



Regenerating soils for climate and farmers

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D2.2 Regenerative Agriculture in the EU: White Paper



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AgriCaptureCO₂

Regenerating soils for climate and farmers

AgriCaptureCO₂ wants to make it easier and more profitable for farmers to adopt regenerative farming practices.

Why?

Regenerative Agriculture is a conservation and rehabilitation approach to food and farming systems that focuses on the core role of healthy soils and farm land ecosystems in producing sustainable food.



How?

Public policies are one piece in the jigsaw of how to mainstream regenerative farming. Through a mix of rules and incentives, policies can steer the agriculture sector towards greater sustainability, or hinder change. Yet, based on a thorough mapping of current policies and laws in the EU and UK, AgriCaptureCO₂ found that policies surrounding agriculture tend to lack coherence, ambition, and effectiveness.

We therefore formulate the following six key recommendations for an enabling policy and legislative framework for regenerative agriculture:

1. Policy coherence & holistic approach

- Taking serious steps towards full policy coherence in trade, agricultural, food, environment, and climate policies.
- Promoting holistic solutions, such as regenerative farming, to address climate, biodiversity, and socio-economic objectives simultaneously.

2. Clear objectives

- EU: setting legally binding targets for GHG emissions from agriculture and related land use, for soil health, and for pesticides reduction.
- EU Member States: setting national targets on at least the agriculture-related EU Green Deal objectives in CAP Strategic Plans.



3. Robust monitoring and safeguards

- Upgrading the monitoring systems for soils and GHG emissions, including by boosting the use of the “Land Information System” in the UK.
- Establishing safeguards and mechanisms to apply the ‘do no significant harm’ principle.
- Setting mandatory baselines in line with a ‘no deterioration’ obligation so basic land management practices which are necessary to maintain soil functionality become mandatory.
- Moving towards applying the ‘polluter-pays’ principle to disincentivise unsustainable practices.

4. Public support through agricultural policy

- EU Member States: designing a diverse and coherent mix of voluntary schemes to support the uptake of regenerative farming models.
- EU: only approving national CAP Strategic Plans if they adequately promote and support the uptake of regenerative farming practices to deliver on EU Green Deal objectives.
- UK: funding a transition to “systems based” approaches such as regenerative agriculture as an option within Local Nature Recovery; providing baseline funding for soil friendly land management practices under Environmental Land Management Schemes; and bringing forward a Soil Health Action Plan by the end of 2021, developed in close consultation with members of the UK Sustainable Soils Alliance.

5. Private financing within an enabling policy framework

- Prioritising “collaboration-based” financing mechanisms such as environmental assurance schemes and value chain financing (which involve actors across supply chains or in regional partnerships, tend to be longer-term and to combine monetary reward and knowledge exchange), over pure “commodification-based” measures such as voluntary carbon markets.
- EU: developing a robust regulatory framework for soil carbon credits and wider nature-based carbon removals, which should as a minimum:
 - set robust rules for the scope of carbon credits, only considering net removals, and accounting for all GHG emissions linked to the land management practices;
 - set robust standards for monitoring, reporting and verification, as well as for mitigating the uncertainty of measurements and risks of reversal;
 - define what constitute eligible practices and determine mandatory indicators for co-benefits, so as to prevent negative externalities;
 - put in place strict transparency and oversight mechanisms;
 - limit the financial and administrative burden on farmers, by requiring that the cost of MRV is (mostly) covered by the buyer of credits, only allowing ex-post credits, and defining fair rules for liability in case of reversal;
 - establish an automatic “commensurate adjustment” mechanism (whereby carbon credits bought by private actors or third countries lead to a commensurate deduction from national mandatory LULUCF targets) to prevent double counting between voluntary credits bought by private actors and mandatory national targets.

6. Enabling factors for behavioural change

- Investing in farmers’ knowledge through peer-to-peer knowledge exchange fora, well-funded and independent farm advisors, and more teaching on soil in formal education.
- Steering a cultural revolution for soil care and a new regenerative farming paradigm
- Developing infrastructure for soil testing, supporting farmers’ investments in adapted machinery or farm infrastructure for regenerative farming, and removing structural barriers to long-term soil care such as short-term tenancies.

