

## Green Care – where people flourish

### Green Care strategy in agriculture and forestry

#### Introduction

Various different types of social care plans have been in development in several European countries, in the USA and Japan for several years now. These plans result from a collaborative effort between government bodies, social services and the agriculture and forestry sector. They involve care for children, teenagers, elderly people, people with disabilities, people with physical and mental illnesses and those furthest from the job market. For all their differences, these plans have one thing in common: They are implemented in active agricultural enterprises, in market gardens, in vineries, in forestry operations and in collaboration with social services and institutions. Metaphorically speaking, the social and agricultural sector grow together and provide additional value to society. Efforts have mainly been concentrated in the following areas: Education, therapy, care and support, and social work. The terms “green care” or “social farming” have become common currency in most European countries, including Austria.

The following strategy should illuminate the different aspects of the advantages of Green Care in the agriculture and forestry sectors (also called *Green care - where people flourish*) and also indicate, which goals are being followed and which steps have to be taken, so that even more people can profit from the proposals made. For this reason, it is important that everyone involved in the decision making process recognise the need for action and together ensure the necessary framework is in place at the various levels.

#### Auftrag

- *Green care - where people flourish* goes beyond traditional limits and makes agricultural and forestry operations partners to social care, health care and educational actors and therefore creates entirely new perspectives.
- In co-operation with social services and institutions, *Green care - where people flourish* uses the resources of farms for innovative social services in the areas of education, health, care and support, as well as work and employment.
- *Green care - where people flourish* gives agricultural and forestry enterprises new opportunities to diversify and find new sources of income.
- *Green care - where people flourish* creates an ideal bridge between agriculture and forestry and the general population; a bridge between people, animals and nature.

#### Offers for very different target groups.

Green Care in agriculture and forestry includes many very different offers.

- Green Care includes educational activities (teaching on the farm) intended to provide children, young people and also adults with more understanding for nature and agriculture. Examples for this include kindergarten and day care centres on the farm, the project “school on the farm” or forest-related education.
- In the areas of care and support (living on the farm), it is the project’s stated goal to offer elderly people and people with disabilities a daily structure and provide them with a joy for life in an environment close to nature. Existing care centres can therefore be given a “green component” using the agricultural sector’s social competencies.

- Therapeutic work (health on the farm) is understood as an expansion of, and alternative to, standard forms of prevention or health promotion for people who suffer from a bodily, emotional, cognitive or social deficit, as well as the rehabilitation of people who suffered a serious accident or illness. Animal or garden therapy has been proven to be a successful method in this area. Contact to nature and animals helps to improve the mental, bodily and social well-being of these people.
- The area of social work (work on the farm) gives useful employment opportunities in the agriculture and forestry sector to people who have been looking for work for a long period of time or those with disabilities. This can help these people to re-enter the workplace. This area mainly deals with giving people self-confidence and social recognition, independent of their performance.

The target groups are very different, starting from hyper-active children, managers with burn-out, people who are cut-off from the labour market, to elderly people and people with disabilities. There is an attractive offer for everyone. Green Care activities are typically carried out in an environment close to nature, or in the agricultural or forestry sector. The enterprise will then become the person's working, living and experience space and offer perspectives for a healthy, balanced existence in and with nature.

There are also successful models in Austria which show that family farming enterprises and the health and social system can profit from these ideas. The association "Green Care Austria", an operative unit since 15th of July 2015 builds the competence centre in Austria. The nine chambers of agriculture are full members of the association (constitutive meeting: 15/07/2015).

Experience in Austria, and in other European countries, has shown that Green Care projects in the agriculture and forestry sectors have, along with the social, health care and educational aspects, contributed to securing and creating jobs and training positions, creating regional added value and improving economic and purchasing power in rural areas.

### **Why Austria needs more Green care - where people flourish**

Increasing pressure to perform in society means many people in the world of work can no longer keep up with the fast pace. Added to this is a demographic development of continually increasing life expectancy, coupled with a lower birth rate. The percentage of elderly people within the population is therefore rising year by year. This means that state and society have ever increasing costs in the areas of care and support.

