Regenomics offers new economic insights for landowners

Regenerative agriculture holds great promise, but how can it become economically viable? In the Public Private Partnership (PPP) project 'Regenomics', Wageningen University & Research and its partners are working to shed light on the costs and benefits of regenerative agriculture. How can we support farmers to make choices that fit their specific circumstances? By the end of 2025, the research results will be available for all European farmers.

Throughout the project, we share 4 different stakeholder perspectives on the transition: how they see their role and responsibility, the opportunities and barriers they encounter, and how better insight into the costs and benefits can help to speed up the transition. This is part 2: the landowners' perspective.

'Agriculture is at a crossroads, more than ever before', says Jurgen TACK, secretary-general of the European Landowners' Organization (ELO). 'Farmers, buyers, food processors, landowners: we all have both an ecological and an economic responsibility. That is what makes regenerative agriculture so promising.'

ELO is an international advocacy organization representing landowners, farmers, foresters and rural entrepreneurs. Their 67 member organizations together represent about 2.8 million European agricultural professionals. In the WUR research project Regenomics, ELO is one of four partners.

Landowners look at land use differently than farmers who rent their land, TACK explains. 'For them, land is capital. To preserve that capital, they must ensure it remains in good condition. That is why we need agricultural models that are both sustainable and profitable. It is rare for these aspects to come together in one strategy. But in regenerative agriculture, they do.'

Promising model

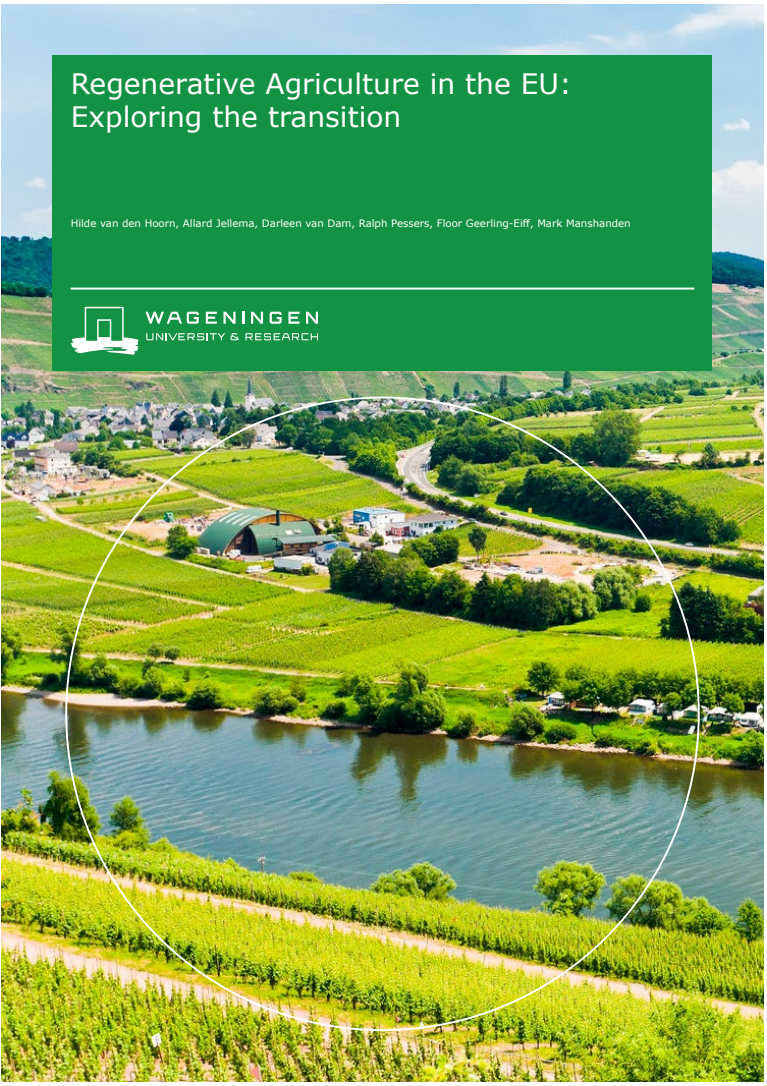
What especially triggered ELO to participate in the Regenomics project, is the project focus on finding a sound business case for regenerative agriculture. 'In our lobbying work, we need metrics and proof', TACK points out. 'Everyone asks for outcomes — but credible, widely accepted data on soil health, biodiversity, and water is still evolving. Without trusted metrics, it's hard to argue for outcome-based rewards or to de-risk private investment.'

