PETERSON SOLUTIONS

The Consumer Goods FORUM

PUBLIC CONSULTATION

Minimum Requirements for Regenerative Agriculture Programmes

For the world, for ourselves, for our families

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Executive summary

01

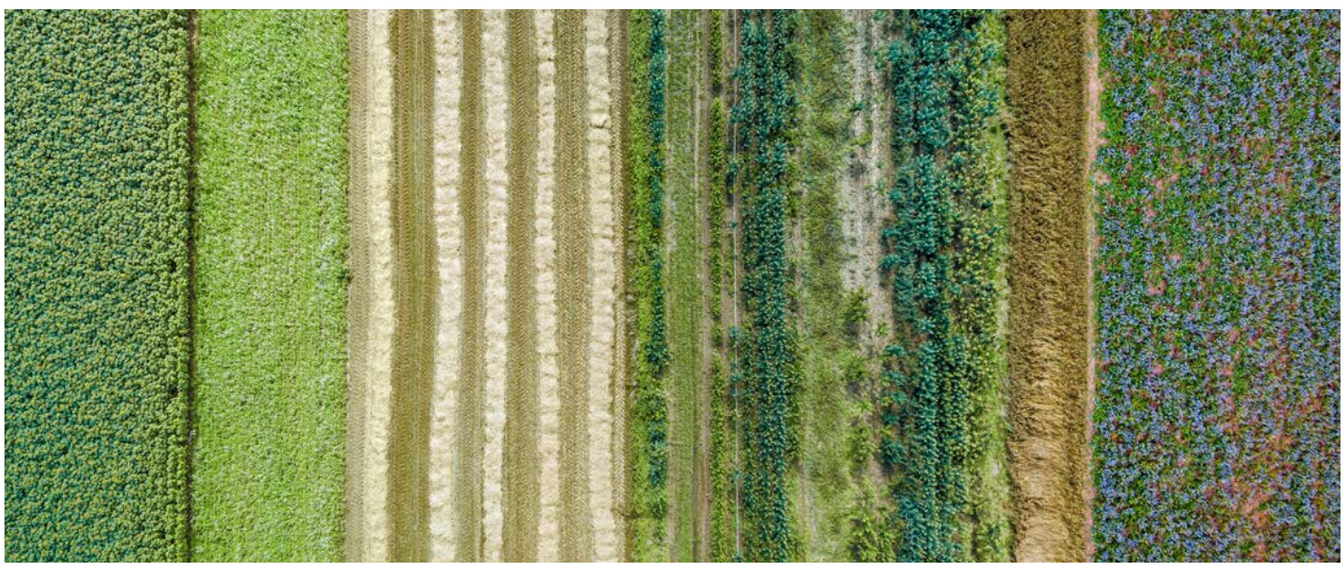
Executive summary

The regenerative agriculture concept is gaining momentum, but without a clear path, it risks becoming vague marketing rather than a credible route to climate-resilient farming. There is a need to cut through the noise and to create harmonised messaging on what supply chain actors require from a regenerative agriculture standard.

The Consumer Goods Forum's (CGF) Sustainable Supply Chain Initiative (SSCI), with assistance from the Peterson Solutions team, is bringing clarity by developing criteria for consistent expectations on what a robust regenerative agriculture standard should entail. These will become consistent, credible reference points to aid in navigating and benchmarking voluntary standards which align with the regenerative term. This document will serve as the basis for the current public consultation in the autumn of 2026.

Regenerative agriculture is an active process and an ongoing effort to restore and enhance the natural functioning of ecosystems through soil-centred management practices that deliver wider holistic impact across climate, nature, water, biodiversity, supply chain resilience and livelihood benefits. It therefore offers companies a possible solution across multiple targets, including GHG emissions, carbon insetting, water stewardship, and natural capital. As such, regenerative agriculture is increasingly referenced within responsible and sustainable sourcing strategies and insetting strategies.

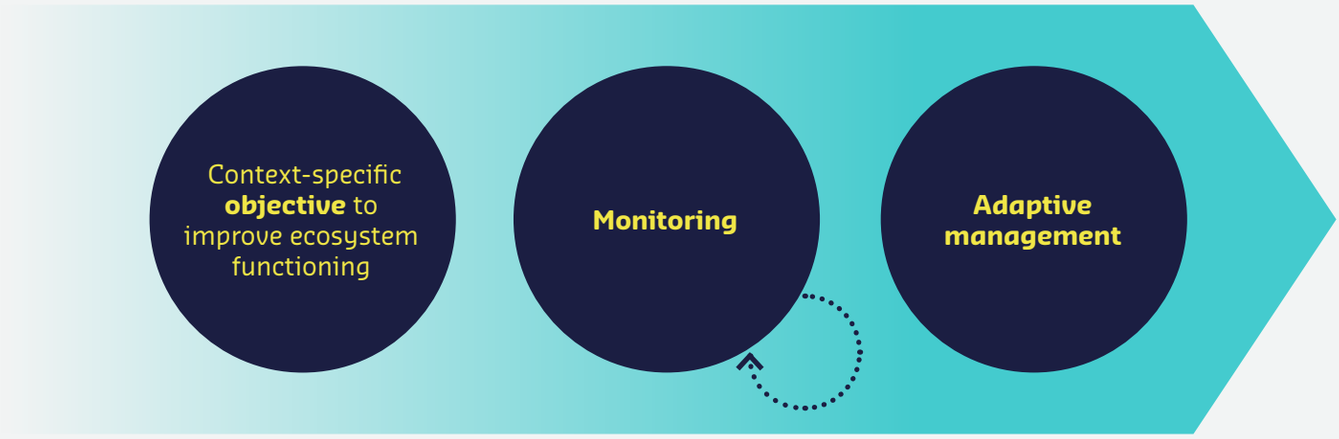
While the SSCI has already made great steps to define good agricultural practices in its Environmental Benchmark, regenerative agriculture emerges as a more focused subset of good agricultural practices. Inclusion of soil health monitoring in the SSCI Environmental Benchmark is a positive anchor point. Regenerative agriculture's effectiveness depends on localised implementation tailored to specific ecological and social contexts. The specificity of regenerative agriculture therefore necessitates a dedicated module. Nevertheless, soil health monitoring will likely be a core pillar of a robust regenerative agriculture standard. The SSCI Scheme Management Criteria will also be required to ensure that a voluntary standard claiming to be "regenerative" is operationally credible, that is transparent, impartial, technically robust, and aligned with global accountability mechanisms.



Peterson Solutions undertook a comprehensive review of voluntary sustainability standards and private programmes that position themselves as aligned with regenerative principles, as well as undertaking stakeholder engagement to capture the practical realities experienced across the value chain. Our stakeholder engagement across retailers, manufacturers, biotechnology, academia, advocacy groups, and standard owners confirms the need for minimum requirements that ensure consistency without limiting contextual flexibility, as well as minimum criteria for what a credible voluntary standard which claims regenerative ideals.

From our research and stakeholder engagement, it was clear that developing criteria to define what constitutes a robust and credible voluntary regenerative agriculture standard must take a context-specific approach. Not all practices which align with "regenerative principles" can be applied indiscriminately; implementation must be tailored to the specific ecological and agronomic characteristics of each farming operation. For example, nitrogen-fixing cover crops are highly beneficial in nutrient-depleted soils but may be unnecessary or even counterproductive in systems already rich in available nitrogen. At the same time, agroforestry integration is useful in tropical contexts but faces significant constraints in grain-dominant operations due to today's mechanised harvest. For this reason, no single set of practices defines regenerative agriculture. Instead, programmes rely on flexible, context-specific practice menus, placing farmers and their decision-making at the centre of implementation. However, the core theme remains: soil health is the central pillar of regenerative agriculture.

Ongoing improvement



Objectives to be set at the farm level, allowing for farmer-driven and context-specific implementation.

Outcome-driven implementation that ensures that the practices being implemented are achieving results.

Outcome-based approaches allow for broader claims (carbon, water, biodiversity, livelihoods), but these must be backed by quantifiable, verifiable data. High-quality data therefore underpins the business case for rolling out regenerative agriculture and is essential for credible claims and market trust. However, positive outcomes are not guaranteed due to the inherently different contexts of soil type, crop type, annual variations in weather, etc.; nonetheless, they should be the north star for regenerative agriculture implementation. Any claims should therefore emphasise transition and process, not guaranteed outputs, reflecting the long-term nature of regenerative change. Additionally, most programmes do not set quantitative outcome thresholds due to context-dependency. Instead, they emphasise robust governance, credible monitoring systems, and evidence of directional improvement.

Our research and stakeholder engagement revealed numerous substantive themes extending well beyond soil health, underscoring that regenerative agriculture necessarily encompasses dimensions not adequately captured in existing voluntary standards. Notably, farmer livelihoods emerged as an interesting and notable disconnect between regenerative agriculture principles and their operational implementation. 62% of stakeholders engaged agreed that farmer livelihoods should be an operational area of impact for regenerative agriculture (1), and 67% of voluntary standards make links to socioeconomic benefits of regenerative agriculture (2). However, at present this imperative remains rarely operationalised in voluntary standards, with few incorporating criteria directly linked to livelihoods or monitoring as a substantive metric; for example, income and expenditure monitoring. However, there is increasing momentum in this space.

