Small Farms in Europe: Time for a Re-Definition

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Introduction

In recent years, the attention of policymakers and the general public towards small family farming has risen significantly. The celebration of the International Year of Family Farming in 2014 has thrown a spotlight on smallholder farmers, underscoring their role in the reduction of hunger and poverty and in the achievement of sustainable development throughout the world. The European Union is no exception, as it has often asserted that small family farms are the “backbone of European farming”.

At the same time, however, small farms are typically associated with low incomes, they struggle to compete with multinational agribusinesses, and their need for better support under the Common Agricultural Policy still awaits an adequate response. In a context where ever-expanding farm sizes are often considered as the only way forward, the member organisations of the Access to land network work every day with small farmers and new entrants eager to establish a small farm. Over two years we have compared our perspectives and explored the diverse realities and facets of small farms across Europe, as well as the challenges facing them. We soon came to realise that one of the obstacles to the continuation and future development of small farms lies in the elusive definition(s) of small farms, and the normative effects these have.

In this paper, we therefore attempt to review existing definitions of small farms, to compare them with the realities that we encounter every day, and to pin down some of the implications of these definitions.

What is a small farm?

So far, there is no clear and unambiguous answer to this question. Most commonly, definitions refer to physical and/or economic size. Farmers’ and civic movements however prefer to put emphasis on labour input or social and environmental benefits attached to small farms. Some definitions refer to a single criterion, others are based on multiple criteria. There is therefore no agreed definition, on the international stage or among academics. As Nagayates aptly states, “the sole consensus on small farms may be the lack of a sole definition”.

What is considered a small farm can also vary greatly over time and space, given the heterogeneity of farming systems, historical legacies, as well as demographics and geographical circumstances between countries. It is further influenced by the criteria chosen for a definition, and, most importantly, by the identity and aims of the individuals and institutions that create the definition, thus being fraught with political
meaning. Moreover, small farmers are not a homogeneous group: they range from middle class individuals who are well integrated in the market to poor subsistence farmers; they have different backgrounds and pursue diverging interests.

Bearing in mind these limits, trying to reach a common understanding on the meaning of small farms is nonetheless a useful exercise. A common definition can serve to better target the group of beneficiaries for policies, subsidies and tax exemptions. It also helps to ensure the rights and legal protection of small farmers. Therefore, to quote the Committee on World Food Security, “a discussion on definitions is neither trivial nor academic, but has real implications for policies and impacts on livelihoods”.

At the European level, there has never been a common understanding of “small farms”. The accession of the Eastern European agricultural countries in the period 2004-2007 doubled the number of small farms in the EU, thus adding to the heterogeneity that characterizes the farming sector in Europe, making it even harder to adopt a common definition. This wide variation in farm structures and the lack of consistent data for all Member States are adduced as the main reason why a commonly agreed definition does not exist. As a corollary, the uncertainty related to the definition has led to unsatisfactory policymaking, with a total absence of any objectives within the CAP regarding the role and functions of small farms.

A debate clouded by the use of different words

When talking about the small farming sector, different terms such as “family farming”, “agroecological farming”, “subsistence farming”, and “peasant farming” are used. Each of them puts emphasis on different aspects of this farming system, being alternately the physical or economical size of the exploitation - in the case of small farming -, its main source of labour - family farming -, the method of production - when referring to traditional or agroecological farming -, the degree of involvement in the market - the terms subsistence and semi-subistence farming - or, lastly, the farmer himself, along with his/her rights and particular connection to the land - as in peasant farming.