As a lobbying organization, ELO mainly works in Brussels — engaging with the European Commission and the European Parliament. Over the past 3 years, they have organized different events around the topic. 'We work with politicians and policymakers to ensure regenerative agriculture is part of future European agricultural policy. That is not easy, because European rules often change, member states interpret them differently, and policy dossiers overlap. This makes it difficult to give landowners stable, long-term signals.'

Next to their lobby activities, ELO connects landowners to research projects, pilots and other practical initiatives. 'That way, members who are eager to innovate can join the transition early on. We've seen many new agricultural methods – especially 'green' ones – fail because they were too idealistic and not focused enough on economic outcomes. Our role is to keep the focus on practical, region-specific solutions that deliver both competitiveness and environmental benefits. Only if a method is profitable, our members will adopt it for the long term.'

Challenges and barriers

ELO and its members face several other challenges in their work. 'Administrative burdens are increasing', says TACK. 'Reporting demands are rising, but the tools are fragmented and not interoperable. That erodes trust among landowners and takes time away from actual management.'



For private landowners, the biggest barrier to switch to regenerative agriculture is a financial one. 'People have invested in their production equipment. When they switch to a new approach, some of that equipment is no longer usable. Switching from one agricultural model to another is therefore always done with a certain reluctance.'

Even so, TACK and his colleagues see a growing interest in the model. 'I am convinced that the Regenomics research results will help more people take the leap. We already see more and more landowners eager to start applying these practices.'

Using the results

ELO plans to use the research findings in several ways, TACK says. 'We will translate the cost-benefit curves and risk profiles into position papers and amendment proposals. Quantified evidence can persuade ministries and members of parliament to pledge their support. The results can also serve as decision-support tools for our members.'

Better-substantiated lobbying matters, emphasizes TACK, because it changes decisions. 'Policymakers and buyers will back models that are proven to work, costed and verifiable at scale. Solid evidence helps move the debate from ideology to implementation, targeting support where it delivers the most environmental gain per euro. That is how we can ensure private landowners are paid for performance – and how Regenomics makes a real difference.'

To ensure the findings reach both European policymakers and ELO's members, the organization will share the results in its newsletters and discussions. 'Scientific results can only have an impact once they reach society. We see it as our role to build those bridges.'

Next steps in the transition

What does ELO need from other stakeholders in the supply chain to move the transition forward? 'Buyers, processors, and retailers can help by offering pre-competitive, multi-year offtake agreements with fair pricing, linked to verified outcomes. It's also vital that they invest in the transition themselves.'

'If that happens across the entire chain', TACK concludes, 'we can absolutely make the leap to what may soon become our new 'traditional' agriculture. That would be good news: not only for climate and biodiversity, but also for agriculture and global food security in the decades to come.'

Do you want to know more about the Regenomics project, or do you have a question for the WUR research team? Send an e-mail to Mark MANSHANDEN (mark.manshanden@wur.nl), and we will get back to you soon.

About this project

Regenomics is a Public Private Partnership (PPP) project, in which we aim to create a better understanding of the economic costs-benefits of the regenerative agriculture transition in Europe. We are doing this by developing 'Regenomics': a replicable cost-benefits framework to create scenarios for arable farms. In 2025, we are testing our model in 4 different EU regions: Picardie (France), Észak-Alföld (Hungary), Niedersachsen (Germany) and Dolnoslanskie (Poland). After that, it will become available for all European farmers.

In this project, Wageningen University and Research works together with four project partners: Cargill, Unilever Europe, Mars Pet Nutrition Europe and the European Landowners' Organization. Since we're working in different regions, various local partners are also involved: Agro-Transfert Ressources et Territoires (France), The Institute of Agricultural Economics (AKI) (Hungary), Kompetenzzentrum Ökolandbau Niedersachsen GmbH (Germany) and Agro Smart Lab with Dorota ŁABANOWSKA-BURY (Poland).