

Educational activity of farms in selected European countries

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Abstract

The aim of the article is to present the genesis and idea of the activity of educational farms, as well as their organisation and functioning in selected European countries (Poland, Italy, Switzerland, Austria, France). The desk research method was used in this study. Educational farms in different countries are connected by the area of their operation and the goals pursued. However, significant differences can be found in the official requirements for such entities, as well as in the ways and possibilities of cooperation between them within the organisations associating them, which results in significant heterogeneity of educational farms in individual countries. The presented research outcomes may be helpful in improving existing and creating new entities associating educational farms.

Keywords: educational farms, didactic farms, educational functions of farms, European countries.

Działalność edukacyjna gospodarstw rolnych w wybranych krajach europejskich

Streszczenie

Celem artykułu jest przybliżenie genezy i idei działalności gospodarstw edukacyjnych oraz ich organizacji i funkcjonowania w wybranych krajach europejskich (Polska, Włochy, Szwajcaria, Austria,

Francja). W badaniach posłużono się metodą *desk research*. Gospodarstwa edukacyjne w różnych krajach łączy obszar działania i realizowane cele. Znacznych różnic można się jednak doszukać w oficjalnych wymogach stawianych takim podmiotom, jak i w sposobach oraz możliwościach współpracy między nimi w ramach zrzeszających je organizacji, co przekłada się na znaczną heterogeniczność gospodarstw tego typu w poszczególnych krajach. Przedstawione wyniki badania mogą być pomocne przy udoskonalaniu istniejących i tworzeniu nowych podmiotów zrzeszających gospodarstwa edukacyjne.

Słowa kluczowe: zagrody edukacyjne, gospodarstwa dydaktyczne, edukacyjne funkcje gospodarstw rolnych, państwa europejskie.

Educational activity is now becoming an increasingly important function of agriculture and rural areas. The background for its implementation are not only the resources of farms and agritourism farms, but also the entire natural, cultural and social environment of the rural areas (Sikorska-Wolak et al. 2018: p. 8). This idea fits into the paradigm of multifunctional and sustainable agriculture promoted and developed in European countries, which is indicated by, among others, Monaghan et al. (2017), Sin et al. (2018), and Zawadka et al. (2021). Precursors in the field of educational agriculture in Europe were Scandinavian countries. At the beginning of the 20th century, they started to implement the ideas of the American movement initiated by the 4H Club (*Head, Health, Heart, Hand*), which aim was the harmonious development of the individual through the implementation of the concept of "learning by doing" (Stewart 2013). This initiative contributed to the start of the so-called "city farms", i.e. farms located in urban or suburban areas, the aim of which was to familiarise children, teenagers and adults living in cities with farm animals and agricultural crops (see: www.cityfarms.org).

In many European countries, many entities deal with the development of education in a farmstead, e.g. owners of educational farms, teachers, employees of advisory organisations and ministries. Various types of training and courses are organised, both for farmers and teachers conducting classes in educational farms, as well as annual meetings of all interested entities, and cooperation networks are created. Courses preparing farmers for educational activities are particularly important. In some countries, farm owners must obtain special certificate to carry out this activity (Czarnecka 2007: p. 149-150).

Currently, educational activity on farms is undertaken in many countries of the European Union. Most of the farms are associated in regional or national networks or consortia. One of the first international organisations of this type was the *International Association of Educational Animation Farms*, established in 1985¹ (fr. *Groupement International des Fermes d'Animation Éducative*, GIFAE). It associated farms from France, Belgium, Spain, Portugal, Switzerland and Canada. The aim of this organisation was to activate children and youth in the field of protection of the environment, natural and cultural heritage, and natural education carried out during field activities (Girault, Fortin-Debart 2006: p. 6; Włodawski 2011: p. 25). In 2010, the organisation ceased its

¹ The translations of foreign proper names presented in the study were made by its authors.

activities, but its mission is continued by European Federation of City Farms (EFCF), co-founded by GIFAE (Chojnacka-Ożga, Ożga 2007: p. 186). It is worth mentioning here that the EFCF's activity has a global dimension and brings together over 2,000 farms in Europe and beyond.