[1] SSCI conducted a public survey via LinkedIn. For further information, see page 15.

[2] For the full list of voluntary standards analysed and methodology, see page 16-17.

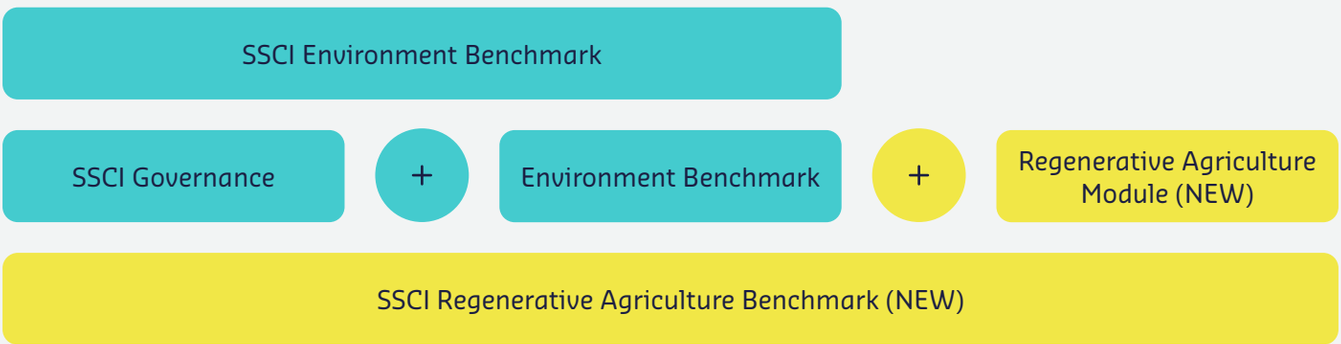
Voluntary standards are therefore not a silver bullet for regenerative agriculture. The complexity of soil health, regional variation, and farm economics means no single standard can address all challenges to regenerate soil at field level. Yet, they serve a critical function: they provide direction and accountability where none previously existed. They help move beyond vague "regenerative" claims toward measurable outcomes and credible practice. SSCI moves to strengthen the conversation around regenerative agriculture, to establish minimum criteria that define a robust regenerative agriculture standard, providing a consistent, credible benchmark for evaluating voluntary standards claiming to be regenerative. The draft criteria reflect that only by setting clear ground-level objectives, implementing practices, ensuring clear monitoring points, verification, and using collected data to inform management decisions will we present a solution to ensure that the entire industry moves forward with momentum within the space of regenerative agriculture implementation.

Based on these findings, together SSCI & Peterson Solutions have developed 8 criteria, outlining the minimum requirements for what constitutes a robust regenerative agriculture voluntary standard. This approach aims to be crop and context-agnostic. In this report, we outline the methodology and analysis that sit behind these draft criteria, and further context on how our conclusion of ongoing improvement via an emphasis on implementing practices and establishing credible monitoring systems represents a robust regenerative agriculture movement. Please find the draft criteria on pages 34-35. Headline results details in the table on the next page.

These draft minimum criteria establish the ground-level expectations that voluntary standards claiming to be "regenerative" should meet, including soil health as the central pillar, ongoing improvement through context-specific practice selection, whole-farm implementation, outcome-based monitoring, and meaningful farmer livelihood support. Now we are holding a public consultation to gather further input. We would like to hear from you:

- How do we know a standard claiming to implement regenerative agriculture is credible?
- Are these criteria adequate to establish a minimum baseline for regenerative agriculture?
- Should regenerative agriculture deliver measurable impact?
- Is there a threshold where a hectare will always be considered regen ag?

After the public consultation, SSCI will consider the next steps for these criteria.



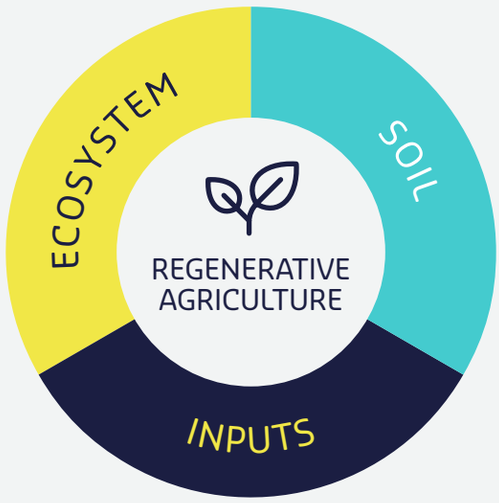
Section	Headline results	Headline summary	Links to draft requirement (Pages 34-35)
Regeneration should focus on the soil	100% of voluntary standards and private programme analysed focus on intended outcomes related to improving soil health, including nutrient cycling. Divergences remain across other associated outcomes. Stakeholder feedback confirms this view: both our surveys and direct engagement showed consensus that soil health should be central to regenerative agriculture practices and outcomes.	A robust standard should require practices that use soil as the primary entry point for improving whole ecosystem functioning, not just practices that contribute to more than carbon sequestration and mitigation.	Criteria 3: Multiple practices Criteria 6: Improvement of ecosystem functioning via the soil
Ongoing improvement and flexible approach	Across the majority of our engagement and analysis, regenerative agriculture is treated as a trajectory of improvement rather than a fixed performance state. All voluntary standards with direct regenerative agriculture claims mandate ongoing improvement; a requirement supported by 97% of survey respondents who consider ongoing improvement central to the practice. 71% of voluntary standards accommodate local ecological conditions (e.g., soil type, climate, rainfall patterns) and crop type, rather than imposing prescriptive, one-size-fits-all requirements.	Because regeneration takes time, and outcomes vary by ecological context, a robust standard should avoid prescriptive mandates. The local geological and climatic conditions and crop requirements should be considered before implementing regenerative agriculture practices. This can be achieved by farmers being able to choose from a 'menu' of context-specific practices.	Criteria 2: Importance of context Criteria 5: Ongoing improvement
Whole farm approach	Median response across all engagements was in the middle of the 'no dominant preference', indicating respondents are roughly split between farm-level and field-level perspectives. 82% of all voluntary standards require a whole-farm approach.	A robust standard should consider the whole farm and considers how regenerately grown crops are part of a farming system.	Criteria 1: Whole farm approach
Context-based environmental monitoring	Despite a consensus that regenerative agriculture should be outcome-focused and 97% of those engaged agreed that regenerative agriculture should require monitoring, few voluntary standards require monitoring of ecological KPIs at the farm level. Most voluntary standards do not require farms to meet predefined, measurable outcome thresholds.	Aligning with the consensus that regenerative agriculture is outcome-based, a robust standard should be in place to validate that positive ecological outcomes manifest. However, ecological outcomes are highly context-dependent; therefore, the monitoring should be context-dependent.	Criteria 7: Monitoring
Farmer livelihoods	62% of stakeholders engaged agreed that farmer livelihoods should be an operational area of impact for regenerative agriculture, and 67% of voluntary standards make links to socioeconomic benefits of regenerative agriculture. However, this imperative remains rarely operationalised in voluntary standard criteria.	Aligning with the industry momentum and logic that human well being, and economic resilience of a farming system remain central to the pillars of sustainability and resilience of regenerative agriculture, this criteria has been included.	Criteria 4: Farmer livelihoods

Section	Headline results	Headline summary	Links to draft requirement (Pages 34-35)
Regenerative Agriculture & SSCI Environmental Benchmark and Scheme Management Requirements Governance	SSCI's Environmental Benchmark reflects general good agricultural practices that are relevant to regenerative systems. However, not all elements apply directly, as regenerative agriculture is more context-specific and requires practices to be adapted to local ecological and social conditions. The SSCI Scheme Management Criteria will also be required to ensure that a voluntary standard claiming to be "regenerative" is operationally credible, that is transparent, impartial, technically robust, and aligned with global accountability mechanisms, such as ISO-accredited auditors.		SSCI Environmental Benchmark

What is regenerative agriculture?

Regenerative agriculture improves ecosystem functioning, reduces GHG emissions and enhances carbon sinks mainly through the following pathways.

- **Soil carbon sequestration**
  Practices such as no - till farming, cover cropping, and organic fertiliser application increase soil organic carbon content, turning farmland into a carbon sink to reduce atmospheric CO_2.
- **Reduction of synthetic inputs**
  Reduced use of synthetic fertilisers (a major source of N_2O emissions) cuts direct and indirect GHG emissions.
- **Improved ecosystem resilience**
  Enhanced biodiversity and water retention capacity reduced energy consumption and emissions associated with irrigation and disaster recovery.



Core consensus, but no universal definition

Regenerative agriculture is increasingly a buzzword spanning the private sector, public discourse and on-the-ground farming practices. The term has been gathering momentum since 2015, propelled by the climate impacts of industrial agriculture and mounting ESG expectations, and catalysed by major multinationals (most notably Nestlé, PepsiCo, General Mills, and Danone) publicly committing to "regenerative" sourcing. What began as a niche set of ecological farming principles has now become a central pillar of corporate sustainability strategies, government policy conversations, and NGO advocacy. This corporate uptake has pushed the concept into mainstream media and investor conversations, creating a feedback loop of visibility and expectation. While the term is increasingly recognised as an approach to farming that strengthens the long-term health of agricultural landscapes, this momentum has also created noise and confusion for on-the-ground implementation.

