

Lifestyle farming in the European Periphery

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What is a lifestyle farmer?

A rural landholder who intentionally does not derive his/her income primarily from commodity production. The lifestyle farmer may be a producer, but this production is driven by non-commercial aims (e.g. desire to enjoy nature, self-provision, live in a rural area, or interact with livestock or horses).

Why study lifestyle farming?

Countryside consumption – the management of farm land to pursue a rural lifestyle, healthy food and leisure, rather than to produce agricultural commodities – is an important driving force for change in rural Europe. These lifestyle farmers can manage their land very differently from commercial farmers, because they are not seeking to make a profit. They are also often **new entrants** to farming, or returning to the land after a long period of urban employment. They therefore have different skills and interests than commercial farmers.

What was studied?

Interviews were conducted with key informants and lifestyle farmers in selected regions in Bulgaria, Portugal and Scotland (UK). The Bulgarian case focused on the Trinoga Association, a formally organized initiative which, since 2005, has promoted the idea of community supported agriculture for healthy and locally grown food. The association is located in a depopulated mountain area with small-scale farming. The initiators are young people with higher education and urban backgrounds who settle in the village, producing their own food and developing new activities of public benefit for the local community.

The British initiative concerns lifestyle farmers in Aberdeenshire, Scotland: households living on and managing land holdings of less than 10 ha for recreational and life quality purposes. Recreational small-scale land use, evolved primarily since the 1970s, with the arrival of the oil industry (and associated wealth) in Aberdeen. Lifestyle farming experienced a boom from 2003 to 2008, but was negatively impacted by the post 2008 recession.

The Portuguese study also reflects a spontaneous, non-organised process: rural small farms (from 2 to 20 ha) in the surrounding area to Montemor-o-Novo, in Alentejo region, a beautiful landscape located 100 km east of Lisbon. Replacement of former local inhabitants and farm families by newcomers started in the late 1980s and ran into the 1990s, and has clearly been increasing in the last 10 years.

Where are lifestyle farmers likely to be located?

The research found some common characteristics of the locations of lifestyle farms, of differing importance in the three sites (see figure 1).

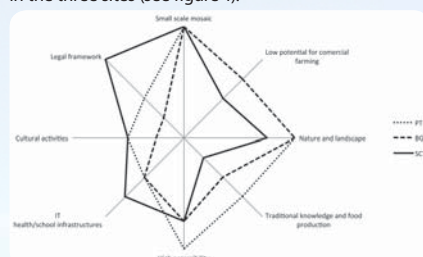


Figure 1 Diagram of attractiveness factors for lifestyle farming

- The **'small-scale mosaic'** – in regions where the land is already divided into smallholdings, it's easier for newcomers to purchase lifestyle-scale properties
- **Low potential for commercial farming** either due to low quality agricultural land or to socio-economic constraints results in land being more visually appealing to lifestyle farmers and less in demand by commercial farmers.
- Strong **local farming knowledge cultures** were particularly important in the Bulgarian and Portuguese cases. This active cultural orientation towards self-provisioning motivates lifestyle farming
- As lifestyle farmers do not make their living from the farm, they are often located **near urban centres**, where farm household members are employed. Similarly, good quality **infrastructure**, particularly internet technologies, enable home working and ensure a high quality of life.
- In the Scottish and Portuguese cases, there was **no legal framework** required the use of agricultural land for agricultural production, thus leaving the land available for personal recreational use.

Key findings

- Lifestyle farmers are often 'unseen farmers', unrecognised by agricultural or rural policy
- Largely un-regulated, and rarely receive government support
- Often benefit from tax advantages intended to assist commercial farmers
- Compete with commercial farmers for land
- Often new entrants, or returning after long-term urban employment
- Excluded from traditional sources of state support (e.g. agri-environmental funding) through lack of awareness.
- May adopt poor land and livestock management practices owing to lack of knowledge or skills.
- Lifestyle farmers perform important functions: occupying land which would otherwise be abandoned, creating and maintaining wildlife habitats, preserving rare breeds of livestock, producing local food, retaining population in rural area and contributing to the economic viability of farming services.
- Legal reporting requirements (e.g. livestock tracking and welfare reporting) are designed for commercial-scale farming operations and can act as a barrier to less intensive, leisure-oriented management of livestock.
- The growth of lifestyle farming reflects competition between the housing and agricultural sector for agricultural land, and the markets of both sectors.

Policy Implications

- **Agricultural policy should recognise lifestyle farming, in order to better regulate it, and ensure benefits from lifestyle farming activities**
- **Targeted extension activities and supports can enable lifestyle farmers to fulfil important services (e.g. woodland expansion, wildlife habitat creation, local food production)**
- **Planning policies can be developed to ensure that lifestyle farmers do not compete with commercial farmers for land in peri-urban areas**

For further information see: www.farmpath.eu



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FarmPath is funded under the 7th Framework Programme of the European Commission (Call FP7-KBBE-2010-4), grant agreement no: 265 394. It is 72% funded by the European Commission, with the remaining provided by participating research institutes. In Scotland, this funding comes from the Scottish Government's Rural and Environmental Sciences Services Division Strategic Research Programme.