Interesting initiative that has recently gained great popularity in many countries, which perfectly fits the activities of educational farms, is *Green Care*, which is a well-established international concept that uses animals, plants and nature in promoting health and healthy lifestyle (Steigena et al. 2016: p. 693).

The aim of the research, hypothesis, and used methodology

The aim of this study is to analyse the educational activities of farms in selected European countries. The research issues are reflected in the following questions:

- 1) What is the origin and idea of functioning of educational farms?
- 2) What is the organisation and functioning of entities of this type in selected European countries?

The following countries are included in the research: Poland, Italy, Switzerland, Austria, France. The choice of these countries is not accidental. After a thorough analysis of the available information, it is found that only in these countries the functioning of farms performing didactic functions is carried out on the basis of a superior (usually nationwide) unit, whose role is to inspire and assist in establishing such entities, as well as to promote and coordinate their activities.

In order to achieve the research objective, the desk research method was used (Bednarowska 2015; Guerin et al. 2018), with institutional and legal analysis included, and a case study. The analysis covered scientific and popular science publications on educational farms, documents in the field of government and regional legislation on them, websites of the discussed entities, information brochures, as well as reports (including statistical ones) published by organisations associating farms of this type. The review of these publications, studies and documents made possible discussion of functioning the educational farms in selected European countries. It also allowed the verification of the research hypothesis, which assumed that regardless of the country, the idea of educational farms is connected by the area of activity and the goals set for them by their owners. However, the formal and legal requirements for the farms are different, as are the ways and possibilities of their cooperation within larger organisations associating them.

Research results

Educational farms in Poland

Great opportunities for education using the natural and cultural resources of the Polish countryside and farms, as well as the experience of other countries, inspired the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD) and the Agricultural Advisory

Center (AAC) in Brwinów, Branch in Kraków, to create a network of educational farms (Sikorska-Wolak, Zawadka 2016: p. 104). The National Network of Educational Farms² (NNEF) was established in 2011 and is run by the AAC in Brwinów, Branch in Kraków. The aim of its activities is to popularise the idea of education on a farm and to promote the activities of educational farms. Any facility that meets the definition of *educational farm* approved by the MARD in November 2011 can join the network. The educational farm is an object:

- 1) located in rural areas,
- 2) run by a resident of the village,
- 3) accepting children and youth as part of school programs and extracurricular activities,
- 4) owning and presenting livestock or agricultural crops,
- 5) pursuing at least two educational goals from five listed below:
 - education in the field of crop production,
 - animal production education,
 - education in the processing of agricultural products,
 - education in the field of ecological and consumer awareness,
 - education in the field of rural material culture heritage, traditional professions, handicrafts and folk art (Kmita-Dziasek 2014: p. 5; Krzyżanowska, Kowalewska 2015: p. 18–19; Bogusz, Kmita-Dziasek 2015: p. 157–158; Zawadka et al. 2021).

The educational farm should have livestock or agricultural crops intended for presentations to groups of children and youth admitted as part of school and out-of-school programmes or made available as a tourist attraction for families with children and adults traveling individually. The implementation of these goals can be undertaken by natural persons, including individual farmers, but in some cases also such organisational units as: companies, cooperatives, farmers' wives' associations (Raciborski 2014: p. 49). The minimum, obligatory technical condition is to have a roofed place to conduct classes and make toilets available to participants of classes and to meet the safety conditions specified by law (Kmita-Dziasek 2015: p. 6).

