



# Implementing a Farmer Relief Service

## Policy Brief Sweden

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*Implementing a farmer relief service is crucial for animal welfare, farmer well-being, local employment, and ensuring gender equality and safety for farmers and small children.*

## Executive Summary

Without substitutes, farmers struggle to take the mandated five-week vacation, leading to overwork and stress. This impacts animal welfare and farmer well-being. Implementing a farmer relief service could boost local employment and it is crucial for pregnant farmers and those with small children, thus ensuring farm safety and gender equality. A new regulation about substitutes is proposed to cover the costs of leave from the farm, childcare and unplanned situations.

## The Challenge

Most farmers cannot afford to pay for substitutes on the private market, and not everyone can rely on friends, family and neighbours. For those who can't rely on this support experience stress and put their animals, themselves and their children at risk.

If Swedish agriculture is to be able to meet contemporary requirements for preparedness in times of war and crises, a new generation must enter the industry. For young families to invest in agriculture and animal husbandry, economic and social conditions must be greatly improved in the long term.

Sweden does not have a governmental system for relief services targeting the agricultural sector. Instead, it is available through VÄXA – an economic association with cattle farmers – and through private businesses. The service is expensive, and many farmers do not have the financial availability to prioritize using the service.

No subsidies are given from the national government as is the case in for example Finland and on Åland.

## Best Practice from Finland

Finland's farmer relief system, regulated under the statute 20.12.1996/1231, is designed to support agricultural entrepreneurs by providing substitute services during vacations, illness, or other periods of incapacity. This system ensures that farmers can maintain their operations without interruption, promoting their social security and work motivation. The relief service includes assigning substitute workers or compensating farmers for the costs of self-arranged substitutes. This approach not only enhances farmer well-being but also contributes to local employment and farm safety.

Source:

Finnish law about farmer relief service (in Finnish and Swedish): FINLEX. (n.d.). "Lag om avbytarservice för lantbruksföretagare | 1231/1996 | Lagstiftning | Finlex", available at: <https://www.finlex.fi/sv/lagstiftning/1996/1231> (accessed 3 April 2025).


A farmer relief service is especially important for pregnant farmers and for those with small children. While Sweden has a very good system for parental leave and for caring for sick children, the system is built on the supposition that parents can take time off from work, which is not always the case for farmers. The solution for many farming parents is to bring their children along while working on the farm. However, having children in agricultural work involves a major safety risk that many farmers are concerned about.


Also, in lieu of substitutes, farmers cannot take the state regulated vacation of five weeks, since the animals need daily attention. The combination of long working hours, working alone, high performance requirements, increased vulnerability, conflicting signals from the national government, and the deterioration of economic conditions has meant that the Swedish farmer is overworked and suffers, contrasting starkly with the comprehensive legislative protection for workers in today's Swedish welfare state.


If farmers are not able to rest, it can lead to burnout and decreased attention to detail, which can negatively impact animal care. Regular rest periods allow farmers to recharge, thus reducing their stress and improving their ability to manage their farms effectively. This, in turn, ensures that animals receive consistent, high-quality care, as a well-rested farmer is more attentive and capable of identifying and addressing health issues promptly. Additionally, taking breaks can prevent decision fatigue, leading to better management practices and overall healthier livestock.


## Policy Solutions

We propose farmer substitutes enable farmers with animals to get time off or get extra help when sick.

 Substitutes can be a solution for recurring leave off the farm, child care, or when something unplanned happens, in case of illness for example. It can also be a solution, but not especially argued here, when there is a work peak and additional staff is needed.

 A new regulation about farmer relief services is proposed to cover the costs of leave from the farm, childcare and unplanned situations.

 The purpose of the proposed substitute service for agricultural entrepreneurs is to support farmers opportunities to exercise their right to social security and to support agricultural entrepreneurs' work motivation and opportunities for a longer working life.

 The national governmentally funded farmer relief service could be organized as financially shared between the farmers and society.



## Supporting Evidence

Women farmers we interviewed in Sweden rely on family for extra childcare and family logistics. This includes partners, parents and stepparents. This is especially evident when the children get sick, and operations and animal care still need to happen.

Additionally, implementing a relief service for rural areas could significantly boost local employment by creating job opportunities for residents, while supporting the local economy by keeping jobs within the community and reducing the need for external workers.

### A vision of more women in farming

The sustainability visions from Sweden included a future with more women engaged in *ecopreneurship* and organic farming, and the stakeholders interviewed emphasized that would require new work practices and organising of work in farming and food production to be able to combine the business with family life in sustainable way. Especially since these businesses and farms are in general small-scale with few or no employees, which can cover for the farmer during sickness or vacation.

20% of the sustainability problems identified in the FLIARA project was related to inappropriate, inadequate or biased public policies, which if not resolved could intensify the problem or not lead to it being resolved at all. Public policy and sustainable farming models and lifestyles were considered as important areas for innovation and the suggested policy proposal would address these concerns by creating appropriate public policies to support sustainable farming.

Source:

Kuhmonen, T. and Tembo, B. (2024), "D2.2: Future Vision Manifestations", 6 November, available at: <https://zenodo.org/records/14045244> (accessed 3 April 2025).

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## Conclusion & Call to Action

The FLIARA project shows a need for a solution; therefore, the national government should introduce a system similar to the one in Finland. A new regulation about farmer relief services is proposed to cover the costs of leave from the farm, childcare and unplanned situations.

## Further Reading

Case study report on Farming women-led innovations in Sweden: Sivini, S., Roos, A. and Leonardelli, I. (2024), "D.3.3: Women-led Innovations in Agriculture and Rural Areas, Lessons Learned Report and Fact Sheets on Female Innovations", 6 November, available at: <https://zenodo.org/records/14045390> (accessed 3 April 2025).

Finnish law about farmer relief service (in Finnish and Swedish): FINLEX. (n.d.). "Lag om avbytarservice för lantbruksföretagare | 1231/1996 | Lagstiftning | Finlex", available at: <https://www.finlex.fi/sv/lagstiftning/1996/1231> (accessed 3 April 2025).

Kuhmonen, T. and Tembo, B. (2024), "D2.2: Future Vision Manifestations", 6 November, available at: <https://zenodo.org/records/14045244> (accessed 3 April 2025).



## About FLIARA

The project is on a mission to create a more sustainable future by highlighting the role of women in agriculture and rural areas. FLIARA will boost understanding of the needs and challenges facing women leading innovative environmental and rural development practices in EU farming and rural areas.

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# Female-Led Innovation in Agriculture and Rural Areas

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