However, although these concepts have many things in common, they should not be taken as bywords. Let’s take the example of “family farm”, a term widely in use among institutions such as the FAO, the IFAD, the World Bank or the European Union. This is a very vague concept, as more than 80% of the farms in the world and almost all the farms in the EU can be defined as “family farms”. A family farm can range from a small subsistence farm to a large, market oriented, highly mechanized and highly capitalized exploitation. Thus, family farming does not necessarily mean small-scale agriculture. This is the main reason why the international peasant movement La Via Campesina rather use the term small-scale or peasant farming. Interestingly, small farms are also not necessarily family farms anymore. In several EU countries, newcomers to farming invent new forms of partnerships (e.g. cooperatives, associations) to run their farm with the support of one or several other farmers who are not from the family. (For examples, see the cases of AIAB Lazio and Terre de Liens.)
An elusive definition

The most commonly used parameters to define small farms are physical size, economic size, and labour input. In the following section, we will discuss these parameters, compare them for farms across Europe and explain why in particular physical size and economic size by themselves are insufficient indicators to define small farms.

1. Physical size

The physical size of a holding is globally the most commonly used criterion to define small farms. Many sources define small farms as those with less than either 5 or 2 hectares of crop land. However, this definition is considered misleading by several authors as it does not take into account the vast differences that exist between countries and production types. Indeed farms of the same size can be extremely different in character and income depending on the type of crop grown, the quality of the soil, landscape features, climatic conditions and resources available to the farmer. This is why the land size criterion is often used in combination with other indicators, such as labour input or economic size, as discussed below.

![Graphic 1: Distribution of farms by physical size](image-url)

Furthermore, typical farm sizes vary considerably between countries. Thus, what is a small farm in one country may be big in another. To illustrate, while the average size of holdings in Europe is 16.1 ha, it is 92.3 ha in the United Kingdom but only 3.6 ha in Romania. Consequently, both in Romania and in Spain farms up to 5 hectares can be considered as small, while in the United Kingdom and in France this number increases to 20 hectares. In Italy anything up to 8 hectares is usually regarded as a small farm, while in Germany the agricultural structure is so diverse even within the country that it would be entirely impossible to use physical size as an indicator for what constitutes a small farm: While in the north-east the average farm size is 286.4 ha, it is only 34.2 ha
in the country’s south-west. Farms under 5 ha are not even included in the German national farm statistics, a threshold above which farms in Spain and Romania are already considered large.\textsuperscript{11}

2. Economic size

The economic size criterion is generally considered to be the most appropriate one when identifying small farms to be targeted by special support measures. This explains why EU institutions and member states have chosen to adopt this indicator in their development policies.\textsuperscript{12}

In the European context, the economical size of a farm used to be measured in European Size Units (ESU), 1 ESU corresponding to a standard gross margin of 1.200 euros.\textsuperscript{13} Small farms are considered those having less than 1, 4 or 8 ESU, depending on the definition.\textsuperscript{14} Given that in most countries farms under those thresholds are not considered as “professional exploitation” and are therefore excluded from statistical surveys, information on these farms is scarce.\textsuperscript{15} With Regulation (EC) No 1242/2008, the methodology to classify agricultural holdings has changed, the economic size of an agricultural holding being now measured as the total Standard Output (SO) of the holding expressed in euro.\textsuperscript{16} Since some of the data used in this section dates back to before the regulation came into force, both SO and ESU are used.\textsuperscript{17}

**Graphic 2: Distribution of farms by economic size**

![Distribution of farms by economic size](image-url)
The French statistics office defines farm size based on output potential (in €), therefore calculating the standard gross margin (SGM) of a farm on average over 5 years. According to its definition, small farms are those with a maximum economic size of 25,000 euros. However, it should be noted that many farms which are small in physical size would likely fall into the “medium-size” category of official statistics in terms of potential output. Through on-farm processing, direct sales, and other activities, they can engage in high added value activities and limit their costs. In Germany, small farms have an economic size between 8 and 16 ESU, which represents 16% of the farms. Very small farms in the UK are defined as those with less than 8 ESU, while small farms range from 8 to 40 ESU, or do not exceed 50,000 euros SO.1819

The official definition of small farms in Romania is based on economic criteria as well: According to law 37/2015, farms under 1,999 euros SO are entirely subsistence farms, those between 2,000-7,999 euros are semi-subsistence farms, selling less than half of their production and those between 8,000-49,999 euros are small commercial farms selling more than half of their production. In Italy, there is no clear indication about the maximum economic size of small farms. The minimum size for a commercial farm is 4 ESU, while farms under 4 ESU but with sales higher than 2,066 euros or with a surface area of more than 1 ha are defined as small commercial farms.20 Below this threshold, farms are considered subsistence or semi-subsistence farms and are therefore excluded from statistical surveys. Given that the average economic size of Italian farms is around € 25,000 SO,21 we can assume that, below this threshold, a farm may qualify as small in economic terms.