The NNEF does not have legal personality, it operates in the agricultural advisory system on the basis of voluntary cooperation of the central unit (AAC in Brwinów, Branch in Kraków) and voivodeship agricultural advisory units (AAU). At the national level, the NNEF activities are coordinated by the AAC in Brwinów, Branch in Kraków. At the voivodeship level, the partners of the AAC in Brwinów Branch in Kraków are the AAUs located in 16 voivodships. In each AAU there is at least one advisor prepared to act as a voivodeship coordinator. The coordinators recommend farms for the network, advise how to adapt the farm to provide educational services, help in developing programmes and in completing the application form for the network. They conduct promotional and training activities in the region.

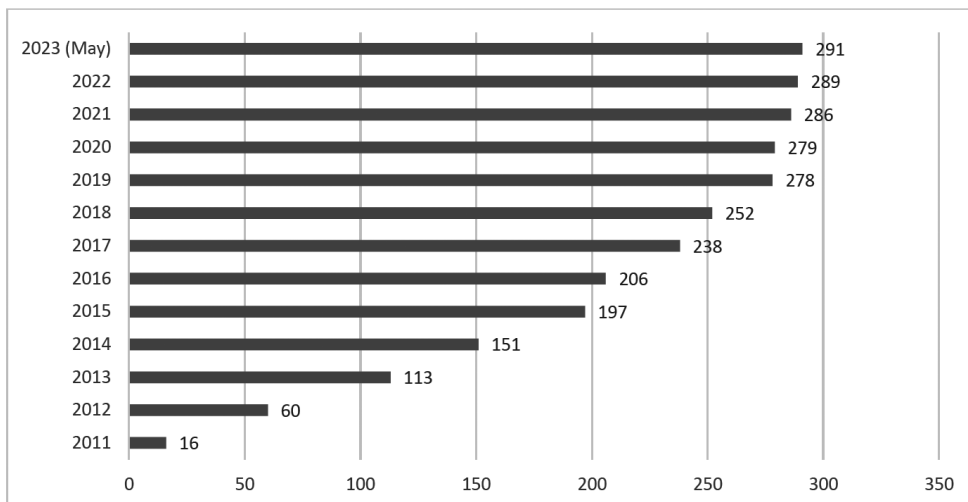
² pl. *Ogólnopolska Sieć Zagród Edukacyjnych*.

Figure 1: NNEF's logo

Source: www.zagrodaedukacyjna.pl (20.05.2023).

At the local level, farms interested in providing educational services prepare an application along with a description of the proposed educational programs. Participation in the network is voluntary and free of charge. Farms admitted to the network have the opportunity to promote offers in the nationwide Internet system, at fairs and other promotional events, and in the media. They can participate in the experience exchange on social media. They have access to substantive guides, can participate in periodic training sessions and receive advisory support from the AAU specialists. Network's participants have the right to mark the object with the logo of the educational farm (Krzyżanowska 2016: p. 306–307).

The development of the NNEF is characterised by significant dynamics. The increase in the number of associated farms in individual years is presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Number of farms belonging to the NNEF in 2011–2023

Note: The number of farms in individual months of each year was characterised by a small variability. Source: own elaboration based on data from the AAC in Brwinów, Branch in Kraków and information available on the website: www.zagrodaedukacyjna.pl.

Educational aspects have been implemented in many agritourism farms from the beginning of their existence, but the creation of the NNEF concentrated this activity under a common brand and gave it a more professional character.

