



# Food and Agriculture

**COST Action 866**  
**Green Care in Agriculture**

**2006 - 2010**

Chair: Prof. Bjarne O. Braastad

<http://www.umb.no/greencare>

<http://www.cost.esf.org>



picture by Massimo Vollaro

The aim of the COST Action 866 is to increase the scientific knowledge on the best practices for implementing green care in agriculture with the objective of improving human mental and physical health and the quality of life.

‘Green care’ is the utilisation of agricultural farms - the animals, the plants, the garden, the forest, and the landscape - as a base for promoting human mental and physical health, as well as quality of life, for a variety of client groups. A multidisciplinary scientific effort is essential to further develop green services as part of a multifunctional agriculture. This COST Action will coordinate research and develop new research on green care in biological, medical and health sciences, including conceptual, theoretical, and methodological developments. The Action will also focus on economics and management of green care farming, as well as developing policies and discussing how green care can fit current and future national health and social care systems, and affect rural development positively.



picture by Massimo Vollaro

These objectives will be fulfilled by multidisciplinary discussions among scientists in agricultural sciences, economy, medicine, psychology, social sciences, nursing science, etc., by involving stakeholder groups, and by enabling the exchange of young researchers between research groups.

**COST** is an intergovernmental European framework for international co-operation between nationally funded research activities. COST creates scientific networks and enables scientists to collaborate in a wide spectrum of activities in research and technology. COST activities are administered by the COST Office.

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## Background

The health sector and social services need alternatives to traditional medical treatment, therapy, rehabilitation, and work training. In the countryside and on farms, the animals, the plants, the garden, the forest, and the landscape are used in recreational or work-related activities, for psychiatric patients, mentally disabled persons, people with learning disabilities, people with burnout problems, people with drug problems, young people, elderly people, and clients of social service. These services may generally be called green care or social farming, and may involve e.g. animal-assisted interventions, horticultural therapy or therapeutic horticulture. Such activities may not be pure therapy but extensive experience suggests they may have therapeutic value.

Multifunctionality is regarded as one of the future goals of agriculture that could be an alternative source of revenue for rural communities. The numbers of multifunctional farms offering green care services are increasing rapidly in several European countries. Examples are: combine the production of cash crops or animal production with (i) social functions, like providing space for recreation, the care for landscapes, or the care for disabled people; or (ii) health services, like providing space for rehabilitation of people with psychiatric diseases.

Although there is much practical experience in utilisation of farms, farm animals, plants, gardens and the landscape for rehabilitation and therapy, there has not been much scientific research investigating the effects on the various target groups and next to nothing for farm animal research.

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## The secondary objectives of the Action



- Establish a well-functioning multidisciplinary scientific network of scientists working on, or interested in working on, scientific topics of relevance to green care in agriculture.
- Develop an international research agenda within green care that will be proposed to EU institutions and to national research councils.
- Increase the scientific knowledge on topics of relevance to green care, gain experience and knowledge on green care and discern how various scientific disciplines could cooperate to achieve this objective.
- Improve the relevance, efficiency and quality of current and new research within green care in Europe.

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## Organisation

The Action consists of three Working Groups entitled:

- WG 1: Health effects of green care
- WG 2: Economics of green care
- WG 3: Policies related to green care



## WG1: Health effects of green care

The main aim of WG 1 is to coordinate research and develop new research in biological, medical and health sciences for the purpose of gaining new insight into the effects of various types of green care on several aspects of physical and mental health and the quality of life of people. The work must include conceptual and theoretical discussions and developments, as well as discussions on research methodologies.

Milestones:

1. Development of a conceptual framework and theoretical models for the health promoting mechanisms of green care.
2. Comparison and discussion of ongoing research projects related to health effects on people.
3. Establishment of a set of good research methodologies.

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## WG2: Economics of green care

The main aim of WG 2 is to coordinate research and develop new research on economics and management of green care farming. This includes the cost-benefit effectiveness of green care across the economic spectrum (micro, mezzo and macro levels) within the framework of multifunctional agriculture, market based versus governmental based economics, marketability of public goods and positive agricultural externalities, as well as measurements of the positive externalities of Animal Assisted Therapy and Horticultural Therapy.

Milestones:

1. Development of a methodology to determine the economic benefits of green care services for farmers, for other parts of the agricultural sector and for the health and social care sectors, and also the social returns of such services.
2. Development of systems to support green care regionally and nationally.
3. Development of a research programme on economics of green care.



picture by Bente Berget

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## WG3: Policies related to green care

The main aim of WG 3 is to investigate how green care fits into current and future national health and social care systems. This includes the organisation of the green care system and the building up of the network behind the health and social care systems. A further aim is to define how rural development is affected; creation of new jobs and strengthening of the economic viability of rural communities, those of less-favoured and remote rural areas in particular.

Milestones:

1. Definition of terms and concepts for the different services of green care.
2. Evaluation of the contribution of green care not only to rural and agricultural policies, but also to policies in health care and social care.
3. Development of a research agenda on policies of green care.



picture by Massimo Vollaro

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