



Photo by Matteo Metta, Sardinian
landscape

Position Paper on Regenerative Agriculture

Our responsibility and opportunity to support Agroecology and truly holistic food system transformations.

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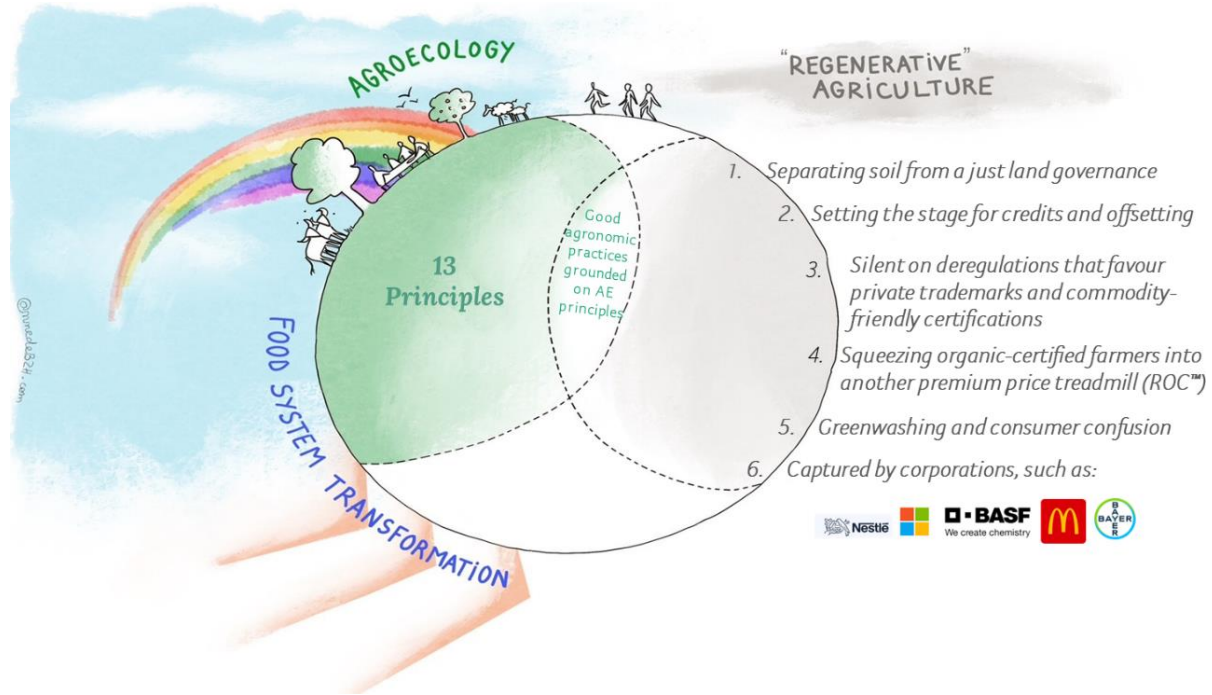
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1 Executive Summary

This paper clarifies Agriculture Europe’s position on regenerative agriculture (RA), a term that is increasingly circulating in farming and European Union (EU) policy circles. The first proponents of RA had several principles and good agronomic practices that are closely aligned to agroecology, particularly around soil health and biodiversity loss (Giller et al., 2021). Today, there is little scientific debate on the RA concept, and no widely accepted definition has emerged (European Commission, 2024). Of greater concern, RA in the EU policy making is increasingly diverging from agroecology in goals and scope, largely due to its lack of a “beyond the individual practices and farm-gate” perspective, which has left it vulnerable to co-optation by global finance and big industry actors. Unlike agroecology, RA does not constitute a fully systemic approach to agri-food transitions at all levels.