In practice, regenerative agriculture is inherently context-specific: its application varies according to crop type, soil characteristics, precipitation patterns, climate, and the wider production system. As a result, there is no single prescriptive set of practices. Instead, broad consensus exists around the core outcomes regenerative agriculture seeks to achieve, including improved soil health, enhanced biodiversity, increased resilience, and more efficient nutrient cycling. These outcomes in turn should build soils and support natural nutrient availability, thereby reducing dependence on synthetic fertilisers while increasing resilience to environmental and economic shocks, such as climate variability and input price volatility.

For this reason, organic, often seen as the gold standard for sustainable agricultural production, and regenerative agriculture can work synergistically. Organic farming operates within a prescriptive framework with strict, standardised criteria focused on prohibited inputs; synthetic pesticides, fertilisers, and certain other substances are forbidden across all contexts. In contrast, regenerative agriculture adopts a more context-specific approach, emphasising measurable environmental outcomes. Rather than competing, these approaches can work synergistically: a farm certified organic can move beyond compliance with a standard to simultaneously implement regenerative practices and proactively track soil improvement. Conversely, regenerative agriculture may be used as a stepping stone towards organic production. The draft SSCI regenerative agriculture criteria accommodate both systems.

Public and private standards

Private standards, voluntary labels and certification schemes, with criteria and differing mixes of practice and outcome-based metrics, have created a fragmented market of competing definitions.

Influence of context

Agroecological conditions, farm scale, social systems and local knowledge mean the same practice can produce very different results in different places.

Measuring practices vs outcomes

RegenAg inherently mixes practices and outcomes (e.g., practice-based no-till vs outcome-based soil carbon gains), which different stakeholders prioritise differently.

A business case for SSCI regenerative agriculture criteria

Is it necessary to have SSCI regenerative agriculture criteria?

02

A clear business case for a Regenerative Agriculture SSCI Criteria

As interest in regenerative agriculture accelerates across global supply chains, the absence of a shared, practical definition poses a growing risk. Without clear parameters, regenerative agriculture can drift into vague marketing language rather than serving as a credible pathway toward climate-resilient farming. To ensure integrity, comparability, and long-term value, organisations increasingly recognise the need for a minimum framework that sets out common expectations for both internal and external stakeholders.

The Sustainable Supply Chain Initiative (SSCI), part of the Consumer Goods Forum (CGF), works to strengthen trust and transparency in global supply chains by benchmarking and recognising third-party sustainability standards. Its role is to provide a consistent, credible reference point that helps companies navigate the growing landscape of certification schemes and identify those that meet robust expectations for responsible sourcing. Within the context of a noisy landscape of 'regenerative agriculture', there is a clear need to create harmonised messaging on what supply chain actors require from a regenerative agriculture standard.

Today, regenerative agriculture claims are increasingly referenced in certification schemes, responsible or sustainable sourcing programmes, and third-party voluntary verification systems. Yet without a baseline set of minimum requirements, these systems risk diverging in ways that confuse suppliers and undermine credibility.

In response to the growing noise and fragmentation surrounding regenerative agriculture, a range of organisations have worked to establish common principles and synthesise evidence to answer the fundamental question: 'What is regenerative agriculture?'. The SSCI, with support from Peterson Solutions, builds on this foundation by addressing a different challenge. Rather than further defining regenerative agriculture or developing implementation guidance, such as has been done by prominent certifications and initiatives, SSCI focuses on assurance and comparability. It is developing benchmarking criteria that will establish consistent expectations for what a credible regenerative agriculture standard should require; aligning core principles, measurable outcomes, and verification expectations of 'regenerative agriculture'.

These criteria are designed for SSCI Members, namely companies directly involved with primary production or downstream regenerative agriculture ambitions, and aim to provide supply chain actors with trusted reference points to navigate, assess, and compare the rapidly expanding landscape of voluntary regenerative agriculture standards.

Peterson Solutions is a recognised leader in regenerative agriculture and sustainable sourcing programme implementation. We bring extensive experience designing and implementing regenerative agriculture programs at scale, including work with major global companies, supporting some of the same multinational corporations that are members of the CGF. This client overlap, combined with our broad international footprint and strong local presence, enabled us to leverage existing relationships and insights, facilitating alignment at different points in the supply chain, and aiding collaborative efforts within CGF's network.

By establishing a common set of expectations for credible regenerative agriculture voluntary standards, the criteria have the potential to deliver value across the entire supply chain. For producers, greater consistency can reduce the burden of navigating multiple, and sometimes conflicting, programme requirements. For standard owners, it provides a clear yardstick against which to strengthen and demonstrate the robustness of their schemes. Buyers, manufacturers, and retailers benefit from a more transparent and comparable standards landscape, enabling more confident sourcing decisions, reducing due diligence costs, and strengthening sustainability claims; particularly as there is increasing scrutiny on sustainability claims with the European Union's Empowering Consumers Directive (EmpCo). Moreover, this should support interoperability between private and public programmes. Ultimately, a harmonised approach can improve trust, minimise duplication, and accelerate investment in regenerative agriculture by giving all supply chain actors greater confidence that "regenerative" claims are underpinned by credible, consistent expectations.

How do we know a standard claiming to implement regenerative agriculture is credible?

OBJECTIVE: to understand the current landscape of regenerative agriculture voluntary standards by examining them from multiple angles - how practitioners conceptualise regenerative agriculture, the practices, which third-party schemes are considered authoritative and why, and what commonalities and gaps exist across leading programmes. By cycling through stakeholder perspectives, existing standards, and comparative analysis, our approach aimed to identify what a robust voluntary regenerative programme should entail, as well as shared principles and inconsistencies in how regenerative agriculture is defined, measured, and reported, ultimately revealing opportunities to strengthen coherence and alignment across the sector.

Methodology

Establishing minimum criteria for voluntary standards

Our first objective was to assess the current landscape of voluntary sustainability standards that position themselves as aligned with regenerative principles, alongside an assessment of the current landscape of in-house regenerative agriculture programmes, to identify areas of convergence and divergence, and highlight where definitions, criteria, and verification approaches were either aligned or inconsistent. These standards were identified and selected based on whether they were widely used by CGF members, directly claimed to promote regenerative agriculture or had a position statement to align their standard with regenerative principles. In addition to analysing voluntary standards, we reviewed in-house regenerative agriculture programmes from leading companies to understand how regenerative principles are defined and implemented across both third-party certification frameworks and corporate supply chain strategies, revealing practical insights into what companies require versus what standards mandate.

The second phase centred on validating the core principles of regenerative agriculture through stakeholder engagement to capture the practical realities experienced across the value chain. Interviews were conducted with representatives from retail, manufacturing, biotechnology, academia, advocacy organisations, auditors, and standard owners. These dialogues challenge the assumptions associated with implementation and verification and clarify the minimum requirements necessary to ensure consistency while preserving essential contextual flexibility. To extend our research reach, we conducted a survey via the SSCI LinkedIn page to engage the broader SSCI community on key regenerative agriculture topics, complementing the direct stakeholder interviews and standards analysis.

Insights from both the voluntary standards review and stakeholder engagement were synthesised into a set of draft minimum criteria. These were subsequently refined through a two-stage review process: first via the SSCI subject-matter expert evaluation, and then through a public consultation period, ensuring the resulting framework is both technically robust and broadly endorsed.

Analysis of the SSCI Environmental Benchmark was also conducted to determine the extent of overlap between the existing benchmark and the draft regenerative agriculture criteria.

12 **Voluntary standards analysed**
Voluntary standards which position themselves as ‘regenerative’ or working within the regenerative agriculture movement.

16 **Stakeholder engagement calls**
Retailers, manufacturers, biotechnology, academia, advocacy groups and standard owners.

29 **Survey results analysed**
Public link to engage on what regenerative agriculture to explore perspectives on requirements for regenerative agriculture certification and monitoring programmes.

08 **Criteria drafted**
Including an analysis against the SSCI Environmental Benchmark.

Thank you to all stakeholders and sources involved in the project

Standards analysed

CREAF
Regenerative Organic Certified™
Regenerating Together Programme BY SAI PLATFORM
Unilever
regenagri
FIBERSHED
Regenified™
CERTIFIED REGENERATIVE BY AGW
pepsico
WILDFARMED
REAL ORGANIC PROJECT
SOIL ASSOCIATION ORGANIC
DEMETER CERTIFIED BIODYNAMIC®

Stakeholders directly engaged

AgriPurpose
McCormick
BAYER
Carrefour
Ceres
CONTROLUNION
regenagri
Loblaws
Ahold Delhaize
REWE GROUP EURO GROUP
Regenerating Together Programme BY SAI PLATFORM

The organisations who took part in the first round of consultation

As well as several others, not included here

University of Reading

Fyffes

Regenerative Organic Certified™

COLEAD

Groenten Fruit Huis

Fattoria La Vialla

NZ Ethical Employers
Cultivating Excellence in Employment to Support Primary Industries

vividfoods.

