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THE EESC AND SOCIAL FARMING

The topic of social farming, as a tool for innovation in agriculture, was the subject of an interesting Opinion (NAT/983) adopted during the September Plenary Session of the EESC (European Economic and Social Committee). Social farming takes many different forms, making it difficult to define it in a single, unambiguous way. This diversity is reflected in the terminology used, which, whilst differing in nuance, refers to very similar approaches aimed at restoring health and wellbeing in conjunction with agricultural activity. In Italy, the development of social farming is linked to the so-called “Mediterranean welfare system”, based on the participation of a large number of stakeholders (the public sector, private actors, the non-profit sector and families), and the concept was defined by Law 141 of 2015. Social farming is multidimensional in nature, as it brings together various different policies (a multi-policy approach), including agriculture, rural development, social work, health, education, the environment and the social economy, all of which require a coordinated and integrated approach. It forms an integral part of European policies aimed at promoting, on the one hand, the social inclusion of people with specific needs and varying levels of vulnerability, and, on the other, the vitality of rural areas, enabling people facing difficult life circumstances to meet their needs and enhance their role in society by engaging in agricultural activities in a safe environment. It focuses on therapy, vocational integration (through the concept of “social enterprise for labour market integration” – WISE -) and the education of people who are disadvantaged due to physical and mental disabilities, social problems, old age, long-term unemployment, mental health issues or refugee status. In this regard, the EESC recommends that the European debate on social farming take greater account of the issue of refugees and the integration into agriculture of people who have suffered trauma. «Social farming - said Councillor Ulgiati - can contribute to job creation through adequate support, guidance and the protection of workers' rights, based on a positive culture of decent and meaningful work. Furthermore - he added - social farming can help prevent rural depopulation and tackle the housing crisis, as small farms and agricultural holdings have buildings that can be adapted to enable young families, new entrepreneurs or marginalised groups to have a permanent home in rural areas».



EU: ITALY FACES RISK OF SANCTIONS OVER “GREEN HOMES” AND ENERGY

The European Commission has issued a double reasoned Opinion to the Italian Government on energy matters. In the October 2026 Infringement Package, the European Commission included two pre-litigation notices for Italy, calling on Rome to comply with EU rules relating to the so-called “Green Homes” Directive and the Energy Efficiency Directive. Italy, along with eight other Member States (Belgium, the Czech Republic, Ireland, Luxembourg, Hungary, Malta, Poland and Slovakia), remains in the European Commission's sights for failing to submit to Brussels, by 31 December 2025, the draft National Building Renovation Plan, considered a cornerstone of the EPBD Directive 2024/1275 (Energy Performance of Buildings Directive). The National Plans are designed to improve the energy performance of buildings and thereby contribute to energy independence, the availability of affordable housing, lower energy bills and improved living conditions. The reasoned Opinion, sent to Italy a few days ago, constitutes the second and final stage of the pre-litigation phase of an infringement procedure, which began in March 2026 with an initial official warning in the form of a letter of formal notice. Member States have two months to respond to the reasoned Opinions and submit their draft plans. Otherwise, the Commission may decide to refer the case to the Court of Justice of the European Union. The same applies in the event of failure to fully transpose Directive 2023/1791 on energy efficiency (the Energy Efficiency Directive) into national law.

