

Industry Position on Regenerative Agriculture

The Issue

The terms regenerative agriculture or regenerative farming have been in use since the early 1980s. Although there is no consensus definition of it, regenerative agriculture is increasingly called upon and referred to as an all-encompassing global solution to food security, soil health, climate change, and biodiversity conservation. However, definitions and approaches vary and keep evolving, and “regenerative farming” is often misunderstood as a form of “organic farming”.

Position / Key Messages

Regenerative agricultural practices are practices that contribute to build and maintain soil fertility, increase and preserve biodiversity and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Practices such as crop residue retention, cover cropping and reduced tillage are more widely applicable ‘good agricultural practices’, while others are at best niches (e.g. permaculture, holistic grazing).

Regenerative agriculture is context-specific: It aims to deliver environmental, economic, and social benefits. Thus the farming practices employed have to be defined and set up in relation to the local ecological, socio-cultural and economic situation and should be based on field and farm analysis. What works in one location or agricultural system should not simply be extrapolated to others.

There is no regenerative practice per se, as soil, weather conditions, and the crop grown determine the level of inputs and the agronomic management practices required to achieve the desired production with a minimum of environmental and climate impacts. Thus many sustainable land and water management practices can qualify as regenerative methods.

Integrated Plant Nutrient Management¹ is an integral part of regenerative agriculture: The combination of mineral and organic fertilizers has been scientifically proven to be the best solution for maximizing crop yields and increasing biomass by producing fertile soils with the greatest ability to provide nutrients and store carbon. Balanced crop nutrition², together with other good agricultural practices, is a determining factor in soil health management.

Regenerative agriculture cannot be limited to organic farming practices only, as depleted or degraded soils can make the use of mineral fertilizers indispensable for building soil organic matter and soil health.

Conservation farming approaches, such as cover cropping, crop rotations, composting, and (minimal) tillage can be considered regenerative practices as long as they are well managed and tailored to the specific soil, weather, and land-use conditions.

The fertilizer industry recognizes regenerative agriculture as one of the approaches that can restore and maintain soil health, reverse biodiversity loss and increase soil carbon sequestration. The industry further recognizes, however, that there are other approaches with high food security, soil health,

biodiversity and climate mitigation potential within the range of land management and restoration activities, and that regenerative practices are complementary or an integral part of them.

Background

The fertilizer industry supports the Global Compact Principles to Sustainable Soil Health Management. It is committed to help driving productive and sustainable agronomic practices by promoting and facilitating access to knowledge, products, and technologies that lead to new business opportunities for farmers and the supply chain, and supports further work on regenerative agriculture, together with other companies in the agribusiness value chains.

¹ Integrated Plant Nutrient Management refers to the promotion and maintenance of soil fertility for sustaining crop productivity and carbon sequestration through optimum use of all possible sources of nutrients like organic, mineral and biological in an integrated, complementary manner, appropriate to each farming situation.

² The objective of balanced fertilization is ensure that the plant has access to an adequate supply of each nutrient at every growth stage in order to avoid any over or under-supply and to optimize plant yield. Balanced crop nutrition is based on the 4R principles of Best Management Practices : Using the right nutrient source, at the right dose, in the right place, at the right time.