Educational farms in Italy

The first initiatives of opening farms to visitors in order to disseminate knowledge about their functioning took place in Italy in the 1960s. They can be exemplified by projects such as *Open Gates* (ital. *Cancelli Aperti*) or *Day on the Farm* (ital. *Giornate in Fattoria*), undertaken by industry associations, aimed at bringing the countryside and agriculture closer to the city dwellers (Rossetto, Sambin 2013; p. 13). However, this idea began to be implemented in a formally organised way only in 1997, when the Alimos³ cooperative (at that time acting as an agri-environmental observatory), in cooperation with farmers from the province of Forlì-Cesena, created the first network of educational farms in the Emilia-Romagna region, called *Rete delle Fattorie Didattiche Romagnole*. In 1998, after joining the network of other provinces in the region, the project *Open Farms and Educational Farms* (ital. *Fattorie Aperte e Fattorie Didattiche*) was launched. During this period, also Piedmont Agrotourism Consortium (ital. *Consorzio Agriturismo Piemonte*) and Mantua Agrotourism Consortium (ital. *Consorzio Agriturismo Mantovano*) promoted ideas of this type. In 2000, as a part of the project *City Farms – A network of ecological didactic farms for ecological education and aware consumption* with financial support from the Ministry of the Environment, the Alimos cooperative developed a nationwide inventory of educational farms and a map of projects of this type.⁴

Despite its considerable size of activity, specificity of educational farm⁵ in Italy is not specifically regulated at national level (*Estate a scuola...* 2021). In a very general way, this issue was referred in normative acts concerning agritourism (Legge 20 febbraio 2006) and social farming (Legge 18 agosto 2015). Precise (and somewhat varied) guidelines for the accreditation and operation of educational farms were developed at the regional level. However, it is important that each farm of this type must be registered and meet certain quality requirements, and its teaching staff must undergo special training course.⁶ Teaching activity can be carried out by farms and agritourism farms (Ronchetti et al. 2011).

In Italy, there is no national government institution coordinating and supervising the development of educational farms. Informally, however, this role is now played by an initiative started by the Alimos cooperative (today RI.NOVA Società Cooperativa) through the website *Fattorie Didattiche* (www.fattoriedidattiche.net), which is administered by

³ In 2021, Alimos and CRPV merged to form an entity called RI.NOVA Società Cooperativa, which specialises in research and experimentation in the field of crop production (see more: www.rinova.eu/).

⁴ See more on website: www.fattoriedidattiche.net

⁵ It should be noted here that the Italian concept of a farm in its construction assumptions is more similar to the Polish concept of an enterprise, not a farm. Therefore, they can be defined as an organised set of tangible and intangible components intended for conducting business activity (Szymacka 2009). A farmer, on the other hand, is referred to as "professional agricultural entrepreneur" (ital. *imprenditore agricolo professionale*). See more: Decreto Legislativo 27 maggio 2005.

⁶ See more on website: www.animalissimo.it

RI.NOVA. Farms listed there, in addition to the criteria imposed by regional regulations, must meet certain quality requirements: be environmentally friendly, cozy and comfortable, properly equipped and safe, and have a specific didactic programme.

Figure 3: Fattorie Didattiche project's logo



Source: www.fattoriedidattiche.net/ (18.05.2023).

It is also important that such farms should be located near cities or main communication routes. In the case of units located far from cities and less accessible, it is advisable to provide food and accommodation, which facilitates a longer stay.

In order to ensure high pedagogical and substantive quality of classes conducted in educational farms, the Alimos cooperative launched in 2010 an online course addressed to representatives of educational farms and people wishing to start this type of activity. This training course is also carried out now, and its cost is €61.⁷

The development of educational initiatives on farms and agritourism farms is quite a dynamic phenomenon in Italy. In the first national census of such entities, conducted in 2000, 276 entities were listed. In 2005, there were 622 of them, and in 2010 – just 2,000. In 2018, 2,680 educational farms were listed in the regional registers, and in 2020 as many as 3,120. It is also worth noting that 60% of teaching farms were agritourism farms. Of course, this does not mean that all agritourism farms in Italy have regional accreditations for teaching activities. Out of 24.6 thousand of Italian agritourism farms in 2019, only 1,715 (i.e. 7.0%) were listed on regional lists of educational farms (*Vademecum...* 2021).

At the end of May 2023, 2,954 educational farms accredited by regional authorities were listed on the website *Fattorie Didattiche*. The Veneto region dominated (324 places, 11.0% of the total), Emilia-Romagna (287 places, 9.7%) and Piedmont (273 places, 9.2%).