EuroFruits

· TIERRA DE TODOS ·

TEAM Public Health

proforest

SAI PLATFORM

Sources consulted

WBCSD World Business Council for Sustainable Development

IF Innovation Forum
events and insight for sustainability

Results

03

Results

Introduction

The following sections present the principal findings from the analysis. Together, they explain the rationale underpinning the draft criteria and demonstrate why a credible regenerative agriculture standard should prioritise context-specific implementation, ongoing improvement, robust monitoring, and transparent governance over prescriptive, one-size-fits-all requirements.

The analysis revealed that the greatest differences between existing approaches lie not in their intended outcomes, but in how they operationalise them. Standards vary in the practices they promote, the scale at which they apply requirements, the outcomes they monitor, and the governance systems used to verify progress.

The results section has been broken down into four key headlines:

Theme	Headline results	Headline summary	Links to draft requirement (Pages 34-35)
Regeneration should focus on the soil	100% of voluntary standards and private programme analyses focus on intended outcomes related to improving soil health. Divergences remain across other associated outcomes. Stakeholder feedback confirms this view: both our surveys and direct engagement showed consensus that soil health should be central to regenerative agriculture practices and outcomes.	A robust standard should require practices that use soil as the primary entry point for improving whole ecosystem functioning, not just practices that contribute to more than carbon sequestration and mitigation.	**Criteria 3:** Multiple practices **Criteria 6:** Improvement of ecosystem functioning via the soil
Ongoing improvement and flexible approach	Across the majority of our engagement and analysis, regenerative agriculture is treated as a trajectory of improvement rather than a fixed performance state. All voluntary standards with direct regenerative agriculture claims mandate ongoing improvement; a requirement supported by 97% of survey respondents who consider continuous improvement central to the practice. 71% of voluntary standards accommodate local ecological conditions (soil type, climate, rainfall patterns) and crop type, rather than imposing prescriptive, one-size-fits-all requirements.	Because regeneration takes time, and outcomes vary by ecological context, a robust standard should avoid prescriptive mandates. The local geological and climatic conditions and crop requirements should be considered before implementing regenerative agriculture practices. This can be achieved by farmers being able to choose from a 'menu' of context-specific practices.	**Criteria 2:** Importance of context **Criteria 5:** Ongoing improvement
Whole farm approach	Median response across all engagements was in the middle of the 'no dominant preference', indicating respondents are roughly split between farm-level and field-level perspectives. 82% of all voluntary standards require a whole-farm approach.	A robust standard should consider the whole farm and considers how regenerately grown crops are part of a farming system.	**Criteria 1:** Whole farm approach
Context-based environmental monitoring	Despite a consensus that regenerative agriculture should be outcome-focused and 97% of those engaged agreed that regenerative agriculture should require monitoring, very few voluntary standards require monitoring of ecological KPIs at the farm level. Most voluntary standards do not require farms to meet predefined, measurable outcome thresholds.	Aligning with the consensus that regenerative agriculture is outcome-based, a robust standard should be in place to validate that positive ecological outcomes manifest. However, ecological outcomes are highly context-dependent; therefore, the monitoring should be context-dependent.	**Criteria 7:** Monitoring
Farmer livelihoods	62% of stakeholders engaged agreed that farmer livelihoods should be an operational area of impact for regenerative agriculture, and 67% of voluntary standards make links to socioeconomic benefits of regenerative agriculture. However, this imperative remains rarely operationalised in voluntary standard criteria.	Aligning with the industry momentum and logic that human well being, and economic resilience of a farming system remain central to the pillars of sustainability and resilience of regenerative agriculture, this criteria has been included.	**Criteria 4:** Farmer livelihoods
Regenerative Agriculture & SSCI Environmental Benchmark and Scheme Management Requirements Governance	SSCI's Environmental Benchmark reflects general good agricultural practices that are relevant to regenerative systems. However, not all elements apply directly, as regenerative agriculture is more context-specific and requires practices to be adapted to local ecological and social conditions.		SSCI Environmental Benchmark

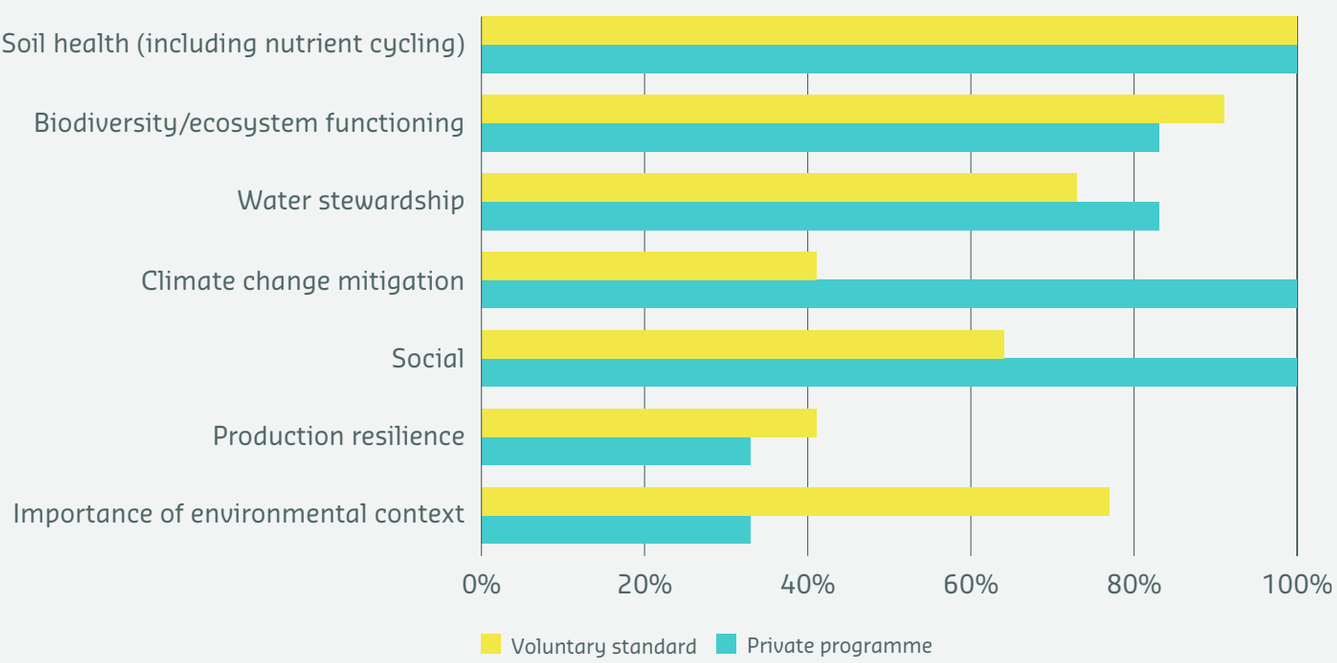
1.0 Regeneration should focus on the soil

The review of existing voluntary 'regenerative' aligned standards and in-house regenerative agriculture programmes revealed strong agreement that soil health is the defining pillar of regenerative agriculture, with all standards and private programmes reviewed explicitly identifying soil health and nutrient cycling as core objectives; in other words, regenerative agriculture is predominantly framed around practices that use soil as the primary pathway for restoring ecosystem function. Biodiversity and ecosystem functioning also emerged as widely recognised priorities, reinforcing the view that regenerative agriculture seeks to restore broader ecological processes rather than focusing solely on agricultural productivity.

The themes included in this landscape review were chosen as the most frequently cited principles associated with regenerative agriculture. They encompass the principal ecological outcomes (soil health, biodiversity, water stewardship, climate mitigation), socio-economic considerations (farmer livelihoods), production outcomes (resilience), and the recognised need for context-specific implementation. By examining the extent to which voluntary standards and private programmes address these interconnected dimensions, we sought to assess the degree to which voluntary standards operationalise the holistic ambitions of regenerative agriculture, or alternatively, whether practice gaps persist between conceptual ideals and operational implementation.

Beyond these foundational themes, the emphasis placed on different outcomes varies considerably. Water stewardship is commonly incorporated across both standards and private programmes, although it appears more frequently within corporate programmes. The greatest divergence is observed for climate change mitigation and social outcomes. Private programmes are substantially more likely to frame regenerative agriculture around greenhouse gas reductions, carbon strategies, farmer livelihoods, and social resilience, likely reflecting how in-house regenerative agriculture programmes have been utilised as a mechanism for wider on-the-ground impact.

