



### D3.5 Practice Abstracts - first bench

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## Summary

This deliverable presents the first batch of ten practice abstracts from the SoilValues project. These abstracts, which will be submitted to the EU CAP Network platform and published on the EU CAP Network website, are concise summaries in a harmonized format. They provide farmers, advisers, consumers, and other stakeholders with accessible, practice-oriented knowledge from the start of the project through to its conclusion, while also enabling networking across the EU.

The ten abstracts address both foundational and practical aspects of soil health business models (SHBMs). The first batch of practice abstracts are all centred around the SoilValues Communities of Practices (CoPs). The first four practice abstracts provide theoretical context based on experiential knowledge gained within SoilValues related to (1) establishing a testing ground, (2) establishing a CoP, (3) an overview of existing soil health business models (SHBMs) and associated ecosystem services, and (4) potential incentives related to regenerative management practices/ecosystem services. The remaining six practice abstracts describe the CoPs structure and lessons learned to date within the SoilValues study areas, namely (5) Denmark, (6) Germany, (7) Belgium, (8) Portugal, (9) Poland, and (10) the Netherlands.

From this concise and consolidated overview, we conclude that CoPs are essential for ensuring effective SHBMs. Two key recommendations are highlighted: (1) peer learning and collaboration are central to success, and (2) supportive structures in policy, finance, and governance are needed for effective scaling.



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## Acronyms and abbreviations

CoP	Community of practice
CSA	Community Supported Agriculture
SHBM	Soil Health Business Model
WP	Work package

## Project consortium

No.	Participant organisation name	Country
1	Katholieke Universiteit Leuven (KU Leuven)	BE
2	Eigen Vermogen van het Instituut voor Landbouw- en Visserijonderzoek (EV ILVO)	BE
3	Stichting Wageningen Research (WR)	NL
4	Wageningen University (WU)	NL
5	European Landowners' Organization (ELO)	BE
6	Consultoria Agroindustrial (CONSULAI)	PT
7	Aarhus Universitet (AU)	DK
8	KOIS Invest (KOIS)	BE
9	MR F&A Consult (MFRA)	BE
10	Instytut Rozwoju Wsi i Rolnictwa Polska Akademia Nauk (IrWiR PAN)	PL
11	Thuenen Institut (THUENEN)	DE
12	Udruzenje Eko-Inovacija na Balkanu (ABE)	RS
13	Instituto Navarro de Tecnologias e Infraestructuras Agroalimentarias (INTIA)	ES
14	Lietuvos Misko ir Zemes Savininku Asociacija (FOAL)	LT

## Overview of the SoilValues project

SoilValues: Enhancing Soil health through Values-based business models (HORIZON-MISS-2021-SOIL02-05)

Project duration: 1 January 2023 – 31 December 2026 (48 months)

Total project budget: € 4 999 922.50

EU Grant: € 4 999 922.50

Land managers combine man-made resources with natural resources to produce marketable products like food, feed, fibre and wood, but at the same time produce ecosystem services that are generally not marketed or compensated. However, land managers generally have little incentive to invest in healthy soils, as they cannot sufficiently capture the value generated by these ecosystem services. SoilValues aims to contribute to the conditions for developing successful soil health business models. These are models in which land managers make production decisions that result in higher levels of soil-based ecosystem services (SES) and in which they are paid for the non-marketed services they generate. In order for such business models to function, three important conditions need to be fulfilled: (1) the outcomes of SES need to be measured, thus requiring knowledge, indicators and models, (2) the data and information generated by these indicators and models need to be exchanged to facilitate monitoring, reporting and verification (MRV), and (3) all these activities should be governed by an appropriate institutional framework consisting of the necessary legislation, standards and incentive schemes. To enhance the conditions for developing successful soil health business models, SoilValues will: (1) provide a comprehensive assessment framework addressing all factors influencing the development of business models for investing in soil health, (2) establish 6 testing grounds across Europe to test and improve emerging and designing new soil health business models, (3) establish 12 communities of practice of land managers, value chain actors, investors and public authorities for soil health business models, (4) design a comprehensive toolbox of incentives and policy recommendations to facilitate soil health business models and (5) raise awareness and exchange knowledge for soil health business models. This work is structured along five distinct work packages (WPs) as indicated in Figure 1.

## 1. Introduction

Practice abstracts are short, practice-oriented summaries that aim to foster knowledge flows and share project results more efficiently with farmers, foresters, rural communities and other relevant stakeholders. In the current deliverable, we present the first bench of 10 practice abstracts formulated within the SoilValues project. This deliverable is part of Work Package (WP) 3 “*Communities of Practice*”, specifically Task 3.2 “*Set Up and Develop Initial CoPs*”. Its primary purpose is to provide concise summaries for SoilValues stakeholders, highlighting the work carried out within the six initial Communities of Practice (CoPs), as well as relevant contributions from other WPs — namely WP1, WP2, and WP4.

