The traders' perspective: 'Regenerative agriculture strengthens the resilience of our food supply chain'

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Regenerative agriculture holds promise, but how can it become economically viable? In the Public Private Partnership (PPP) project 'Regenomics' Wageningen University & Research and partners are working to shed light on the benefits and costs of regenerative agriculture. How can we support farmers to make choices that fit their circumstances? In January 2026, our model 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 3 of the series How different stakeholders view the transition to regenerative agriculture: the buyers/traders' perspective.

'For us, regenerative agriculture is an important way to strengthen the resilience of farms, reduce emissions, and support our customers as we work together toward a more sustainable food system', says Sandrine Chiron. As Cargill's EMEA (Europe, Middle East and Africa) Sustainability Leader for the agricultural supply chain, she is responsible for their European programs on regenerative agriculture.

Cargill – a worldwide multinational in the agricultural and food business – is one of four partners in the Regenomics project. In the food chain, they are positioned between farmers and food companies, trading with both. 'We chose to join Regenomics because this research is about the economics of farming, and what regenerative practices actually 'work' from a farmer's point of view', Chiron explains.

For a global company like Cargill, it is crucial to know where the market is heading. 'But we cannot easily ask farmers for privacy-sensitive data like their annual profits and losses', Chiron says. 'They would be reluctant to share such information with us. In this project, we can learn about the effectiveness of regenerative practices on European farms. That way, we can support farmers better in making the transition.'

Another important value of the project is the fact that different stakeholders are participating, says James Ede, director of EMEA Sustainability for Cargill's food business. 'ELO, Unilever, Mars Pet Nutrition and Cargill – that is a broad representation of the food chain. It means we can look at various demands and opportunities right away, and thus work more efficiently. We are not going to make the transition to regenerative agriculture on our own. We need to work across the chain, and we need all actors to really drive forward. Regenomics adds to that.'

Opportunity to grow

Over the past five years, Cargill has been investing a lot in programs on regenerative agriculture. What have they learned so far? 'We have noticed that applying the same program design on different continents is not always the right solution', Chiron says. 'You have to tailor your activities to a region – because circumstances are different everywhere. Plus, adoption of regenerative practices is still very new. Only 3 to 5 percent of European farmers are now involved. There is still significant room for growth.'

To maintain a resilient supply chain, Cargill needs strong collaboration with farmers. 'Without farmers and crops, we are nothing', Chiron points out. 'And we are constantly challenged by our customers to help influence more sustainable practices upstream. I hope projects like this can help all of us to see the bigger picture: creating a more resilient food system is a shared responsibility.'

For farmers, their own business is often their biggest concern, James Ede adds. 'They are the ones taking financial risks, so they need to be sure an investment is worthwhile. Therefore, regenerative practices and policies need to be farmer-centric. We have to demonstrate that switching to these methods can help them to reduce risks. Scientific evidence is important to give them more confidence in that regard.'

Obstacles

Looking at the transition, the two Cargill professionals see several obstacles. One challenge is the uncertainty that comes with trying new practices, especially when farmers are learning what works best on their land.

'Without confidence in the long-term benefits, many farmers hesitate to take on that additional risk – which is why programs that combine financial support with training, technical assistance and flexibility in practice choice are so important', says James Ede. 'It is also why initiatives like Regenomics, which provide clear models and evidence on how regenerative practices affect on-farm economics, are essential for giving farmers the confidence and data they need to make informed decisions.'

A second obstacle is that farmers are being overwhelmed with all different kinds of offers and initiatives regarding regenerative agriculture: from data collection and subsidies to carbon farming. 'That makes it difficult for them to choose the right options. For us, it is quite a challenge to help farmers understand which programs are most solid, and built to last.'

The third challenge for Cargill is the current lack of policy and legislation on regenerative practices. 'There is already a lot of legislation on other sustainable practices, like biofuels. But on carbon farming for example – using agricultural techniques to capture carbon in the soil – there is none yet. New legislation is now being designed, for which we are also being consulted. We hope this will help to scale up such practices.'

Despite these hurdles, Cargill is positive and hopeful on the transition. 'If you look across food brands, millions of euros are now being invested in regenerative agriculture – money that was not there five years ago', says James Ede. 'Indeed, we still have quite a way to go. But I think it is a promising outlook.'

Acting together

Cargill is looking forward to the final conclusions of Regenomics. Depending on the recommendations, they might be able to implement some changes in their programs quite soon. 'Next to that, I hope we will be able to agree with our partners on some common actions', Sandrine Chiron says. 'I would like to see more farmers ánd customers engaged in this transition. They, too, have committed to reducing their footprints over the next five to ten years. That means we need to act now.'

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).

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2025-December