during the Christmas holidays, in the case of the Ancora prison under Article 21 Law no. 354/1975.), the prisons in this study only involve inmates in cultivation and/or breeding practices, and in product processing, when present. Thus, with regard to this aspect, it would be useful for current penal systems to increase opportunities for inmates to have relations with other actors and meet customers.

The life of prisoners inside prison is a rather controversial topic in the scientific literature, as well as in public opinion. The prison system – in Europe and abroad – differs between countries, for historical and cultural reasons and social structure. It remains undoubted, however, that imprisonment is a trying experience for the individual, for various reasons. First of all, isolation. Work in this context has represented (and we do not exclude that in some cases it may still represent) a means of exploitation and punishment in order to compensate for the damage caused by the guilty party towards the community as a whole. However, a different value has been attributed to it over time: work can be a tool for the recognition of one's own abilities and therefore for obtaining a "clean" autonomy, far from irregularity and illegality. Conversely, the rehabilitative potential of agricultural work in prisons is not just a matter of acquiring manual skills or executive abilities, but of knowing and understanding the importance of work as a difficult affirmation of self.

The explorative analysis allows us to say that the agricultural activities conducted in these prisons can be considered at least partly as SF, given their characteristics. It is also important to note that our study collected testimonies from practitioners, administrative staff and external operators (a representative of a cooperative and agronomists), who present a "different" point of view from the inmates, who are directly affected. However, the interviews confirm some of the existing literature on the issue. In general, the interviewees regard agricultural work in the prison context favourably, even if there are some regulatory limitations. The analysis allows us to

infer that agricultural activities in prison mainly contribute to improving the condition of prisoners.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The explorative analysis aimed to catch some characteristics of agricultural work in European prisons and compare them with Social Farming ones. The study provides an initial overview of the agricultural activities conducted within European prisons. Specifically, it identifies the unique characteristics of each programme, both in terms of the social and agricultural aspects, to highlight similarities and differences with SF initiatives. Examples include the direct involvement of prisoners in work organisation and certified training programmes, as well as the possibility of selling the products they cultivate. This enables inmates to attribute meaning to their efforts, thereby rediscovering the intrinsic value of work – namely, contributing to collective welfare and justice. Among the challenges mentioned by the interviewees, it is important to emphasise that the specific administrative structures can significantly hinder the creation of an effective workplace. The execution of work activities is often constrained by the availability of staff and the necessary security measures, which also limit potential interactions with external actors.

Furthermore, the analysis highlights that prison-based agricultural activities are not particularly open to the outside world, which contrasts with the inclusivity often found in Social Farming practices. This is partly due to the security systems and controlled procedures required within the prison context, although some institutions do allow inmates to maintain relationships with external actors. Our analysis of agricultural activities, according with previous studies, shows that penal institutions able to build networks with local communities, works in prison benefits both the inmates, who are exposed to a broader range of human interactions, and members of civil society, who can gain a better understanding of the prison environment.

The study offers the possibility of grasping some elements presented both in SF practices and prison work, such as purposes (inclusion, re-education, empowerment, etc.), type of activities (training, agricultural and related activities, engagement in the work organization), organization of activities, networking with external actors to a straight re-educational process (relational aspects and re-socialization). Further in-depth studies could provide the opportunity to understand if and how the elements differ and how SF practices could contribute to the development of effective agricultural activities in prisons.

Policies can play a significant role in developing new approaches to address both agricultural and social issues. However, at EU country level there are no specific laws on SF, except in Italy, while local health and social systems offer different opportunities and economic support for the implementation of SF initiatives. Due to the importance and complexity of the issues, further studies could be focused on the topic, in order to compare the situation at European and international level.

The analysis had an exploratory approach using online surveys and interviews with prison staff, given the evident difficulty in contacting and involving prisoners. Consequently, the results come from the unique perspectives of the management and staff responsible for agricultural activities and may be very different from – or opposing – those of prisoners. In order to capture interpretations and experiences of these agricultural programmes or initiatives by prisoners, a specific study should be conducted. A more specific analysis could also allow us to fill the gap related to technical information (e.g. percentage distribution among end users or food consumed in prisons) or methodological or ethical issues (e.g. level of involvement of prisoners). In particular, addressing the issue of income generation in different countries, also considering the literature on prison labour exploitation, could offer the opportunity to understand whether prison workers' rights have the same level of satisfaction compared to the outside and how social agriculture could contribute to create a more inclusive and fairer context.

In conclusion, our work contributes to the improvement of existing scientific research on the topic, because – despite the limitations – to our knowledge, no previous study has linked the experience of agricultural work in prison to the characteristics of Social Farming. This element is important to understand the different declinations of SF in European contexts.

#### SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

Supplementary material associated with this article can be found, in the online version, at doi: <https://doi.org/10.36253/rea-15329>. This includes the appendices that are referred to in the main text of the article.

#### AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

M.A.: Investigation, Conceptualization, Methodology, Data curation, Writing-Original draft preparation. F.F.: Investigation, Conceptualization, Methodology,

Data curation, Writing-Original draft preparation. F.G.: Conceptualization, Methodology, Visualization, Supervision. G.G.: Investigation, Conceptualization, Methodology, Data curation, Writing-Original draft preparation.

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