Austria is no exception here, as the following figures\*) show:

- Between 2011 and 2050 the percentage of over 65 years olds in Austria will increase from 17.7% to just over a third or more. In other words, we shall have more than 2.6 million people in Austria over the age of 65 by 2050. This means an increase of 77% in 40 years.
- 80% of the 14 to 65 years olds in Austria have admitted to suffering from stress, 3 million people complain of sleep disorders.
- In 2010 in Austria
  - 2.6 million working days were lost to stress
  - 1.6 million working days were lost to depression
  - 8.6 million working days were lost due to damage to the spine and back.
- 44.5% of all employees declared unfit to work in Austria in 2010 left their occupational activity for mental health reasons. This creates costs of around 7 million euros per year.
- Around one million people in Austria are in danger of suffering from burn-out. This also applies to 5% of school pupils, who suffer from chronic school stress.
- Added to this is the fact that every 3rd eleven year old child in Austria is overweight or obese.

\*) Source: Statistik Austria 2008; Austria federal association for psychotherapy, November 2010; Burnout Congress, Wien 2006; Federation of Austrian Social Security Institutions, 5/7/2012; Population prognosis 2012, Statistik Austria, 14/9/2012; City of Vienna MA 24; WGKK 2009

### **Don't compete, complement**

All of this is a massive challenge for society, the world of work and the health and social system, who are increasingly unable to deal with these problems with their existing structures. The agriculture and forestry sector also needs to look at ways of offering new ideas beyond the production of foodstuffs.

As examples from inside and outside the country have shown, Green Care can, in conjunction with state, health and social care institutions, social partners and the agriculture and forestry sector, provide possible solutions in these areas. These solutions should not be seen as competition to existing (social) institutions, but rather as the creation of high quality complementary offers. Existing health care plans and strategies will be taken into account.

Existing agricultural structures, including personnel resources with suitable professional competencies on the farms which are involved with Green Care, can be put to use in this manner.

This will lead to a synergy effect between the social sector and agricultural activities, which will in turn mean an upturn for rural areas and help to slow emigration from these areas. These projects will also create a new business field for some farming families, a field which combines social competencies and ecologisation in an ideal manner.

The agriculture and forestry sectors are ready to engage with these ideas in the framework of Green Care. An Austrian-wide representative survey was carried out in December 2012 and January 2013 by a market research institute. 801 interviews were carried out, which showed that 64% of those farmers asked saw a chance for the agriculture and forestry sectors in Green Care. They regarded this diversification in the direction of service provision as an opportunity to ensure the future of their business.

### **Child care, care for the elderly, animal supported intervention and much more**

Green Care projects already exist in agricultural and forestry enterprises in several Austrian federal states. They are extremely varied and run, for example, from animal supported farm kindergartens in Upper Austria, animal-supported education in child and teenager support in Lower Austria, a garden estate with day structures for people with disabilities in Vienna and an in-patient nursing facility for those requiring care in Styria. These pioneering projects have, with their engagement, energy and their readiness to accept risk, prepared the ground for *Green care - where people* in Austria. Now new Green Care proposals need to be implemented in agricultural and forestry enterprises, in collaboration with all decision makers involved. Farmers make, in co-operation with recognised social services and institutions and in combination with their business infrastructure, their personal services available to those who need them. Increasingly, many members of farming families have (additional) training in medical, educational, social or care areas - as kindergarten teachers, nurses, or carers for the elderly. This means special projects can be created whilst still maintaining existing legal requirements and quality standards.

Green Care has already been successfully put into place in several European countries, especially in Norway and the Netherlands. Despite this there is a lack of inter-disciplinary co-operation in Austria and at the EU level. This co-operation is essential if this issue is to be further developed at a cross-sector level and must therefore be created as quickly as possible.

### **Goals of the Austrian Green Care strategy in agriculture and forestry**

- Improving awareness, presenting and recognising the added economic value of Green Care for society.
- Development and implementation of high-quality Green Care products and services on active agricultural and forestry enterprises in co-operation with social services and institutions.
- Presenting the legal conditions for the implementation of Green Care proposals to agricultural and forestry enterprises.
- Creating the certification criteria for high-quality Green Care products and services on active agricultural and forestry enterprises (quality management systems).
- Developing a *Green care - where people flourish* platform, which will provide all partners with information and allow for the exchange of knowledge

- Presenting existing financial models and structures, as well as creating new models for the financing of Green Care projects in agriculture and forestry.
- Promoting an Austrian collaborative effort and working together with interested parties (ARGE Green Care Austria).
- Developing and promoting education and further education programs for all people involved with Green Care in the agriculture and forestry sectors.
- Supporting interdisciplinary research for Green Care in the agriculture and forestry sector, in order to factually prove the effects and use of Green Care intervention
- Forcing collaborative efforts at the European level.