Understanding the differences between RA and agroecology is both a responsibility and an opportunity: it allows for meaningful food system transformation, placing agroecological and organic farmers, peasants, citizens and many agroecological food actors at the forefront, rather than inadvertently reinforcing existing power imbalances or missing the chance to fundamentally reshape food systems. It enables actors on the ground to understand how concrete, transformative actions can be captured by broader “regenerative” narratives driven by entrenched power structures. Figure 1 highlights some of the RA proponents and other key distinctions with agroecology are further discussed in Chapter 3 of this paper.

Figure 1: Unpacking some points of convergence and divergence between Agroecology and RA



Source: AEEU's elaboration, drawing courtesy of Anne Guérin (Idéographe)

Agroecology is a holistic, science-based and rights-oriented framework and social movement universally defined by the FAO and the High-Level Panel of Experts (HLPE) of the Committee on World Food Security (FAO, 2018; HLPE, 2019). This formal recognition has been signed also by the [European Commission and the Member States in 2019](#), and it has slowly been integrated in several key EU decision making processes, most recently the European Commission’s [Vision of Agriculture and Food](#). In contrast, RA today

lacks a clear, reliable and widely agreed definition that, like agroecology, can be respected for its practices, as well as its scientific, independent, and inclusive foundations. Sharing individual agronomic practices, such as crop rotation or minimum tillage, does not make RA and agroecology equivalent. Agroecology is committed to a systemic transformation of food systems and rural livelihoods (Anderson et al., 2020; Gliessman, 2016, 2007; Hill et al., 1996).

Understanding the differences between RA and agroecology is an opportunity to advance the urgent transitions needed. Especially in the EU evolving policy context, RA is emerging as a narrative that risks undermining ambitious agri-food policies. It does so by:

- *accommodating the dilution of essential public legislations* in order to make space for costly, private regenerative schemes led by the big industry and greenwashing finance;
- *accelerating the financialization of land and food systems* via questionable carbon credits and inequitable markets;
- *consolidating a commodity-driven farming* model with business-as-usual policies;
- and *raising several concerns on the future of the organic sector* in Europe, e.g. in terms of consumer confusion between organic and regenerative organic (e.g. ROC™), new administrative burden for farmers, and unfair competition for an already squeezed premium price for organic products compared to conventional one¹.

Agroecology Europe supports honest and constructive dialogues with a diversity of farming approaches, while cautioning against greenwashing, greenhushing, the dilution of regulatory standards and equitable enforcement, land and data grabbing, and the risk of corporate capture that could undermine environmental integrity, social justice, and food system transformation in Europe and beyond.

¹ For a recent overview of premium price comparison between organic and conventional products, see Page 12, European Commission, 2026.

Agroecology Tastes Good and Healthy



Photo: Agroecological lunch at [Azienda Agricola Podere Montisi](#), Florence, Italy. Photo by Stefano Pastore

2 Context and purpose

With this position paper, the association Agroecology Europe seeks to provide clarity to its members and broader supporters on the differences between agroecology and Regenerative Agriculture (RA) or regenerative farming, thereby ensuring integrity and safeguarding the ambition of agroecology as science, practice and movement for food system transitions.

The term RA initially emerged as a reflection of the desire to address the problems of conventional agriculture, including the conventionalization of organic farming, particularly around soil health degradation and biodiversity (Rodale Institute, 2015). These concerns are equally central to agroecology yet remain widespread realities in many commodity-driven food systems (Darnhofer et al., 2010; Panagos et al., 2024). The recent uptake of RA across corporate, financial, and policy arenas has led to a proliferation of varied and sometimes contradictory interpretations and applications. In many cases, RA is increasingly hijacked to consolidate the interests of large food retailers, agrochemical input providers, fast food chains, major polluters, and capital giants taking control of our food system, which despite using the term RA, do not promote changes to increase the sustainability – environmental, economic or social – at the cropping, farming or food system level.