3. The need to account for labour input

In two of the six countries analysed, small farms are classified officially according to the amount of labour input. Thus, in the UK government vision, very small farms are those that employ up to 1 full-time-equivalent (FTE)22 (part-time work and work during spare time), while small farms employ a maximum of 2 FTE full time.23 This is the same definition that the University of Exeter study “Is there a future for small family farms in the UK” refers to.24 The official definition of small farms in Spain makes reference to the labour criteria too, as small farms are considered those which are run by a single
person without needing any other member of the family to work on the farm, even when most of the work at the farm is done by salaried labour.\textsuperscript{25}

Since physical and economic size are, as we have seen, insufficient to define small farms, La Via Campesina and several civic movements are calling for definitions of small farms to include a reference to labour input, so as to recognise the role of farms in terms of job creations, and condition farm expansion to the presence of active farmers. Thus, in France, the definition from \textit{Confédération paysanne} combines the economic criteria with the labour input criteria, classifying as “small” those farms with revenues of less than € 50.000 for 1 annual work unit (AWU), € 62.500 for 1.5 AWU, € 75.000 for 2 AWU, € 100.000 for 3 AWU, and € 125.000 from the 4\textsuperscript{th} AWU.

\textbf{Commercial v. subsistence farms}

Sometimes definitions classify farms according to their participation in the market. Following this criterion, a small farm can be a subsistence, a semi-subsistence, or a market-oriented farm, depending on the ratio of food that is consumed by the household in relation to the food that is actually commercialised.\textsuperscript{26}

Subsistence farmers are more important in NMS such as Bulgaria and Romania compared to old MS. In Romania for example, subsistence and semi-subsistence farmers make up 88\% of the farms and 91\% of the total farmers.\textsuperscript{27} Subsistence farmers manage small plots of land (typically less than 2 ha) and have at least one animal (pig or cow) and a number of fowl and sheep.\textsuperscript{28} For the purpose of rural development support (Regulation (EC) No. 1698/2005), semi-subsistence farms have been defined as those agricultural holdings that produce primarily for their own consumption but also market a proportion of their output, however, no specific threshold is defined. Nevertheless, if we take the FADN methodology as a reference, we could use its definition of commercial farms to infer the maximum economical size of subsistence and semi-subsistence farms. Therefore, subsistence and semi-subsistence farms would not exceed 16 ESU in Germany and UK, 8 ESU in France, 4 ESU in Italy and Spain and just 1 ESU in Romania.\textsuperscript{29}

The 12 Member States that joined the EU in 2004 and 2007 have a significantly higher share of semi-subsistence farms (61\%) than the 15 older EU Member States (23\%).\textsuperscript{30} Small units with less than 1 ESU (or €4.000 SO) are not a prerogative of NMS, as they are well spread in some established MS such as Italy (48\%) and Spain (40\%), while their importance progressively decreases moving to the UK (18,2\%), France (14,8\%), and Germany (2,7\%). In Europe, on the whole, more than half of the farms have a SO below 4.000 euros.\textsuperscript{31}
A normative definition

The definitions of small farms which are most commonly used are, however, not only incapable of displaying the great variety of small farms across Europe. They are also highly normative, excluding by definition a large number of small farms from public support and pushing farms towards consolidation and growth.