No consensus on intended outcomes of regenerative agriculture



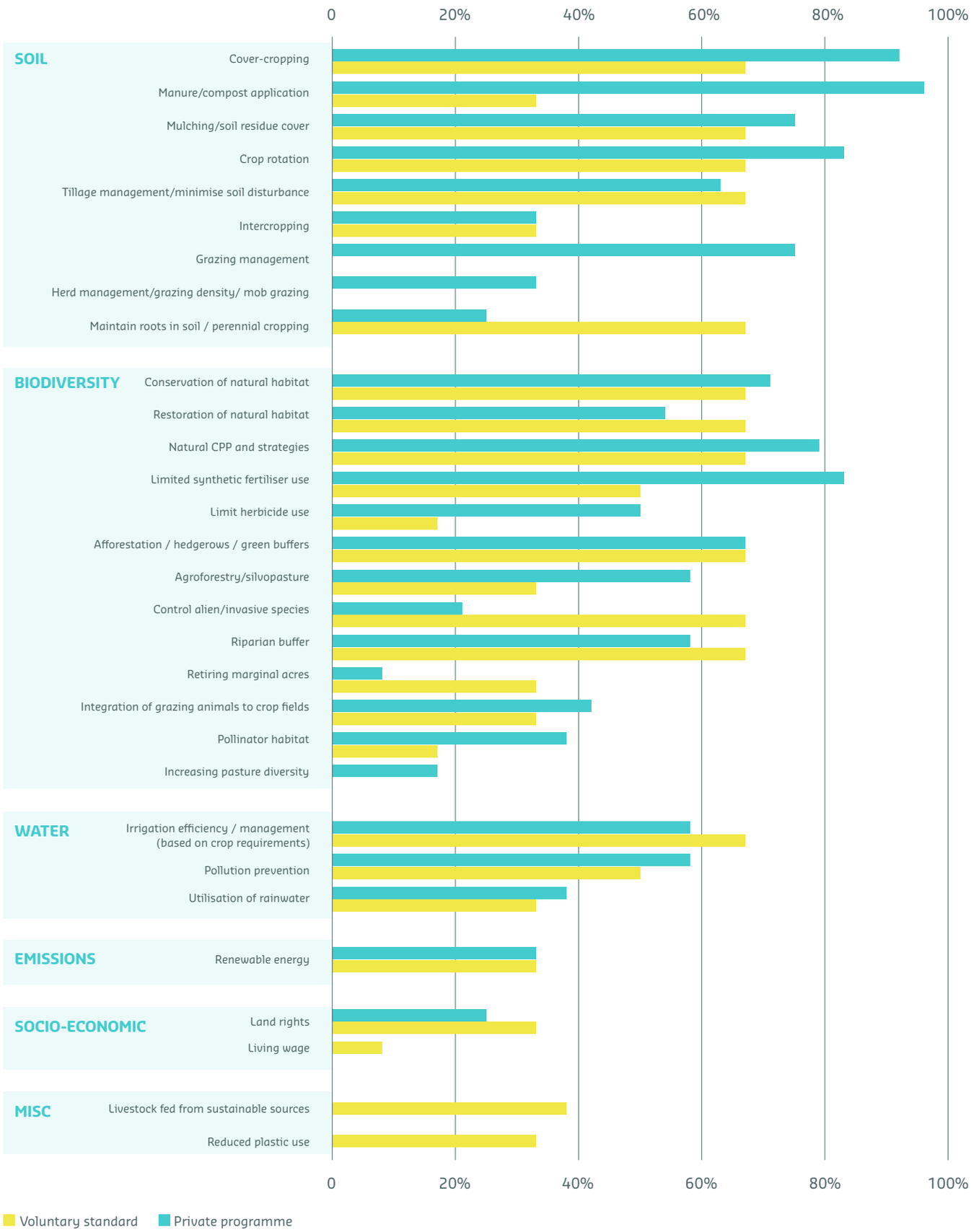
2.0 Ongoing improvement and flexible approach

2.1 No one set of practices constitutes 'regenerative agriculture'

Our analysis confirmed that there is no single, universal set of practices that defines regenerative agriculture (see Graph 2). Here we analyse high-level practices commonly associated with regenerative principles. Unlike organic standards, which rely on fixed, rules-based requirements, regenerative agriculture is inherently context-specific, with practices selected and adapted according to local ecological conditions, farming systems, and producer priorities. Most frameworks do not provide prescriptive instructions, enabling farmers to choose the interventions most appropriate for their soils, crops, and climate. The majority of standards and corporate programmes rely on flexible menus of practices rather than prescriptive, rules-based instructions. This approach, reflected in initiatives such as 71% of the voluntary standards analysed, supports adaptation to diverse production contexts. However, it should be noted that effective implementation requires targeting practices that improve performance in the farm's weakest areas. This flexibility places the farmer at the centre of implementation, recognising their expertise and allowing them to tailor regenerative strategies in ways that maximise both ecological and livelihood outcomes. Adding to this point, the analysis also found that, even when not explicitly stated, many frameworks increasingly incorporate producer livelihoods as a core dimension of regeneration.

Critically, the lack of consensus extends beyond regenerative agriculture itself: there is no clear standard for what constitutes effective cover cropping or other individual practices. These assessments are inherently context-dependent, varying by local farming conditions and crop type. Furthermore, many practices involve trade-offs, which are explored in Limitations: Navigating Trade-offs.

No consensus on practices commonly associated with regenerative agriculture



2.2 Not a fixed state and not continuous improvement

A core theme across interviews, standards and programmes analysed, regenerative agriculture is consistently framed as a process of improvement rather than a fixed state. All voluntary standards with direct regenerative agriculture claims mandate ongoing improvement; a requirement supported by 97% of survey respondents who consider ongoing improvement central to the practice. 71% of voluntary standards accommodate local ecological conditions (soil type, climate, rainfall patterns) and crop type, rather than imposing prescriptive, one-size-fits-all requirements. As a result, most systems do not classify a farm, field, or production unit as 'regenerative'; instead, they describe it as "implementing regenerative practices" or "progressing toward regenerative outcomes." This represents a notable departure from conventional agricultural standards, which typically focus on compliance with a defined set of practices or thresholds. The emphasis on ecological improvement reflects the outcome-oriented nature of regenerative agriculture and the recognition that ecological regeneration is dynamic, context-specific, and not easily captured through static certification labels.

Discussions with academic experts highlighted a significant divergence in the terminology used in this field. Given the realities of ecological limits, it is essential to adopt the language of ongoing improvement rather than continuous improvement, the latter implying an unsustainable trajectory of perpetual growth, which is unfeasible as the land must be operated within biophysical limits. This shift in language matters because it shapes expectations: for farmers, it avoids the pressure to deliver year-on-year gains that ecosystems cannot sustain; and, for corporations, it tempers the impulse to treat regenerative agriculture as another efficiency-driven performance metric.

The analysis further showed that, although regenerative agriculture practices are expected to deliver tangible ecological outcomes, none of the benchmarked standards or programmes set quantitative thresholds for outcome performance. Instead, the emphasis lies in establishing governance frameworks for ensuring implementation of practices and often includes systematic monitoring of ecological regeneration. This approach reflects the sector's current reliance on practice adoption and ongoing improvement pathways, rather than fixed numerical targets, as proxies for progress toward regenerative outcomes.

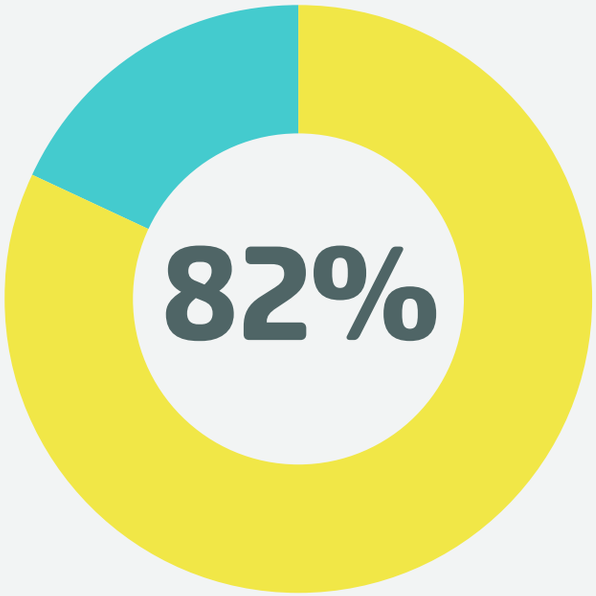
Aligning with this flexible approach, during our stakeholder engagement, it was clear that many SSCI Members developed regenerative agriculture ambitions due to the flexibility and narrative of regenerative agriculture. The regenerative principles draw on multiple pillars (soil health, carbon sequestration, water management, animal welfare, biodiversity enhancement, etc.); they allow organisations to choose whichever ecological or social outcomes align most closely with their strategic targets and take direct action towards these.

A note on organic: The comparison between organic and regenerative approaches revealed a complementary relationship: organic remains strict and rules-based, whereas regenerative models offer more flexible, context-specific pathways. This divergence in structure, organic as prescriptive, regenerative as adaptive, means the two systems can function synergistically. Organic provides a robust regulatory floor, ensuring a baseline of environmental protection and market integrity. Regenerative offers a pathway for farms to pursue ecological optimisation, tailored to their context. Collaboration between RegenAgri and the Regenerative Organic Certification illustrates this convergence, while several standards, such as Demeter and the Real Organic Project, require organic as a prerequisite for a regenerative standard. Our survey results reflect this, with some respondents viewing organic as a foundation for regenerative practices; however, the consensus leans toward seeing these as meaningfully different approaches rather than points on the same spectrum.