Although RA builds on some good agronomic practices that are at the core of agroecology, the two approaches are not the same and tackle different dimensions of the food system. The growing confusion between them is not merely a semantic debate confined to specialist circles. This confusion has tangible consequences on the legitimacy and shaping of large-scale policies, agroecosystems, and research agendas. Moving towards agroecology, for example, means supporting diverse and locally adapted crop rotations instead of input-intensive monocultures that can be labelled as regenerative based on single output metrics (i.e. biomass).

The blurring of RA and agroecology risks coopting decisions that extend well beyond macro-level policies and can affect genuine and innovative projects on the ground, such as those that work closely with communities, independent farm advisors, and citizens committed to food sovereignty. In its current usage, regenerative framing risks co-opting good agronomic practices that are led by independent, forward-looking farmers or social justice movements, thus redirecting them into a framework that ultimately reinforces the same structural power imbalances, consolidates inequalities, facilitates trade speculation, and legitimizes deregulation for private schemes, thus maintaining the *status quo* of current unsustainable systems.

The position paper is therefore intended to enable actors to draw on agroecology as a coherent, trustful, and transformative source of inspiration to build networks, shape public policies, design programmes and projects, and orient research agendas in the field of responsible innovation, farming, food, nature, environment, and rural development. In doing so, our aim is to ensure that agroecology continues to work together with a broad diversity of people, movements, and approaches that not only address environmental degradation but also confront structural power imbalances within current food systems, while safeguarding social equity, ecological integrity, and the livelihoods and rights of small- and medium-scale peasants and farmers.

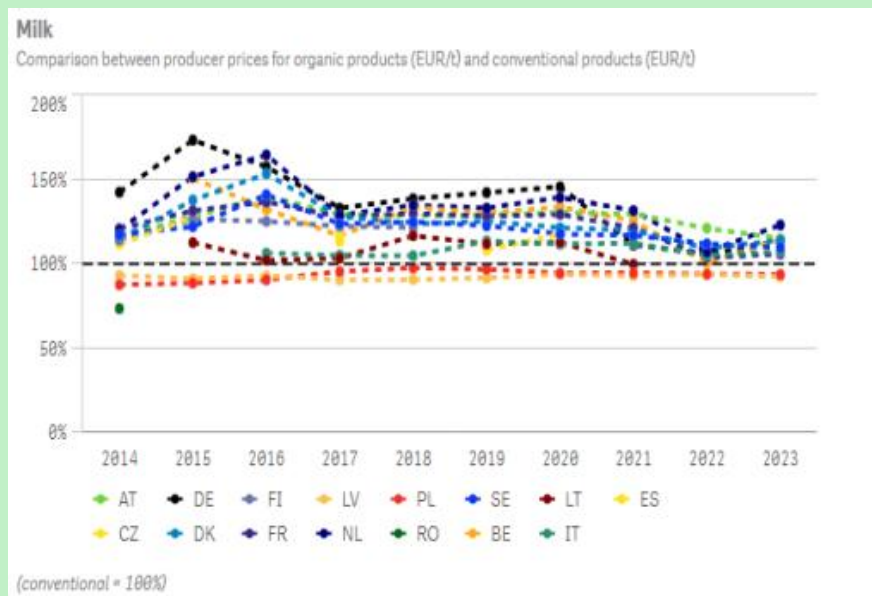
BOX 1: Agroecology and Organic Farming together: a commitment to raise the consumer trust and regulatory ambition, not undermining it with policy rollbacks and new labels.

Increasing pressures from the finance and food industry are pushing national and EU decision makers to recognize and channel public funding towards RA schemes and labels, such as the USA-registered trademark Regenerative Organic Certified (ROC™) or others, at the expense of the needed accountable and ambitious EU legislations, and a resilient, fair market especially for small-medium scale enterprises. The RA pressure to deregulate for more labels and public fundings towards self-defined voluntary initiatives raises a number of serious concerns for all actors of the value chain, particularly for the organic ones (e.g. trust, public oversight, equity, stability of farm income support).

