



# Agriculture & Progress contribution on the new EU Soil Strategy

Nature and agriculture are intrinsically linked and reinforce each other's well-being. The agricultural community cannot prosper and deliver quality food if biodiversity is lost, if soils erode and deteriorate and if they suffer the direct consequences of climate change.

In this regard, Agriculture & Progress, a platform which brings together agricultural producers and the first processing food industry to promote sustainable agricultural production, backs and welcomes the EU Commission's initiative which puts soils at the heart of the debate.

Soil is an irreplaceable resource, vital to the production of food, fuel and fibre; and an essential support system for the services provided by nature. A fertile soil can take thousands of years to develop and only a few seasons to be destroyed. It is an extremely complex, variable and living medium which performs many vital functions: production of food and other biomass, as well as the storage, filtration and transformation of many substances including water, carbon, and nitrogen. These functions are environmentally as well as socio-economically important.

In farming, soil is a key part of the agricultural toolbox. Since the healthiest soils produce the most food, they are at the centre of every farmers' consideration to ensure that it provides the nutrients need for the success of its crops. To ensure this, farmers need to foster their knowledge of their soils and understand its composition in order to decide how to treat the land and the surround environment.

To achieve these goals, practices and conservation techniques have been developed taking into account local specificities such as:

- monitoring levels of nutrients in the soil,
- using precision agriculture practices to apply nutrients and water only where they are needed,
- keep soil erosion, soil compaction and soil removal at harvest to a minimum by means, for example, of
  - intercrop cover,
  - adapted ploughing and tilling with reduced intervention,
  - improved harvesting practices
  - incorporating crop residues
  - compost and green manures
- monitoring watering so that salts do not accumulate
- favouring crops that improve soil protection e.g.
  - maize which favours a high rate of organic matter or
  - sugar beet for which seeds can be sown directly into mulch or green manure crops in order to minimize loss of organic matter
- calling and fostering the support for innovative techniques such as new breeding techniques

**These practices perfectly comply with the land degradation neutrality objective for 2030, one of the key targets of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). They also help to conserve soil fertility, increases soil biodiversity and keeps a balance between beneficial microorganisms and soil-borne pathogens.**

It is in this context that the Agriculture & Progress platform calls today upon the EU Commission to work hand in hand with the agricultural community to recognize the use of sustainable soil management practices that have been put in place for many years and which continue to evolve through the support and exchange of best practices, training and advice from technical institutes. Agriculture and progress estimate that the current legal framework is sufficient and a specific regulation is not needed. It is important to go on to support on research and innovation on soil with appropriate funding.