It is also worth mentioning here that invoices or bills for teaching services may be issued by farm owners without VAT if the given entity is listed in the regional registers of educational farms and the service provided is part of the state or regional curriculum (e.g. agreed with the public school teacher) (Decreto del Presidente... 1972: art. 10, n. 20; Agenzia delle Entrate 2007).

⁷ It should be noted, however, that this course cannot be recognised for the purposes of accreditation by some regional authorities that organise such training courses in their area of operation.

Educational farms in Switzerland

Farmers' attempt to bring their work closer to the rest of society contributed to the idea of using farms (usually in Switzerland in the form of a sole proprietorship; see: Bundesamt für Statistik 2023) as a place for teaching classes, which has been popularised in Switzerland for almost 40 years. Initiatives of this type were initially implemented by individual farms. Since the 1990s, these activities have been carried out in a coherent and coordinated way as part of the project *Schule auf dem Bauernhof* (SchuB), which serves to spread knowledge, exchange ideas and disseminate the concept of educational farms (www.sbv-usp.ch).

The SchuB, like the partnership campaign *Schweizer Bäuerinnen & Bauern*, which aim is to build and maintain relationships between town and country, strengthen trust in local agriculture and promote the sale of local products, is a project of the Swiss agricultural sector (*Basiskommunikation* WWV). SchuB is a decentralised entity. Forum SchuB is the coordinator of the development of educational farms in Switzerland at the national level (Wydler 2012: p. 2). Its activity is wide-ranging and mainly concerns the promotion of the idea of the functioning of educational farms, care for the quality of their services and ensuring further improvement and development of the offer. The Forum SchuB is the first point of contact for cantonal project managers, it supports the cantons in training service providers, actively participates in promoting the SchuB initiative by organising and participating in local and regional events. A very important role of the Forum is to create teaching materials for farmers – educators and teachers. However, each canton has its own SchuB organisation that oversees educational farms in its area.⁸

Figure 4: *Schule auf dem Bauernhof* project's logo



Source: www.schub.ch (18.05.2023).

The National Forum SchuB (germ. *Nationales Forum "Schule auf dem Bauernhof"*, SchuB) facilitates exchanges between cantons and language regions, prepares teaching and promotional materials for schools and farms, supports and organises exchange and training events and thus contributes to the dissemination of the SchuB programme. This work brings results, as evidenced by the fact that in 2022 a record 60,000 students participated in didactic classes organised in farms associated in SchuB (*Schule auf dem Bauernhof knackt...* 2023).

⁸ See more on the website: www.schub.ch/#ueber-uns

It is also worth noting that the number of Swiss educational farms that have joined the SchuB initiative has been declining in recent years. In 2016, their number was 420, and 45,000 people participated in the classes (Jahresbericht 2016), but in 2020 there were just 400 educational farms (*Schule auf dem Bauernhof...* W/W/W, 2023). In mid-May 2023, 393 such farms were listed on the SchuB portal (www.hofsuche.schub.ch/de). However, the number of people using farms' offer increased by 25%. The interest in participation of Swiss students in visits to educational farms is certainly supported by the fact that the costs of such activities are partly covered by the cantonal branches of the SchuB. The amount of co-financing varies regionally. The costs that schools must pay include: costs of travel to the farm or possible meals for the participants of the classes. However, it is important that visits to educational farms are carried out as a didactic project in the context of education for sustainable development, so the school can apply for additional funding from *éducation21*, the national centre for education for sustainable development.⁹

Educational farms in Austria

An initiative bringing together owners of educational farms in Austria is the *Schule am Bauernhof* (SaB). This project has been implemented since 1998 (ÖKL 1999), and its initiator (unlike in Italy and Switzerland) was the government authority (ministries) and the Environmental Education Forum (germ. *Forum Umweltbildung*). The project is financed by federal government, federal states and the EU under the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (Grasböck 2015: p. 12). The entity implementing and coordinating this undertaking is the Rural Training Institute (germ. *Ländliches Fortbildungsinstitut*, LFI; see: www.landwirtschaftundschule.at).