On the demand side, according to a special report by the European Court of Auditors (2024), EU consumers are already exposed to a growing number of labels, logos and schemes, often leading to misguided decisions or fraudulent practices. In a study carried out by Ipsos and London Economics (2013), “the Commission identified 901 voluntary food labelling schemes regarding European agricultural food products, but this figure has not been updated. According to this study, a third of the surveyed consumers found the labels confusing and the same proportion thought they were misleading”.

On the organic farmer side, proponents of RA are promising new revenue streams for EU organic farmers who want to move into ROC™. However, EU statistics show that the premium price of organic products is already declining and converging towards conventional prices, while farmers continue to protest the administrative burden and the lack of fair food prices that reflect the costs of production. Figure 2 illustrates the trend for milk, while additional data available in the [EU FADN, EU organic farms, dashboard](#).

Figure 2: Trends of premium price for organic (coloured lines) compared to conventional milk (black line, 100%) by Member States and years.



Source: [EU FADN, EU organic farms, dashboard](#)

Agroecology brings a coherent, holistic perspective to understand and address root causes of our agri-food systems problems. This includes strengthening the public support to transition towards organic and agroecological farmers, enhancing regulatory framework in an equitable manner, promoting local food supply chains and collective infrastructures, as well as the investing in agroecological research and territorial cooperation for enhancing the bargaining powers of farmers and trust with consumers.

Agroecology is beyond single metrics. It's about food quality, values, wellbeing, climate action, animal welfare, and so forth: all integrated.



Photo: [Agroecological biocontrol](#) in action, Spain: intercropping watermelon and *Lobularia maritima* to eliminate the use of toxic pesticides for aphid control, while enhancing pollinators and yields. Photo by Verdcamp Fruits.

3 Agroecology's strengths in relation to Regenerative Agriculture

Agroecology is not merely a set of agronomic practices; it is a scientific discipline, a set of practices and principles, and a social movement. Its definition has been consolidated through inclusive, multilateral processes, notably by the FAO and the High-Level Panel of Experts (HLPE) of the Committee on World Food Security (FAO, 2018; HLPE, 2019).

The members of Agroecology Europe believe and are committed to work on the following strengths of agroecology in relation to RA:

Mission and scope

1. **Agroecology builds on a recognized definition and pursues a clear mission of transforming food systems for food sovereignty**, including environmental protection and restoration, and socio-economic justice, and defending the rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas².
2. **Agroecology is explicitly value-based and grounded in core principles and human rights**, rather than being limited to a set of practices; as such, it encompasses the entire food system, from soil health to the organisation of human societies.
3. **Agroecology explicitly addresses power imbalances** and questions of *who benefits, who decides, and how value is distributed* across food systems, all dimensions that are essential for long-term sustainability. Ultimately, agroecology aims at the valorisation and integration of the farming community with the rest of the society, environment and economy.

Systems and practices

4. **Agroecology offers a rich, locally adapted and co-created toolbox of agronomic practices** that respect ecological principles and support a balanced and prosperous socio-economic system, such as diversified crop rotations, biological control, and the integration of livestock in mixed farming (Wezel et al., 2014, 2020).
5. **At the same time, agroecology is critical of certain agronomic practices that become “regenerative” to enable greenwashing**, like input-intensive monocultures, appropriation of genetic materials, patented seeds obtained or not with new genomic techniques that could produce crops whose performance is based only on external inputs for nutrition and protection, frequently at the expense of the human and environment health. Furthermore, agroecology is not limited to agronomic practices alone but continuously integrates and valorises farming in relation to food systems, artisanal knowledge, governance arrangements, and fair-trade practices
6. **Agroecology jointly addresses ecological processes, livelihoods, power relations, governance, and knowledge systems**, without separating principles and practices from single results and metrics that favour a few powerful actors and interests.

² UN General Assembly, Resolution 73/165 (2018) United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas.