1. An excluding definition

A major issue to have in mind is the availability of data. Indeed, the two main sources of statistical data on small farms at the European level - the FADN (Farm Accountancy Data Network) and the FSS (Farm Structure Survey) surveys - are built in a way that excludes a priori a considerable number of small farms from the data collection: The FADN only covers commercial farms while the FSS covers farms of 1 ha or more. Therefore, the smallest farms and those that produce only or mostly for self-consumption are excluded from the surveys.\(^3\)

This means that the small farm sector in Europe is larger than numbers suggest, especially when New Member States (NMS) such as Romania are concerned. Such a definition also has policy implications as these small farms are usually left out of any policy support. This policy bias is sometimes even more marked - for instance in the UK, where farms are eligible to policy support only if they are above 5 hectares.

2. Undervaluing farmers’ pluriactivity

Some definitions or definition proposals\(^3\) only apply the term small farms when most of the income is generated from on-farm activities. However, this does not reflect the real situation amongst the majority of small farms in Europe and risks to exclude millions of small and semi-subsistence farms for whom pluriactivity is a choice or a survival strategy. Part-time farming allows the farmer to increase the household income by engaging in other profitable activities. It can also be a way for individuals and families with a non-farming background to enter agriculture. In Europe, over 1/3 of the households that operate farms are also active in other sectors of the economy, and this proportion would be even higher if spouses/partners were to be included.\(^3\) Part-time farming is most widespread among physically small farms: over 60% of the managers of farms with less than 5 ha UAA spend less than a quarter of their working time on the farm and more than a quarter of small farms have a main income activity outside of agriculture. This percentage declines as the farms get bigger.\(^3\)

The close relationship between part-time farming and small-scale farming is evident in all of the countries analysed in this study, as shown in Table 1.\(^3\) This phenomenon affects young managers in particular. Moreover, the majority of farms whose manager is aged 65 or over are conducted by family members employed in other sectors that do not take formal ownership of the farm in order to not lose the benefits related to professional farmer qualification. Therefore, part-time is almost certainly more widespread than the statistics show.
Table 1: Percentage of farm managers and family members of farms under 20ha working part-time on the farm

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Farm Managers working part-time</th>
<th>Family Members working part-time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>70,8%</td>
<td>90,9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>83,2%</td>
<td>95,2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>82,9%</td>
<td>88,4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romania</td>
<td>96,8%</td>
<td>98,5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>78,7%</td>
<td>95,1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>82,6%</td>
<td>91,9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Eurostat. Agriculture, fishery and forestry statistics. Main results - 2010-11. See Germany, Spain, Italy, United Kingdom, Romania and France 2012 Edition.

It therefore becomes obvious that part-time farming is an extremely common reality among small farms in Europe. Excluding part-time farmers from definitions – and thus from public support – means ignoring a major group of European small-scale farmers.

### 3. Pressuring farmers to grow

Policies are based on definitions. A definition of small-scale farmers has therefore the power to decide who is eligible for public support – and who is not. If the definitions used ignore the realities of smallholders across Europe or fail to capture their high diversity, it means that large numbers of farmers are excluded from support. This, however, has further implications. If farms under a certain threshold of physical size are not eligible for support, this will push farmers towards land consolidation, creating farms large enough to tap into public funding. If mono-activity and full time work are conditions for eligibility, pressure to shift towards them is placed upon farmers. Therefore, the implicit image of a “modern” farm – based on capital intensity, large physical size and high output – becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. By ignoring the realities of small farms and streamlining definitions with this vision, smallholders are pushed towards matching these expectations.

### Ideas for a new definition: recognising social and environmental benefits of small farms

As this paper has shown, the existing parameters to define small farms are not only insufficient to capture their realities across Europe, but the current definition is also normatively biased. Recognizing that a single, clear definition that captures the diverse realities of small farms across Europe is extremely difficult to reach, in this section we would nevertheless like to present some additional points which from our experience are defining criteria of small farms independent of the agricultural context of each country.

