



# When Agroecology meets Nature Restoration

Insights from three Belgian farms



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*Insights from three Belgian farms*

In the heart of Wallonia, three farms – [La Ferme du Champ des Noces](#), [La Ferme de Corioule](#), and [La Préale](#) – are implementing agroecology that not only provides organic, local food but also nurtures rural resilience through local employment and nature restoration.

On 13 May 2025, in a beautiful sunny day under the Belgian sky, Agroecology Europe and the Belgian agroecology platform [Terraé](#) visited these three real-life examples of agroecology to take the opportunity to learn from the ground and reflect on the alignment between agroecology and the EU agri-food and environmental policies. The visit involved a mixed group of 24 participants, including farm advisors, civil society organisations, and policy makers from the European Commission DG AGRI, DG ENV, DG SANTE, and DG INTPA.

While the farm visits addressed various agri-food and rural topics – such as labor, land, and technology – this article delves into how agroecology can not only align with the EU's forthcoming Nature Restoration Law, set for implementation by 2026, but also advance beyond its objectives by transforming food systems and enhancing the resilience of rural communities.

**Photo 1:** Field visit at “[La Préale](#)”, Achet



Photo credits: Matteo Metta, Agroecology Europe

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## Starting with Terraé, agroecology principles, and breakfast

The three field visits started with a breakfast at the bakery farm “[La Ferme du Champ des Noces](#)”, followed by the presentation of Belgian project “Terraé”. Terraé is a Walloon agroecological transition plan initiated in 2022, comprising eight interconnected actions under the coordination of the SPW Agriculture, Natural Resources, and Environment.

These actions include the development of an agroecological framework, the establishment of a farm network, the creation of a knowledge-sharing platform, and the evaluation of biodiversity and ecosystem services. The network involves 40 volunteer farms across Wallonia, supported by four organisations of Terraé: Natagriwal, Greenotec, Fourrages Mieux, and the CRA-W. This farm network serves as a foundation for the Terraé platform, which disseminates agroecological practices and research findings.

**Photo 1:** Breakfast and agroecology at [La Ferme du Champ des Noces](#)

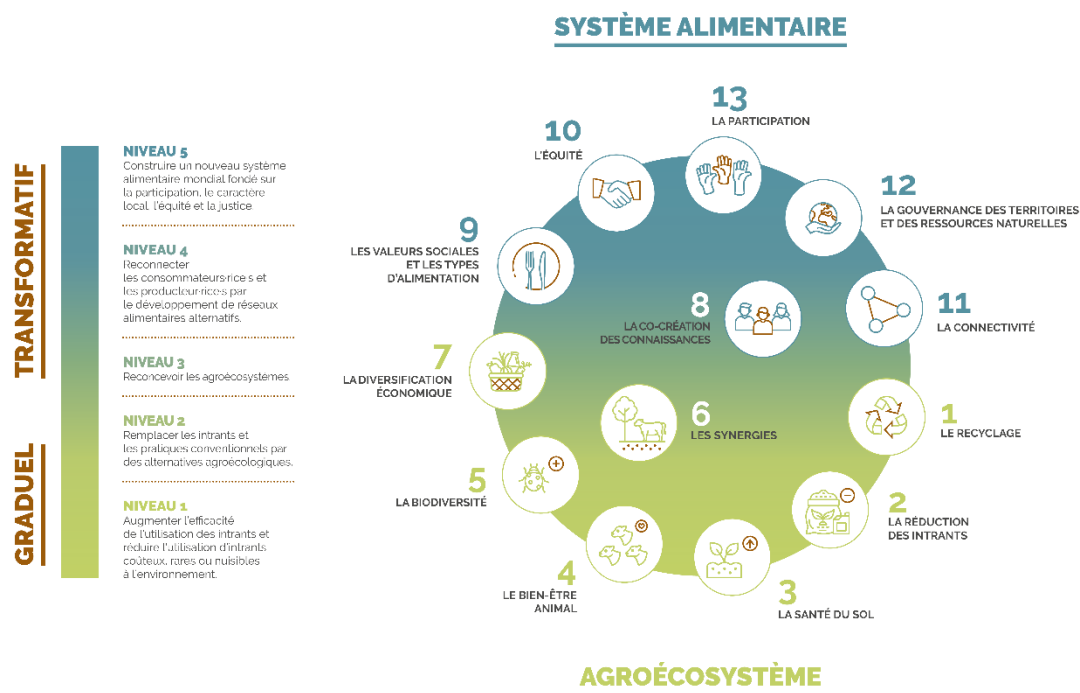


Photo credits: Matteo Metta, Agroecology Europe

An important aspect to note is that the Terraé combines the joint efforts of three Ministries (Environment, Climate, and Agriculture). The work of Terraé in Wallonia is anchored in the [internationally recognised 13 principles of Agroecology](#), and it is applied dynamically as a context-specific and holistic concept.