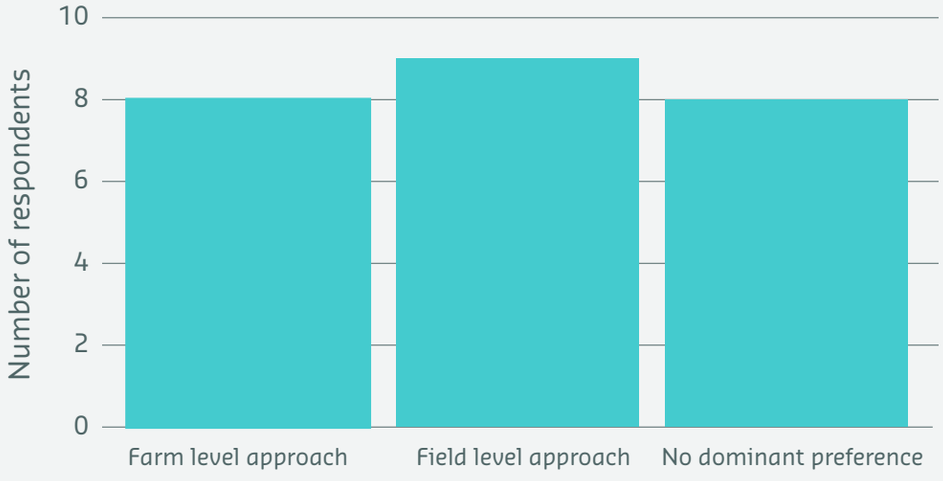
3.0 Whole farm approach

A notable point of divergence, however, concerns the scope of application, and a key point which SSCI should come together to define. Some frameworks adopt a whole-farm or landscape-level perspective, while others focus narrowly on crop-specific requirements, resulting in inconsistent expectations across systems. In the draft criteria, we have proposed a whole-farm approach, aligning with the idea that regenerative agriculture is a systematic change which transcends one field and considers how regenerately grown crops are part of a farming system; e.g. crop rotation is not implemented in isolation. A crop-specific or practice-specific orientation approach can offer clarity and ease of measurement; it risks fragmenting the concept, reducing regeneration to a checklist of interventions applied in isolation rather than as part of an integrated ecological strategy.

82% of standards require farm-level response (i.e., not field-level)



No consensus on field or farm approach regenerative agriculture



Median response across all engagements was in the middle of the 'no dominant preference', indicating respondents are roughly split between farm-level and field-level perspectives.

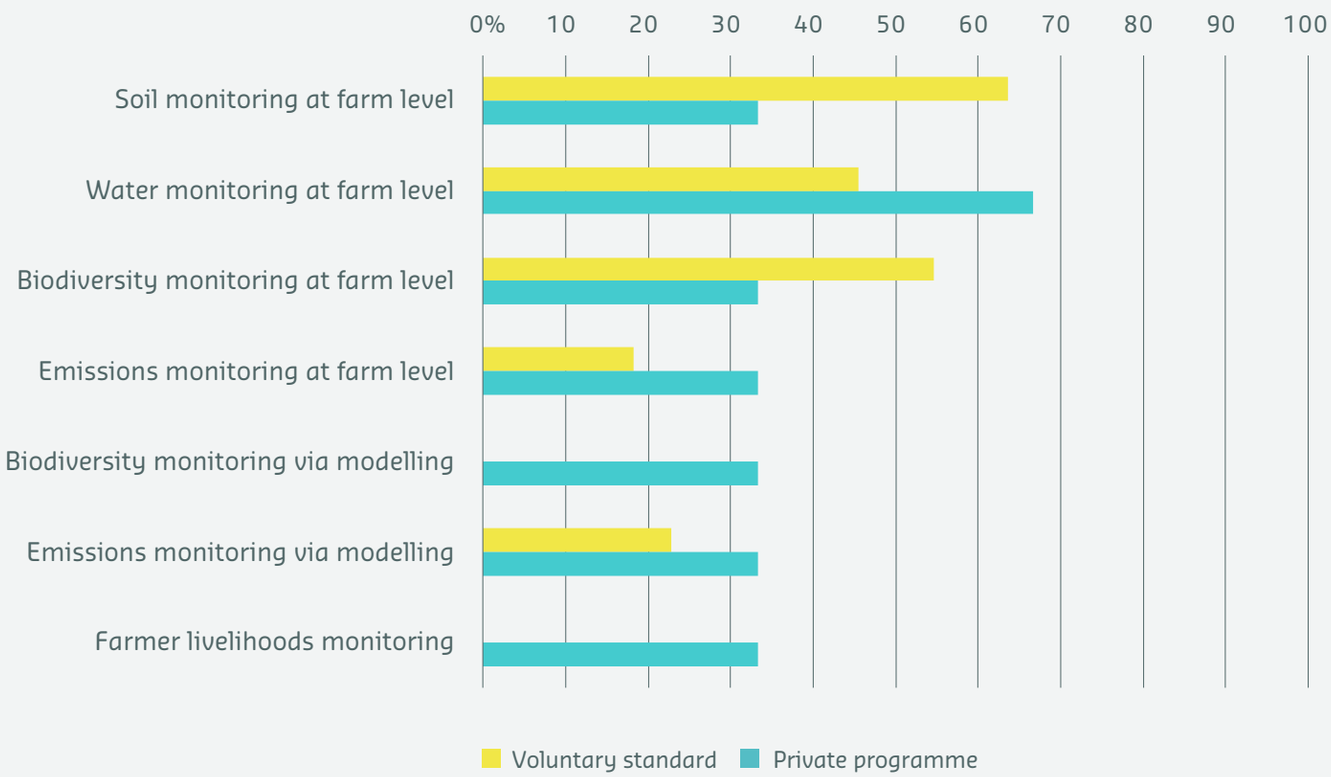
4.0 Context-based environmental monitoring

Despite a consensus that regenerative agriculture should be outcome-focused, 100% of survey respondents agreed that regenerative agriculture should create measurable impact, and 97% of those engaged agreed that regenerative agriculture should require monitoring; very few voluntary standards require monitoring of ecological KPIs at the farm level. Most voluntary standards do not require farms to meet predefined, measurable outcome thresholds. Because ecological outcomes are highly context-dependent, the emphasis instead lies on implementing regenerative practices and establishing credible systems for monitoring change over time. This reflects a broader trend in which regenerative agriculture is treated as a trajectory of improvement rather than a fixed performance state.

The analysis also highlighted a growing recognition of the need for context-specific monitoring to ensure that implemented practices are genuinely delivering positive impact. Because the effectiveness of regenerative practices varies by crop, climate, and production system, programmes increasingly stress the importance of verifying that the right practices are being applied at the right time and in the right conditions. This shift reflects an understanding that practice adoption alone is insufficient without evidence that those practices are contributing to measurable ecological improvement.

Aligning the implementation of good practices with soil health as a foundational pillar (see graph below) but should have wider holistic ecosystem impacts is seen across the analysis. Soil health and, secondly, biodiversity emerged as consistently validated pillars of regenerative agriculture (both in our analysis of voluntary standards and stakeholder engagement). However, monitoring of these pillars is considerably more challenging, particularly biodiversity, due to the sheer range of indicators involved, the variability of ecological baselines, and the resource-intensive nature of credible assessment. Biodiversity encompasses multiple dimensions (species richness, functional diversity, habitat quality, landscape connectivity), each requiring different methodologies and levels of expertise. Unlike soil carbon or nutrient levels, which can be measured through relatively standardised sampling, farms and supply-chain actors currently lack. Biodiversity assessment often demands repeated field surveys, specialist identification skills, and long-term monitoring to capture seasonal and inter-annual fluctuations. These requirements translate into higher costs, greater labour demands, and a need for technical capacity that many farms and supply-chain actors currently lack, despite it being a core pillar and indicator of ecosystem regeneration. To this point, investors are increasingly interested in on-the-ground monitoring of soil health and biodiversity for climate and biodiversity strategies.