### Use in various forms

Green Care strategy in agriculture and forestry has several different uses:

- Life in nature or in an environment close to nature, and having contact to animals has a positive effect on the health and well-being of elderly people and people with special needs.
- Green care offers sections of the farming enterprise the additional chance of securing their economic viability in the service sector.
- Additional jobs will be created and rural areas revitalised, which will reduce emigration from these areas.
- Social services can, with the help of Green Care proposals, expand their portfolio with a “green competence” and therefore create a unique feature for themselves.
- Synergies will result for social welfare systems, for regions and for local communities through the use of agricultural infrastructure in providing therapy, care and support for people.

### Green Care in Norway and the Netherlands

#### Norway

Green Care is already very well developed in Norway. There, 1,100 farms offer Green Care services, from around 44,700 agricultural business (Source: Ministry for agriculture and nutrition, status as of 2011). The spectrum of services range from childcare centres and schools, day care for people with physical disabilities, to care for patients with dementia. Green Care is a central part of the agreement between the agricultural ministry and the association of local and regional authorities in the area of agricultural and economic development. The goal of the strategy is to develop “those high-quality social services on farms required by society”

#### Netherlands

Green Care has been successfully practiced in the Netherlands for over 20 years. More than 1,100 farms are considered “Zorgboerderij” (Green Care farms) from around 67,500 agricultural business (Source: Central office for statistics). These are usually small family business with grassland, as well as dairy cow, sheep and horse farming. The range of care varies from people with disabilities to drug-addicts and long-term unemployed. Care is done partly in day care centres and partly as long-term support using accommodation on the farm. In these businesses, work is usually divided between the man and the woman. The man is traditionally responsible for the agrarian part, whilst the woman (usually as she has training in the social sector) often works closely with social workers and therapists to take care of the clients. The introduction of a voluntary quality system has led to a definite improvement in professionalism within the system.

### Common objectives

Green care - where people flourish clearly provides society, especially in rural areas, with added value. For this reason all decision makers should act together

### Acting together at the EU level

Green Care in agriculture and forestry is a social role model for the development of rural areas, by securing and creating jobs, by reducing rural emigration and by improving economic and purchasing power in structurally weak region. For all of these reasons, there is a valid justification for making use of the subsidy programs of the common European agricultural policy (CAP) and the rural development program (2014-20).

It is, at the same time, important that the structure funds – in the first line ESF (European Social Fund) and EAFRD (European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development) work well together. Financial funds from EAFRD, for example to promote investment, infrastructure, education and further education programs, marketing and communication should be made available to those farmers involved in the programs.

The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) released a statement of initiative on the 12th of December 2012 which pointed out that “social agriculture” (Green Care in agriculture and forestry) requires the positive developments of a “favourable environment, an improved inclusion of civil society and successful collaboration between individual political areas and bodies (health, social, agriculture) at a European, national, regional and local level”. Important measures are, in the EESC’s eyes, setting up quality criteria, and including Green Care in research and educational programs.

### **Acting together in Austria**

Clear regulations in regard to certification and quality control have to be created and maintained in Austria in order for Green Care to be implemented across the country. The variety of projects and various social services connected to this means a cross-sector approach has to be taken. At the federal government level, several departments have to be involved and contacted, from agriculture, health, social and education to the economics department. Federal states and local communities also have to be bound into the existing health care plans and strategies, and the social partners have to be actively integrated into existing quality programs.

### **Summary**

*Green care - where people flourish* is a network of different sections in the agrarian, social and educational sectors and in the health care area, between which there was previously no connection. The project’s intention is to create projects in rural areas for a variety of target groups, from people with special needs, kindergarten children, to traumatised, unemployed or disabled people and elderly people in need of care, projects which, up till now, were usually only provided in urban areas. These projects are a collaborative effort between the agriculture and forestry sectors and social institutions. In order for this to succeed, it is necessary for decision makers in involved areas to follow the goals laid down in the strategy together. There is a need for action at the national and European level.

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24 institutions and organisations of the ARGE Green Care Austria have worked together to create this strategy. Date: 09/01/2015.