Around 40 farmers have joined the platform so far. Some of them are not necessarily organic certified, but as Ms. Victoria Tosar (CRAW/Terraé) explains: “our farms strive to achieve agroecology principles by complying or going even higher certain minimum baseline regulations. We see agroecology not as fixed and standardized and it shares many common principles and red lines with organic farming: no GMOs, no synthetic products, no monocultures, and so forth.” The inclusion of these 40 farms was based on the farmers' own drive towards agroecology, rather than a top-down selection based on the assessment of their technical skills or expertise in agroecology.

**Graph 1:** The 13 agroecology principles adopted by Terraé from the High-Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition (2019)



Source: <https://www.terrae-agroecologie.be/>

## Agroecology meets Biodiversity: insights from the farms on the links with Nature Restoration

Alongside the farm visits, participants could raise questions directly to the farmers and observed the implementation of locally adapted agroecological practices, such as no-till or minimum tillage, cover cropping, crop rotation, extensive grazing, planting of areas with landscape features, on-farm food processing, direct selling. In this encounter, participants could learn about the alignment of agroecology with many EU legislations being currently under discussion, such as the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy or the implementation of the upcoming Nature Restoration Law and much more.

**Photo 2:** Mr Laurent Serteyn (Greenotec/Terraé) explaining the long-term crop rotation plan at La Ferme du Champ des Noces and its benefits on soil and biodiversity



Photo credits: Matteo Metta, Agroecology Europe

Table 1 provides a synthetic overview of the alignment between the agroecology principles applied in the farms visited and the nature restoration measures reported as examples in Annex VII to Regulation (EU) 2024/1991 or NRL.

**Table 1:** Agroecology meets Nature Restoration – insights from the ground

Examples of nature restoration measures	Practice observed in the farm visits	Agroecology Principles
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ (16) Introduce high-diversity landscape features in arable land and intensively used grassland, such as buffer strips, field margins with native flowers, hedgerows, trees, small forests, terrace walls, ponds, habitat corridors and steppingstones, etc.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Since 2019, La Ferme du Champ des Nocés has established a 3-meter-wide grassy strip approximately every 60 meters across the width of the field to promote the fauna and flora of our countryside. In future, the farm is planning to plant hedgerows around the arable land to protect the soil from wind erosion.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Synergy</li> <li>➤ Biodiversity</li> <li>➤ Soil health</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ (17) Increase the agricultural area subject to agro-ecological management approaches such as organic agriculture or agro-forestry, multicropping and crop rotation, integrated pest and nutrient management.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Since 2013, La Ferme de Corioule has been organically certified and mixes livestock farming (chicken and cows) with crop farming and grassland management. This means that part of the land is used for animal feed, whereas the livestock manure is used as organic fertilizer for the soil.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Recycling</li> <li>➤ Input reduction</li> <li>➤ Soil health</li> <li>➤ Animal health</li> <li>➤ Biodiversity</li> <li>➤ Synergies</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ (18) Reduce grazing intensity or mowing regimes on grasslands where relevant and re-establish extensive grazing with domestic livestock and extensive mowing regimes where they were abandoned.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ At La Ferme de Corioule, 95% of the feed to rear around 250 cows (Aubrac breed) comes directly from their own produced feed, including the use of extensive grazing on grasslands which otherwise would not be fit for crop production.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Recycling</li> <li>➤ Input reduction</li> <li>➤ Soil health</li> <li>➤ Animal health</li> <li>➤ Biodiversity</li> <li>➤ Synergies</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ (19) Stop or reduce the use of chemical pesticides as well as chemical and animal manure fertilisers.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ The three visited farms adopt long-term crop rotation plans, mixing intercalary or cover crops (leguminous, grasses and brassicas, mixed species) with cereal production to control natural pests, increase soil biodiversity, suppress weeds, enhance soil fertility, and produce forage for the animal.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Recycling</li> <li>➤ Input reduction</li> <li>➤ Soil health</li> <li>➤ Biodiversity</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ (20) Stop ploughing grassland and introducing seeds of productive grasses.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ At La Ferme de Corioule, while permanent grasslands are unploughed, other temporary grasslands are instead cultivated every three-four year by sowing productive grasses to maintain a farm's forage autonomy and close the biological cycle with the livestock farming.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Recycling</li> <li>➤ Input reduction</li> <li>➤ Soil health</li> <li>➤ Animal health</li> <li>➤ Biodiversity</li> <li>➤ Synergies</li> </ul>

Source: own elaboration, Agroecology Europe

## Agroecology beyond Biodiversity: filling the food basket and nurturing rural resilience

Besides working in harmony with the environment and striving to restore nature, the three farms were also very active in other agroecology principles, namely: economic diversification, social values and nutrition, participation, co-creation, etc. For instance, la Ferme du Champ des Noces, located in Hamois, produces a variety of flours and sourdough breads, all milled on-site, and offers pastries and sweets, fostering local food systems through direct sales. La Ferme de Corioule, situated in Assesse, operates a stone mill to process its grains into flour for bread production, collaborating with local bakers, and offers meat boxes directly to consumers, promoting food sovereignty.