Figure 5: *Schule am Bauernhof* project's logo



Source: www.schuleambauernhof.at (20.05.2023).

On farms gathered around the idea of SaB, programmes are implemented that enable children and youth to learn about the specifics of agriculture and food production. This knowledge is to strengthen their attitude as environmentally aware consumers, provide a better understanding of ecological and economic contexts, learn about various forms of agriculture and the origin and production of food. The essence of the project is best reflected in its motto: "We are a school that is not the school you know."

⁹ See more on the website: www.education21.ch

The school building is an outdoor space, the classroom is a field, meadow, forest and stable. Our instructors are plants, animals and people living on the farm" (see: www.schuleambauernhof.at). On farms, stays of a few hours or a whole day are carried out (they constitute the vast majority), and even stays for a week. During one-day visits, participants will learn basic information about agriculture. They have the opportunity to contact farm animals, they can see crops, machines, and participate in various farm activities, such as milking cows, harvesting crops, processing products. The purpose of visits of this type is to arouse the interest of children and youth in the issues of the countryside and agriculture. One-week stays (where participants are provided with accommodation and meals) allow them to get to know and delve into the issues of agricultural production through participation in everyday duties in a farm, establishing relationships with animals, their observation and breeding, as well as active participation in the process of plant cultivation.

An obligatory condition for Austrian farmers joined the SaB programme is the completion of certification course (*Bäuerinnen in Österreich* 2019). Its topics concern pedagogical and didactic issues, organisational, legal and security problems. The training lasts at least 80 hours and ends with an exam (*Zertifikatslehrgang...* 2021). These qualifications allow to conduct classes with children and youth from the age of six to the end of compulsory education (maximum 20 years), as well as educators and future educators, without age limits (*Netzwerk...* 2018). Rural educators belonging to the SaB can also broaden their knowledge and competences within the framework of many training initiatives carried out jointly with the Austrian Pedagogical University of Linz. In order for a given farm to start educational activity, it is also necessary to verify its safety, carried out by the insurance company SVS.

Due to the COVID pandemic, the SaB farms have been able to offer significantly fewer farm visits in recent years. While in 2019, slightly more than 87,000 children got to know the specifics of farms during almost 5 thousand visits, in 2021 there were only about 35,000 children with around 60% fewer visits (www.ots.at).¹⁰ In mid-May 2023, there were 459 farms in Austria involved in the implementation of this project.¹¹

Educational farms in France

There are many farms in France that provide various types of educational services – their number is estimated at over 1,400 (Cazenave 2023). However, these farms differ significantly in their specificity, so their group is highly heterogeneous. There is also no single organisation associating all entities – the most important is the nationwide network of farmers *Welcome to the Farm* (fr. *Bienvenue à la Ferme*, BF), which was established in 1988 and currently supports approx. 10,000 farmers through activities aimed at maintaining the quality of products and services, creating technical facilities, promotion, communication between partners and development of members (*Le réseau Bienvenue à la ferme* W/W). The second important organisation is the network *Village Welcoming*

¹⁰ Information from the website www.ots.at (see more: *"Schule am Bauernhof" startet...* 2023).