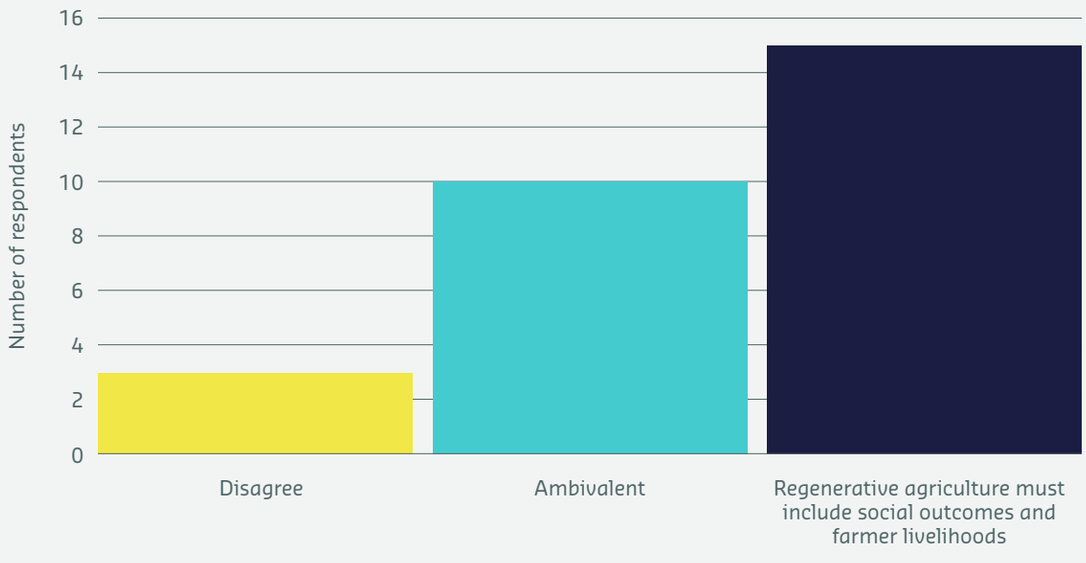
Soil health as a foundational pillar with wider holistic ecosystem impacts



5.0 Farmer livelihoods

Notably, farmer livelihoods emerged as an interesting and notable disconnect between regenerative agriculture principles and their operational implementation. While 62% of stakeholders engaged agreed that farmer livelihoods should be an operational area of impact for regenerative agriculture, and 67% of voluntary standards make links to socioeconomic benefits, this imperative remains rarely operationalised in substantive criteria. In fact, only 4% of voluntary standards analysed include monitoring of farmer livelihoods as a metric; for example, income and expenditure tracking or living wage analyses. This gap is significant: farmers are the stewards and active agents of land management, and without economic viability and social responsibility woven into standards themselves, regenerative practices remain inaccessible and unsustainable. Beyond income monitoring, expert engagement revealed that farmers also require access to agronomic advice and peer-to-peer learning to successfully transition to regenerative practices. Henry Dimbleby's observation that "if it is not profitable, it is not resilient" (Groundswell, 10th June 2026), underscores that regenerative agriculture cannot succeed without economic sustainability embedded in its standard. However, there is increasing momentum in this space, with some schemes piloting socio-economic indicators and framing carbon credits as farmer livelihood investments rather than purely environmental offsets.

Stakeholder survey revealed consensus that farmer livelihoods are central to regenerative agriculture



6.0 Regenerative Agriculture & SSCI Environmental Benchmark

When reviewing the SSCI Environmental Benchmark through a regenerative agriculture lens, there is clear overlap. Many of the Benchmark's criteria reflect general good agricultural practices that are relevant to regenerative systems. However, not all elements apply directly, as regenerative agriculture is more context-specific and requires practices to be adapted to local ecological and social conditions.

It is particularly positive that soil health is given significant attention, especially the focus on soil health monitoring. This aligns closely with regenerative agriculture, where improving and measuring soil function is the central pillar. While the SSCI Environmental Benchmark provides a strong foundation, regenerative agriculture ultimately requires a more tailored, place-based approach to fully capture its intent and outcomes.

Just as SSCI Environmental Benchmark standards are subject to SSCI Scheme Management Criteria to ensure operational credibility, transparency, and technical rigour, the new regenerative agriculture criteria will likewise be governed by these same governance and assurance requirements.

Standard review frequency

A strong majority of stakeholders engaged advocated for review cycles of every 2–3 years, positioning this as the most practical balance between allowing time for meaningful progress and adapting to emerging evidence. This preference for 2–3-year reviews is shorter than current SSCI Scheme Management Requirements and reflects the rapidly evolving regenerative agriculture landscape; a divergence that may warrant further stakeholder consultation.

6.1 Governance

Good governance for regenerative agriculture voluntary standards centres on an on-farm focus that prioritises implementation and verification of a robust monitoring framework that confirms both the implementation of regenerative practices and the measurement of associated outcomes. A credible governance model should also be anchored in academic expertise, drawing on established research to define what practices will likely have a positive impact regenerating the farm ecosystem.

Regenerative agriculture voluntary standards will be benchmarked against this framework following SSCI's established benchmarking methodology.

The SSCI Scheme Management Criteria will also be required to ensure that a voluntary standard claiming to be "regenerative" is operationally credible, that is transparent, impartial, technically robust, and aligns with global accountability mechanisms, such as ISO-accredited auditors.

Claims

Developing credible claims in regenerative agriculture remains inherently challenging. Unlike organic certification, which benefits from a long-established, tightly defined claim architecture, regenerative agriculture lacks a singular, universally recognised standard or message to communicate and claim. Yet, the rigidity of organic claims also exposes its limitations; regenerative agriculture, being fundamentally outcome-based, should in principle enable a broader suite of claims across carbon, water stewardship, biodiversity, and even social dimensions such as farm wages.

Stakeholder engagement revealed a clear demand for companies to articulate the scale of their regenerative ambitions from the investor side, particularly time-bound goals, and that to be meaningful, these claims must be rooted in a narrative from farmer to consumer, ensuring that the narrative is not merely corporate positioning, but grounded in verifiable practice and measurable change. However, there has also been a lot of hesitancy in companies communicating regenerative agriculture ambitions and strategies, for fear of greenwashing claims. Again, the SSCI's work is timely as there is increasing scrutiny on sustainability claims with the European Union's Empowering Consumers Directive (EmpCo).

Ensuring comparability across claims is equally complex, given the deeply context-specific nature of agricultural systems. Any assertion must therefore be backed by high-quality and verified data, whether environmental metrics or transparent reporting on the number of farmers engaged in transition. High-quality data further underpins the business case for investment and catalyses scaling. Again, as any claim will be context-specific, transparency therefore becomes the central organising principle for regenerative claims. Crucially, regenerative agriculture claims should be framed as process or transition-based rather than definitive outputs, reflecting the nature of the system change. For example, "engaging [X] number of farmers across X hectares on regenerative principles by [year]". Alternatively, any claims should be grounded in quantitative data that validate the improvement in ecosystem resilience.

Limitations

Navigating trade-offs

One of the recurring themes identified through our review and stakeholder engagement is that regenerative agriculture often involves balancing competing environmental, agronomic, and economic objectives. While many regenerative practices deliver clear long-term benefits, they can also create unintended trade-offs that require careful management. For example, reducing or eliminating tillage can improve soil structure, increase soil organic carbon, and reduce erosion, but it may also increase reliance on herbicides, particularly glyphosate, for weed control in the absence of mechanical cultivation. Cover cropping improves soil cover, nutrient cycling, and water infiltration, yet can increase water demand in water-limited regions or require additional management to prevent competition with the main crop. Lastly, hedgerows, buffer zones, and field margins are valuable conservation tools that enhance biodiversity and ecosystem functioning; however, they create a direct trade-off with productive agricultural area.

These examples reinforce why regenerative agriculture cannot be defined by a universal set of prescribed practices. The suitability and effectiveness of any intervention depends on local soil characteristics, climate, cropping system, and farmer objectives. Recognising and managing these trade-offs via effective monitoring and adaptive management is fundamental to ensuring that regenerative agriculture delivers genuine improvements in ecosystem functioning rather than optimising one outcome at the expense of another.

Land ownership

Regenerative agriculture relies on a long-term commitment to improving ecosystem function. However, a barrier to implementation is that a substantial proportion of agricultural land globally is managed under tenancy agreements. Tenant farmers often face structural disincentives to invest in regenerative practices because many of the benefits accrue over years, or even decades, while lease agreements are frequently much shorter. Consequently, farmers may bear the upfront costs and risks of transition without the certainty that they will benefit from the long-term returns.

While this is increasingly recognised in the literature, it is not yet strongly reflected in most voluntary standards. The standards reviewed are designed to be applicable regardless of land tenure and require producers to develop regenerative management plans, but they do not contain specific provisions or alternative pathways for leased land.

Outside of voluntary standards and national public incentivisation, carbon credit programmes are often land-ownership programmes agnostic. These create revenue streams that justify long-term investment in soil health, and therefore tangentially regenerative agriculture, even without land ownership.

Tracking regenerative agriculture and reporting against KPIs

Many existing programmes continue to rely on yield as a key performance indicator (e.g. ton carbon dioxide equivalent per ton production); however, yield is heavily influenced by external factors such as weather and climate variability, making it an unreliable standalone measure of regenerative outcomes. Instead, monitoring should adopt a long-term perspective and focus on indicators that better reflect improvements in ecosystem functioning, such as soil health, nutrient cycling, biodiversity, and water dynamics. Robust, longitudinal monitoring is essential to distinguish genuine regenerative progress from short-

term fluctuations driven by seasonal conditions. Monitoring yield as a key indicator of success, also incentivises taking areas of unproductive land into production (e.g. hedgerows, etc.), which is against the regenerative principles.

Contractual constraints

Farmers often face external contractual constraints imposed by buyers and processors that further limit implementation. For example, processing tomato contracts frequently restrict or prohibit the cultivation of certain crops, such as onions, due to concerns about soil depletion from intensive cultivation. While these restrictions are not explicitly regenerative agriculture requirements, they highlight practical barriers to farmer autonomy for driving regenerative agriculture principles.

Draft criteria

Is it necessary to have SSCI regenerative agriculture criteria?