La Préale, also in Hamois, features a permaculture-based vegetable garden, a seed production unit (Anthesis), a bakery (Le Fournil de la Préale), and offers educational workshops and events. By creating local jobs opportunities and fostering community ties, these farms show that farming agroecologically can be also a viable pathway for the development and resilience of European rural areas.

**Photo 3:** Mr. Guillaume Fastré (La Ferme de Corioule) presenting the on-farm stone mill and direct food channels



Photo credits: Matteo Metta, Agroecology Europe

## Agroecology and Nature Restoration in action: main challenges and tensions

During the field visits, farmers and participants highlighted concerns regarding the enabling or disabling role of agri-food and environmental policies at various levels (EU, national, regional). Top-down public interventions with rigid, prescribed calendars often fail to align with farmers' need to adapt agronomic practices to changing markets or meteorological conditions, necessitating better consultations and adaptations. While farmers recognize the long-term importance of landscape features and space for nature, on-farm investments in these areas are under pressure from external factors such as unfair agri-food markets. Many farmers, operating individually, cannot bear these costs or systemic pressures.

Addressing these challenges requires years of experimentation and adaptation of traditional seeds, knowledge, breeds, skills, technologies, and plant-animal combinations at farm, cooperative, or district levels. Platforms like Terraé actively promote participatory research and horizontal networks on topics bridging agriculture and biodiversity (e.g., soil, water, air, seeds). However, with experienced farmers leaving agriculture and poor generational renewal in the farming community, the peer-to-peer transmission of knowledge and practices becomes generally more difficult, making the agroecological transition harder or riskier.

**Photo 4:** Mr. Guillaume Fastré (La Ferme de Corioule) explaining the importance of modern, high-precision weeding equipment in organic farming



Photo credits: Matteo Metta, Agroecology Europe

Discussions during the visits frequently highlighted the concepts of rewards and rules. Significant emphasis and policy commitments are being directed towards market-based rewards and the establishment of private mechanisms to compensate for positive externalities, such as carbon farming and nature credits. While farmers are curious to understand how these mechanisms might function in practice, they remain cautious about potential side effects, the validity and verification processes, and their role in the design and implementation of these schemes. As Mr. Laurent Serteyn (Greenotec/Terra ) aptly stated, *"In agroecology, carbon or nature are primarily valued for their agronomic functions and integration into agroecosystems. Only subsequently can they be considered and regulated as credits to meet climate neutrality goals. We cannot invert this hierarchy."*

**Photo 5:** Mr. Regis Colin (la Ferme du Champ des Noces) introducing their on-farm milling and bakery facilities co-managed with his wife



Photo credits: Matteo Metta, Agroecology Europe

During the discussions, it became evident that many enabling conditions for agroecology lie in stronger rules and enforcement – particularly in transforming unfair food supply chains and tackling issues like land grabbing, food fraud, and speculative practices affecting key rural assets such as land, labor, water, finance, and markets. The personal stories shared by the farmers revealed several often-overlooked but essential factors for agroecological transitions: access to affordable rural housing (both on- and off-farm), quality public infrastructure (roads, healthcare, education, internet), local food processing facilities, networks of cooperation, and social measures promoting gender equity. Without these socio-economic foundations, transitioning the EU agri-food system toward agroecology – and achieving broader goals like nature restoration – will remain a significant challenge.

**Photo 6:** Landscape view from La Préale



Photo credits: Anna Frosini, Agroecology Europe

## Agroecology as part of the Nature Restoration Plans: AEEU requests on policy and research developments

For the first time in history, the EU Member States are developing their national Nature Restoration Plans (NRPs) to restore at least 30% of habitats in poor condition by 2030 in various ecosystems, including agricultural ones. By 2026, the European Commission will receive and review the draft plans.

The integration of agroecology and nature restoration, as demonstrated by the three Belgian farms, is possible and desirable. However, it needs policy recognition and action. It is highly important that the voices of agroecology are properly heard and reflected in the design process of national NRPs. The visits underscored the need for supportive policy frameworks, aligning agri-food and environmental policies and ensuring coherence especially with the CAP in its process of nationalization, defunding, and deregulation.

In conclusion, the experiences of the three Belgian farms highlight the potential of agroecology to contribute to nature restoration and rural resilience. By aligning policies, supporting farmers, and investing at different levels (public infrastructure, research, cooperation), the EU can foster a sustainable and integrated approach to agriculture and environmental stewardship.



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