Across all six countries involved in this study, smallholders’ role has been stressed in relation to their provision of several public goods. These include the preservation of peasant agriculture and local knowledge, taking on stewardship of the land and thus providing goods such as biodiversity, soil and water protection, food security and
landscape management. Moreover, small farms also create income opportunities in rural areas, and they are often deeply involved in local community life, thus contributing to poverty reduction and the vitality of rural communities. These points are discussed in detail in a paper by Eco Ruralis on the benefits of small farms.

However, although this role is increasingly being recognised, the benefits of small-scale agriculture are hard to quantify with any precision, as the parameters we currently use to evaluate public services are inadequate for this. While information on economic performance is abundant, we lack qualitative research and alternative measurement methods that would allow to more accurately determine the contribution of small farmers to delivering public goods (for examples for alternative monitoring and accounting systems, see the paper of Regionalwert AG). Nevertheless, we found through our daily work with small farms that it is the provision of public goods that unifies small farms across Europe much more than any of the commonly used, quantifiable parameters discussed above. Therefore, we believe that this is a crucial point that should not only be recognized more often, but that would make an important addition to the current definitions of small farms, helping to display much better the realities of small farms in Europe.

Be it in economic or physical size, small farms and national agricultural sectors across Europe are so diverse that it is hard to capture a common reality with these simple definitions, which in turn makes it hard to focus support efficiently on similar groups of beneficiaries. The Access to land network member organisations therefore wish for labour input to be better included in definitions of small farms.

**Conclusion**

A comprehensive definition of small farms is not easy to develop, given the variety of agricultural realities that we come across in different European countries. Available definitions of small farms, focusing on physical or economic dimension, tend to fail to grasp the diversity of small farms' realities across Europe. This in turn makes it hard to focus support efficiently on similar groups of beneficiaries. The Access to land network member organisations therefore wish for labour input to be better included in definitions of small farms. We also found that existing EU definitions have major normative implications. They exclude a large number of small farms from statistics, hence from policy support. They also ignore the contributions of a number of small farms to food sovereignty, job creation and rural livelihoods. Finally, they tend to pressure farmers towards land consolidation, mono-activity and full time work.

Rather than for quantifiable parameters such as physical or economic size, most similarities could be found between small farms across the six countries when it came to analysing the public goods provided by small farms. In all of the six countries, small farms are considered crucial to the viability, the vitality and even the survival of rural communities. Small farms contribute to a resilient, healthy and balanced regional development. A small farm can thus be seen as a complex and multifunctional entity, which engages in sustainability in its broadest sense - economic, social and environmental.
We should therefore broaden the scope of the definition of small farms to encompass the above-mentioned aspects. These aspects, although difficult to translate into statistics and numbers, are nonetheless essential for a true understanding of the importance of small farms for regional development and are worth to be the object of further investigation. Therefore, the criteria currently used to define small farms are very much inadequate when applied to farms across Europe, and need to be rethought. Throughout this process, the voice of small farmers defining themselves will have to be a crucial one.
GLOSSARY

AGROECOLOGY  Agroecology is not a mere set of technologies or production practices but a way of life. It cannot be implemented the same way in all territories. Rather it is based on principles that, while they may be similar across the diversity of territories, can and are practiced in many different ways, with each sector contributing their own colors of their local reality and culture. The production practices of Agroecology (such as intercropping, traditional fishing and mobile pastoralism, integrating crops, trees, livestock and fish, manuring, compost, local seeds and animal breeds, etc.) are based on ecological principles like building life in the soil, recycling nutrients, the dynamic management of biodiversity and energy conservation at all scales. Agroecology drastically reduces the use of externally-purchased inputs that must be bought from industry. There is no use of agrotoxins, artificial hormones, GMOs or other dangerous new technologies in Agroecology. (http://www.foodsovereignty.org/forum-agroecology-nyeleni-2015/)

AVERAGE FARM SIZE  It corresponds to utilised agricultural area divided by the number of holdings.