Input, processes, outputs, taste, and waste

7. **Agroecology places equal emphasis on input, human labour and processes, food taste and gastronomic culture of our agri-food system, as well as waste management.** Agroecology is not skewed on single result and output metrics, especially when these output metrics hide system trade-offs or technical flaws and are designed primarily for marketing claims or financial speculation purposes. Agroecology seeks to close natural cycles by reducing external inputs and waste, maximising reuse and recycling, the use of nature-based solutions, while also respecting human values and promoting socially just and rewarding jobs and processes.

Soil and land

8. **Agroecology unequivocally supports the restoration of soil health in all its intrinsic and functional values, rather than focusing only on soil carbon regeneration.** Nor does it instrumentalise soil health or broader sustainability narratives to justify initiatives oriented toward soil carbon trading, which can exacerbate the inequality on distribution of wealth.
9. **Agroecology's strength lies in its proactive approach to soil health,** recognizing the *prevention* of degradation and *protection*, alongside long-term stewardship and *restoration*.
10. **Agroecology recognises soil health as inseparable from equitable land governance,** actively opposing land grabbing and opposing other forms of concentration, exploitation and appropriation, while considering political contexts and the relationships within food systems and rural communities.

Animal Welfare and One Health Approach

11. **Agroecology integrates animal welfare through a One Welfare (Pinillos, 2018) and One Health approach (European Commission, 2025), treating animal wellbeing, human livelihoods, and environmental integrity as inseparable and equally essential.** It rejects models that improve health, productivity, or environmental indicators through confinement, intensification, or welfare trade-offs, and instead promotes livestock systems that respect animals' behavioural needs, strengthen farmers' autonomy, and contribute to resilient agroecosystems and territorial cohesion.

Legislations and private labels/schemes

12. **Agroecology relies on high ambition in public legislations to ensure food system transformations at scale (e.g. animal welfare, soil health),** along with the development of effective and equitable enforcement systems that guide food and farming systems to operate within planetary boundaries, and calls for these policy frameworks to be strengthened rather than diluted to accommodate voluntary private trademarks or proprietary schemes.
13. **Agroecology supports the recognition and protection of agroecological practices through participatory, independent farm advisory services, public legislations, and**

transparent, democratically governed certification and accountability mechanisms that ensure effective and equitable enforcement, as exemplified by the EU organic farming regulation, rather than through private trademarks or proprietary schemes (see ROC™ and other carbon farming schemes).

Private carbon and nature credits

14. **Private carbon and nature credits often present political, socio-economic, and technical challenges**, including questions of credibility, permanence, cost-effectiveness, leakage/displacement effects, equity and other trade-offs that can negatively affect farmers, especially small-scale ones, and undermine genuinely sustainable efforts.
15. **Agroecology promotes both good agri-environmental practices at individual plot or farm, but also socio-structural changes** such as mutualization strategies, investment in rural infrastructure, and other alternatives that makes soil health and nature restoration easier, cost-effective, and holistic at individual and landscape level. These alternatives include bypassing global value chains or actively working to reform food trade rules that push for input intensification. Some concrete ways to do achieve these goals are by supporting biodistricts and farming-oriented business diversification, making independent soil diagnosis affordable and interoperable, strengthening farmers' bargaining power, improving governance and access to knowledge, and collectively managing key assets such as seeds, machinery, and water, or direct selling platforms. Together, these approaches enhance farmers' autonomy and resilience, foster collective action, and strengthen the multifunctionality of agroecosystems.

Individual and collective

16. **Agroecology supports both actions and infrastructures at individual and collective levels.** It values individual initiatives and innovations, while actively promoting collective infrastructures, especially in rural areas, as well as governance arrangements, and enabling conditions for innovations, such as cooperatives that mutualise means of production (seeds, equipment, processing facilities), public water management bodies, food public procurement, local food councils, and knowledge and advisory services that make agroecology viable and scalable.