¹¹ See more on the website: www.schuleambauernhof.at/betriebe

(fr. *Accueil Paysan*), which has existed since 1987 and consists of 13 local associations, each with a specific structure (*Nos associations locales* WWW). For this reason, they usually gather small number of educational farms from a given area, e.g. in the case of *Pays de la Loire*, it is 13 entities.¹²

The French official definition of the educational farm was established in 2001 with the publication of the interdepartmental circular, which stated that it is a facility presenting farm animals and/or crops, which regularly has visitors (mainly children and youth from school or out of school) interested in this type activity (*Circulaire...* 2001). Such a broad definition means that several types of educational farms are distinguished in France:

- entertainment farms, i.e. facilities created especially for the needs of guests, with numerous animal species, without (or with little) commercialised agricultural production, usually located close to cities (*Circulaire...* 2001);
- generally accessible educational farms, which basic function is agricultural production, and educational activity allows them to diversify their sources of income, which contributes to the multifunctionality of agriculture (*Circulaire...* 2001);
- mixed educational farms, where the shares of turnover related to educational activity and agricultural production are similar (proportions between 40% and 60%) (*Les fermes pédagogiques...* WWW);
- mobile educational farms, where animals and the necessary equipment and accessories are transported to selected destinations (e.g. schools, recreation centres, workplaces, institutions, retirement homes), where "artificial farm" is created, with educational workshops and classes (*Ferme Pédagogique Itinérante* WWW).

Regardless of the type, French educational farms have the same goals (*Circulaire...* 2001):

- they should propose different pedagogical approaches (e.g. sensitive, sensory, creative) which at the same time enable embedding learning in reality;
- should facilitate understanding of farming, its challenges and constraints, as well as build awareness of food quality;
- should contribute to the understanding of urban-rural relations in economic, social, cultural and environmental terms;
- should contribute to local development, also by strengthening partnerships between local actors;
- should contribute to the personal development of individuals and civic attitudes through education in the area of respect for other people and living beings, and learning responsibility.

The specific requirements (apart from those resulting from the general regulations on granting specific services, such as the need for third party liability insurance for hosting guests) that must be met by educational farm are not specified, but there is a list of recommendations for this type of entities (*Recommandations* 2000).

¹² See more on the website: www.fermespedagogiques-accueil-paysan-pdl.com

Figure 6: Bienvenue à la Ferme logo

Source: www.bienvenue-a-la-ferme.com (20.05.2023).

Within the BF network, there are a total of 917 entities (membership is paid) that provide broadly understood educational services. According to the internal typology, they are divided into the so-called explorer farms, educational farms, horse farms and farm birthday venues (*Dans une ferme de découverte* WWW). In each of these places the educational element is clearly present, but in the case of educational farms it plays the most important role, and such objects are also focused primarily on accepting children and young people (*Dans une ferme pédagogique* WWW). However, there are definitely fewer entities using the name of educational farm (344), and they are located throughout the country and, interestingly, also in the French overseas territories: French Guiana – 2 farms), New Caledonia – 2, Martinique – 1, and Reunion – 1 (*Que recherchez-vous?* WWW).

Conclusions

Educational farms operate in many European countries. The element that connects all institutions, regardless of the country, is undoubtedly the area of their operation and the goals that such entities want to achieve. However, both the official requirements for educational farms and the ways and possibilities of cooperation between them within larger associating organisations are different. These circumstances result in a significant heterogeneity of the phenomenon and the strong differentiation of places in the countryside that provide educational services.

It is worth noting that the idea of educational farms in Poland is one of the youngest among the presented countries, which on the one hand makes it difficult to gain a competitive advantage on the international arena, but on the other hand allows to draw know-how from Western, much more experienced entities, both in organisational and legal matters. This is reflected in the Polish regulations defining the educational farms and its requirements, especially when we compare them with French or Italian laws.

A disturbing phenomenon, noticeable in most of the analysed countries, is a certain

lack of continuity and representativeness of formalised structures associating educational farms. While this fact should not affect the quality of the offer of individual farms, it may significantly hinder building the reputation and positive social perception of the entire initiative. Perhaps a way to reduce this threat is the certification process implemented in some countries, which provides a top-down guarantee of the level of services provided. Unfortunately, it is also an additional obstacle in the process of popularising agriculture and its importance for society.

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