AWU  One annual work unit, abbreviated as AWU, corresponds to the work performed by one person who is occupied on an agricultural holding on a full-time basis. Full-time means the minimum hours required by the relevant national provisions governing contracts of employment. If the national provisions do not indicate the number of hours, then 1 800 hours are taken to be the minimum annual working hours: equivalent to 225 working days of eight hours each. (Eurostat glossary)

CAP  The Common Agricultural Policy, abbreviated as CAP, is the European Union’s agricultural policy.

ESU  European size unit, abbreviated as ESU, is a standard gross margin of EUR 1 200 that is used to express the economic size of an agricultural holding or farm.

For each activity (or ‘enterprise’) on a farm (for example wheat production, dairy cows or the output from a vineyard), the standard gross margin (SGM) is estimated based on the area used for the particular activity (or the number of heads of livestock) and a regional coefficient. The sum of all such margins derived from activities on a particular farm is its economic size, which is then expressed in European size units by dividing the total SGM in euro by 1200, thus converting it to ESU. (Eurostat glossary)

EU-12  (1 November 1993 - 31 December 1994): Belgium (BE), Denmark (DK), France (FR), Germany (DE), Greece (EL), Ireland (IE), Italy (IT), Luxembourg (LU), Netherlands (NL), Portugal (PT), Spain (ES) and United Kingdom (UK)

EU-15  (1 January 1995 - 30 April 2004): EU-12 + Austria (AT), Finland (FI) and Sweden (SE)

EU-25  (1 May 2004 - 31 December 2006): EU-15 + Cyprus (CY), Czech Republic (CZ), Estonia (EE), Hungary (HU), Latvia (LV), Lithuania (LT), Malta (MT), Poland (PL), Slovakia (SK) and Slovenia (SI)
EU-27 (1 January 2007 - 30 June 2013): EU-25 + Bulgaria (BG) and Romania (RO)

EU-28 (from 1 July 2013): EU-27 + Croatia (HR)

FADN The Farm Accountancy Data Network, abbreviated as FADN, is an instrument for evaluating the income of agricultural holdings and the impacts of the Common Agricultural Policy.

FAO The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, abbreviated as FAO, is an agency of the United Nations that leads international efforts to defeat hunger.

FSS The basic Farm Structure Survey, abbreviated as FSS and also known as Survey on the structure of agricultural holdings, is carried out by all European Union Member States. (Eurostat)

FTE A full-time equivalent, sometimes abbreviated as FTE, is a unit to measure employed persons or students in a way that makes them comparable although they may work or study a different number of hours per week.

The unit is obtained by comparing an employee's or student's average number of hours worked to the average number of hours of a full-time worker or student. A full-time person is therefore counted as one FTE, while a part-time worker / student gets a score in proportion to the hours he or she works or studies. For example, a part-time worker employed for 20 hours a week where full-time work consists of 40 hours, is counted as 0.5 FTE. (Eurostat glossary)

HA The hectare, abbreviated as Ha, is a metric system unit of area equal to 100 ares (10,000 m²) and primarily used in the measurement of land. An acre is about 0.405 hectare and one hectare contains about 2.47 acres.

IFAD The International Fund for Agricultural Development, abbreviated as IFAD, is a specialized agency of the United Nations dedicated to eradicating rural poverty in developing countries.

MS Member State of the European Union.

NMS New Member States, abbreviated as NMS or NMS-13 are the 13 Central and Eastern European countries that joined the EU-15 since 1 May 2004.

SGM The standard gross margin, abbreviated as SGM, is a measure of the production or the business size of an agricultural holding. It is based on the separate activities or 'enterprises' of a farm and their relative contribution to overall revenue. For each separate activity (for instance wheat, dairy cows or a vineyard), a SGM is estimated, based on the area (for crop output) or the number of heads (for animal output) and a standardised SGM coefficient for each type of crop and livestock, calculated separately for different geographical areas to allow for differences in profit. The sum of all these margins per hectare of crop and per head of livestock in a farm is a measure of its overall economic size, expressed in European size units or ESU - 1 ESU is a 1200-euro SGM.
SGMs represent the level of profit to be expected on the average farm under ‘normal’ conditions (discounting, for example, disease outbreaks, fires and floods, adverse weather).