Indigenous knowledge and social values

17. **Agroecology builds upon and places strong emphasis on social interconnected dimensions** (e.g. gender, generational, economic class, and racial equity), by valuing small-scale farmers and indigenous knowledge systems, and by actively supporting the rights and livelihoods of small-scale farmers, Indigenous communities, and food workers. Co-creation of knowledge is done by integrating traditional and modern knowledge.

Corporate capture and greenwashing

18. **Agroecology is critical of farming approaches that are primarily driven by commodity and corporate interests**, including companies such as McDonald's,

PepsiCo, Walmart, Unilever, and Microsoft supporting regenerative programmes (Johnson-Woods, 2023). More broadly, industrial agricultural models have been associated with pesticide dependencies, seed concentration, and financial speculations. Agroecology instead promotes food system transformation grounded in ecological integrity, social justice, and democratic governance.

19. **Finally, agroecology supports approaches that maintain public and community control over food systems**, promote transparency and accountability, and ensure that natural resources are managed sustainably and equitably, rather than being subject to large corporate capture, institutional outsourcing, greenwashing, or financialization of food and farming such as through credits and offsets.

4 Convergences without confusion

With this position, Agroecology Europe recognises that dialogue and cooperation across approaches can foster innovation and learning. Shared agronomic practices can contribute to improved environmental outcomes. However, sharing practices does not imply sharing purpose or approaches.

We therefore support constructive engagement with actors using the RA, as well as scientific exchange on effective agronomic practices for soil health without trade-offs on other socio-economic dimensions such as biodiversity and farmers' autonomy.

At the same time, we stress the importance of conceptual clarity to avoid confusion between approaches that differ fundamentally in ambition and scope. This requires first and foremost transparency regarding goals, funding, metrics, and governance arrangements.

5 Agroecology and Organic Farming: a strategic alliance

Together, agroecology and organic farming can reinforce locally grounded and territorially embedded food systems; enhance the environmental and social ambition of organic production; support farmers through knowledge-sharing, diversification, and fair markets; and uphold and strengthen organic regulation and related agri-environmental and social policies relevant to all the agri-food sector.

We strongly oppose any approach that would weaken organic standards or replace binding regulations with voluntary schemes in the name of flexibility or innovation. Such rollbacks risk rendering organic farming indistinguishable from conventional systems, undermining consumer trust and environmental outcomes.

6 Guarding against corporate capture and greenwashing

This position does not seek to disqualify other approaches. However, it builds on the responsibility to name and address risks associated with the misuse of loosely defined concepts. The uncritical adoption of regenerative agriculture by powerful corporate actors can: enable selective adoption of practices without systemic change; shift responsibility from public regulation to questionable private initiatives with big claims and poor accountability; obscure continued reliance on harmful inputs or exploitative supply chains; and consolidate an unsustainable agri-food system under a new narrative.

7 Our position and way forward

Agriculture Europe affirms the following positions:

1. Agroecology, as defined by FAO and HLPE-CFS, is a coherent and transformative framework for food system transformation.
2. Regenerative agriculture may share some good agronomic practices in common with agroecology (e.g., long term crop rotation, intercropping, mixed animal-plant farming) but should not be treated as synonymous with it.
3. Agroecology and organic farming are complementary and mutually reinforcing, particularly in strengthening local food systems and regulatory ambition across agriculture, food, animal welfare, and other social and environmental legislations.
4. Environmental and social progress must build on and not roll back-existing regulations to make space for private credits, offsetting, certifications favouring business-as-usual and exacerbates inequalities.
5. Clear definitions, public oversight, and democratic governance are essential to prevent greenwashing and corporate capture.

We, Agroecology Europe and its members, invite supporters to use this clarity to foster meaningful collaboration, protect the integrity of established frameworks, and advance a just and sustainable European food system.

Photo: Extensive livestock farming in rural Spain, Andalucia. Photo by Matteo Metta



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