04

Draft criteria

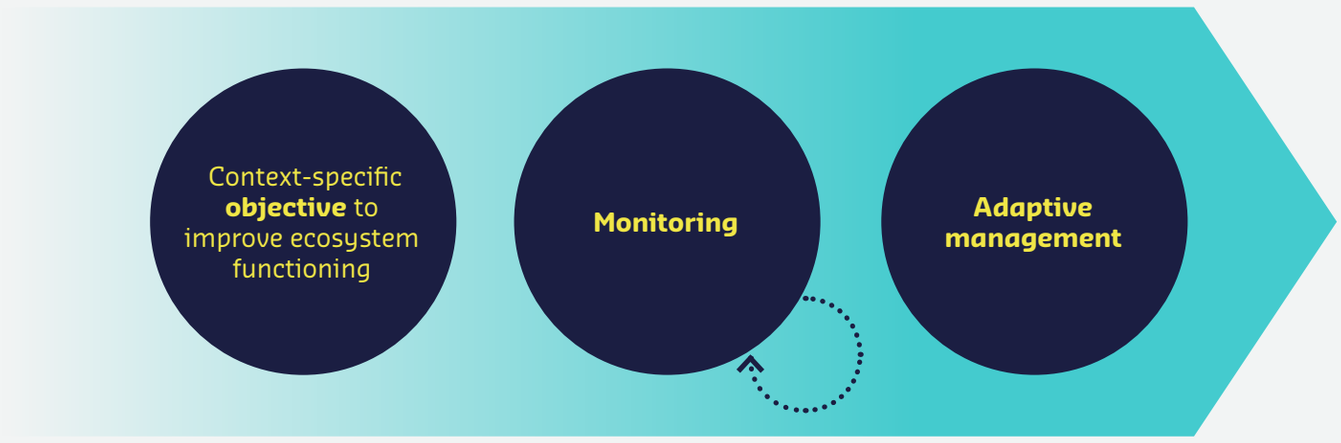
These criteria have been developed for use by the Sustainable Supply Chain Initiative (SSCI) to benchmark voluntary standards that claim alignment with regenerative agriculture against a common set of minimum requirements. The SSCI will determine how these criteria are ultimately implemented, whether through integration into the existing Environmental Benchmark, as a standalone benchmark, or as an add-on module.

	Requirement	Further guidance	Implementation evidence examples	Justification	Alignment with stakeholder engagement and voluntary standards
Whole farm approach	The standard shall require the farming operation to apply regenerative agriculture principles across the entire farm system, not limited to individual fields or crops.	The standard requires evidence of the boundaries of the farm system and demonstrate that regenerative principles are applied across all managed land (e.g., field maps, management plans).	Farm boundaries, farm management plan.	Regenerative agriculture is a systematic change of agricultural principles, which requires consistency over time to develop impact. Conflicting management can interrupt regeneration of soils.	82% of all voluntary standards require a whole-farm approach Guiding questions for consultation: • Some practices can be applied at the field level • Brands only looking to claim regen ag at a crop level
Importance of context	The standard shall require regenerative practices/ intervention be selected and adapted based on local ecological and climatic conditions, and consider crop requirements.	The standard requires that the local geological and climatic conditions and crop requirements have been considered before implementing regenerative agriculture practices. This can be achieved by farmers being able to choose from a 'menu' of context-specific practices.	Farm management plan outlining how practices align with local conditions and crop/ grazing needs. Field maps showing soil types, slope, erosion risk, hydrology. 'Menu' of practices within in the standard.	Application and impact of regenerative agriculture principles is highly dependent upon soil, climate and crop. Majority of voluntary standards examined, and stakeholders engaged, agree that regen ag must consider context. Majority also agree that flexibility to create context-specific impact, via a flexible approach is a driver of the movement. This has allowed for flexibility in practices implemented, and therefore the messaging of claims.	71% of voluntary standards accommodate local ecological conditions (soil type, climate, rainfall patterns) and crop type, rather than imposing prescriptive, one-size-fits-all requirements.
Multiple practices	The standard shall require the implementation of at least three practices (including at least one per plot/field level) at the farm level that align with regenerative principles (soil carbon sequestration, reduction of synthetic inputs, and improved ecosystem resilience).	Regenerative agriculture practices use soil as the primary entry point for improving ecosystem functioning. Principles of regenerative agriculture align in that the practices contribute to more than carbon sequestration and mitigation, that may water stewardship and biodiversity enhancement. An example may include reduced tillage and reduced nitrogen inputs, combined soil microorganism populations are likely to increase, increasing carbon storage and wider soil health benefits.	Farm management plan with activity log. List of examples on page 21.	Regenerative agriculture is not just 'carbon farming' and is a systemic change. To shift away from the BAU farming model to positively impact soil health and wider ecosystem functioning. Robust standards examined require many practices to be implemented to create cumulative impacts.	All voluntary standards analysed require at least one practice to be implemented per field, at a minimum.

	Requirement	Further guidance	Implementation evidence examples	Justification	Alignment with stakeholder engagement and voluntary standards
Farmer livelihoods	The standard shall ensure that regenerative agriculture supports the longterm economic resilience and wellbeing of farmers.	Ensuring farmers' capacity to sustain productive cropping systems and therefore livelihood resilience is considered.	Living wage analysis, profitability analysis, yield increase.	Recurring theme in stakeholder engagement that regen ag is about ensuring farm and crop production resilience/long term viability.	Alignment across stakeholders engaged and standards on farmer livelihoods as a core impact of regenerative agriculture, as the stewards and active agents of land management. However, socio economic monitoring criteria are limited in the voluntary standards analysed, with only 4% monitoring farmer livelihoods.

Ongoing improvement

Regeneration of soils and ecosystems has a natural ceiling, as ecosystems are restored closer to natural functioning and therefore cannot be 'continuous'. Emphasis should be on the implementation of regenerative activities as an ongoing practice.



Objectives to be set at the farm level, allowing for farmer-driven and context-specific implementation.

Outcome-driven implementation that ensures that the practices being implemented are achieving results.

	Requirement	Further guidance	Implementation evidence examples	Justification	Alignment with stakeholder engagement and voluntary standards
Ongoing improvement	The standard shall require that the farm implement regenerative agriculture as an ongoing improvement process, regularly reviewing and adjusting practices based on monitoring results, new knowledge, and changing environmental or operational conditions.	Practices are reviewed every 5 years, using monitoring data.	Farm management plan review process	Theme in stakeholder engagement that regen ag is a process and not a final state.	All voluntary standards with direct regenerative agriculture claims mandate ongoing improvement; a requirement supported by 97% of survey respondents who consider ongoing improvement central to the practice.
Improvement of ecosystem functioning via the soil (target setting and monitoring)	The standard shall require that the farming system set objectives/aim to measurably improve ecosystem functioning, using soil as the primary entry point.	The standard requires the farm to set and maintain measurable objectives for improving ecosystem functions (e.g., soil organic matter %, infiltration rate, biodiversity indicators). Outcomes may include enhanced nutrient cycling, water dynamics, biodiversity, carbon storage, and overall ecosystem resilience.	Farm management plan with objectives/ targets Practice implementation records	Part of ongoing improvement. Objectives/ targets do not have to be met, as the link between practices and outcomes, landscape context, and climate change is unlikely to present linear and replicable results. But the rationale for implementing regenerative principles should be clear.	All voluntary standards analysed aim to improve ecosystem functioning. However, few set clear wording on setting clear, quantifiable objectives at the farm-level.
Monitoring of the environment	The standard shall require a monitoring system to be in place at the farm level to track progress toward improved soil health and wider ecosystem functioning.	A system is in place which is appropriate to the context. The standard should require validation that the monitoring system is in place and results are collected correctly. Monitoring data may be from neighbouring farms (i.e. farms implementing the same practices within the same geography). Monitoring may be simple and based off yield analysis or in-depth and highly aligned to regen ag principles, such as soil testing and biodiversity assessments.	Water quality monitoring: sediment load, nutrient runoff tests, irrigation records, infiltration test results. Soil health monitoring: synthetic fertiliser use, soil test, compost application records, soil biology assessments. Biodiversity monitoring: maps showing buffer strips; biodiversity monitoring logs; grazing plans; records of pesticide reduction. Other: yield monitoring	A process should be in place to ensure ongoing improvement and that the practices being implemented are creating a positive impact. Soil health monitoring is already included in SSCI Env Benchmark Criteria. Looking at regen ag more specifically, more holistic monitoring should be in place; i.e. soil health monitoring plus monitoring outcomes that are relevant to the farming context and linked to objectives of implementing regenerative agriculture. For example, monitoring.	Only 75% of the voluntary standards analysed required a form of monitoring.
Adaptive management	The standard shall require a system of adaptive management to improve the farm's weakest impact areas.	The standard requires on-the-ground monitoring results to be used to inform management decisions. Effective implementation requires targeting practices that improve performance in the farm's weakest areas, e.g. soil carbon, water retention, etc.	Farm management plan review process	Process should be in place to ensure ongoing improvement and that the practices being implemented are creating positive impact.	While this was a core theme in direct stakeholder engagement and linked directly to the idea of ongoing improvement, few voluntary standards analysed directly relate to operationalising adaptive management.

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