From FSS 2010 onward the SGM has been replaced by Standard output (abbreviated as SO) (according to the Regulation (EC) No 1242/2008. (Eurostat glossary)

**SO** The standard output of an agricultural product (crop or livestock), abbreviated as SO, is the average monetary value of the agricultural output at farm-gate price, in euro per hectare or per head of livestock. There is a regional SO coefficient for each product, as an average value over a 5 years reference period. The sum of the entire SO per hectare of crop and per head of livestock in a farm is a measure of its overall economic size, expressed in euro. Until 2007 the Farm structure survey (FSS) and the Farm accountancy data network (FADN) have used standard gross margin (SGM) to classify agricultural holdings by type of farming and by economic size (Commission Decision 85/377/EEC). In the FSS 2010 and onward this classification uses standard output. SO and SGM are calculated in a different way: SGM = Output + Direct Payments - Costs; while SO = Output. The unit used to measure SO is the euro and not ESU (1 200 Euro) as in the SGM classification.

The SO does not take input costs into account and thus cannot indicate profitability, nor is it adjusted for purchasing power differences between countries, but it does provide information for all EU Member States according to a commonly agreed methodology. In the EU-27, the average standard output per farm was EUR 63 144 in 2010. (Eurostat)

**UAA** Utilised agricultural area, abbreviated as UAA describes the area used for farming. It includes the land categories: arable land; permanent grassland; permanent crops; other agricultural land such as kitchen gardens (even if they only represent small areas of total UAA). The term does not include unused agricultural land, woodland and land occupied by buildings, farmyards, tracks, ponds, etc. UAA is only one indicator of farm size and can be misleading, particularly for holdings specialised in agricultural activities that don't need much land (e.g., horticulture; pigs; poultry). (Eurostat; EU Agricultural Economics Briefs - No.9 October 2009)

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5. European Coordination Via Campesina. How can public policy support small-scale family farms ? April 2015.

Small farms specialised in activities that don’t need a lot of land (pigs; poultry; permanent crops) can be quite big in economic terms.


Another definition from Confédération Paysanne, states that small farms are those with “a maximum area (UAA declared for the CAP), apart from moors and courses, of less than 30 ha (58% of the average farm area in France) for 1 AWU, 40 ha for 2 AWU, 50 ha for 3 AWU, and 60 ha for 4 AWU and beyond”.


For each activity (or ‘enterprise’) on a farm (for example wheat production, dairy cows or the output from a vineyard), the standard gross margin (SGM) is estimated based on the area used for the particular activity (or the number of heads of livestock) and a regional coefficient. The sum of all such margins derived from activities on a particular farm is its economic size, which is then expressed in European size units (by dividing the total SGM in euro by 1200, thus converting it to ESU). http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Glossary:European_size_unit_(ESU)


For a definition of ESU and SO, please see the glossary.


Calculation based on ISTAT data (2010 Agricultural Census).

See the glossary for the FTE definition.


Hubbard (2009)


The ESS also includes farms of less than one hectare, if they produce a certain proportion for sale or if their production unit exceeds certain physical threshold. EU Agricultural Economic brief. What is a small farm? Brief n.2, July 2011.

IASSTD. Agriculture at a crossroad. Global Report. 2009 Edition. La Via Campesina proposes to consider the rate of working time on the farm and working time out of agriculture sector as a criterion (ECVC, Small farms and short supply chains in the European Union, Position Paper)
Position; the Council of the EU (26 July 2013) in a working document proposing a definition of family farming, stated that “the major share of the family’s income is derived from farming”.


37 The organizations that contributed to this study are: Aiab Lazio (Italy), Eco Ruralis (Romania), Real Farming Trust (UK), Regionalwert AG (Germany), Rurbans – School of Shepherds (Spain), Soil Association (UK), Terre de Liens (France). Please visit http://www.accesstoland.eu/-Members- for further information.