The first bench of practice abstracts are all centred around the SoilValues CoPs. The first four practice abstracts provide theoretical context based on experiential knowledge gained within SoilValues related to (1) establishing a testing ground, (2) establishing a CoP, (3) an overview of existing soil health business models (SHBMs) and associated ecosystem services, and (4) potential incentives related to regenerative management practices/ecosystem services. The remaining six practice abstracts describe the CoPs structure and lessons learned to date within the SoilValues study areas, namely (5) Denmark, (6) Germany, (7) Belgium, (8) Portugal, (9) Poland, and (10) the Netherlands.

The main body of this deliverable provides a description of each practice abstract. The practice abstracts themselves have been formulated following the EU-CAP network common format and are presented in full in the appendix. All practice abstracts will also be published on the SoilValues EU-CAP Network platform<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://eu-cap-network.ec.europa.eu/projects/enhancing-soil-health-through-values-based-business-models\\_en](https://eu-cap-network.ec.europa.eu/projects/enhancing-soil-health-through-values-based-business-models_en)

## 2. Overview of practice abstracts

### 2.1 Establishing a Testing Ground

The SoilValues project aims to help farmers turn sustainable soil practices into income through the development and establishment of SHBMs. Beyond yield, the SHBMs also aim to reward farmers not just for ecosystem services provided like improved soil, water quality, and biodiversity. In six TG across Europe, farmers, researchers and local partners use tools like the SoilValues Business Canvas to identify benefits associated with regenerative soil management practices and link them to fair payments. To scale success, the CoPs bring together the TG farmers, processors, retailers and policymakers in each study area to share what works, explore market options, and build support. CoPs help farmers access new income sources like ecosystem payments or land partnerships. By showing the value of healthy soils, and teaming up with diverse local stakeholders, farmers can improve their business resilience, reduce risk, and boost long-term profits through nature-positive farming.

### 2.2 Establishing a Community of Practice

To improve soil health and strengthen farm incomes, setting up a CoP can help farmers make connections with local stakeholders who may also benefit from soil health, like advisers, buyers, and local authorities, to tackle shared challenges. A good CoP starts small, identify key stakeholders, setting up meetings to talk informally about problems, and define shared goals. Following this, members within a CoP co-create a clear story about what they want to achieve (e.g., improved soil health, more local value, or cost savings through circular practices). With that shared ambition, the CoP members build an action plan and identify support tools – financial, technical, or legal – that make it all work. Over time, the CoP becomes a learning group where participants explore new revenue streams, improve ecosystem services linked to soil health, and influence local rules and markets.

### 2.3 Ecosystem services for soil health business models

The *knowledge base on the ecosystem services* report provides a detailed overview of over 80 existing business models that reward farmers for improving soil health and delivering ecosystem services like carbon storage, biodiversity, and clean water. It highlights which models offer payments, what kind of indicators they use (such as soil carbon levels or biodiversity), and how outcomes are monitored. For farmers, the key takeaway of this work is that there are growing opportunities for compensation for good soil practices, especially through carbon farming schemes. To benefit, farmers should keep records of their practices, consider soil tests, and join initiatives with clear and fair monitoring systems. Getting involved can lead to better soil, extra income, and reduced risks through future-oriented farm management.

### 2.4 Incentives for soil health

Healthy soils provide crucial ecosystem services, but many soils are at risk of losing these functions, as maintaining soil health often involves upfront costs with delayed benefits. One of the objective of the SoilValues project is to identify incentives that facilitate the uptake and scaling of SHBMs. Results from interviews with 15 stakeholders has highlighted the importance of combinations of financial and non-monetary incentives. In addition to financial instruments such as carbon finance, price premiums and targeted public sector funding, non-monetary incentives such as mentoring programmes and peer-to-peer

learning are seen as crucial for the stabilization and scaling of SHBM. Recommendations include to: i) set up suitable frameworks for financial incentives to reduce costs and improve risk sharing; ii) enhance access to advice, mentoring, and peer-to-peer learning to empower farmers through shared learning and practical support; iii) to raise awareness through campaigns clearly communicating the benefits of SHBM targeted at policymakers, land managers, landowners, and the public, as changing the mindset of actors is vital for sustainably scaling SHBM.

## 2.5 The Danish Community of Practice

The Danish CoP established a network of 10–20 community supported agriculture (CSA) farms to exchange experiences on regenerative agriculture, soil improvement, and community engagement. Farmers share practical insights on compost use, soil cover, and low-input cropping systems to enhance soil fertility. The network also addresses practical challenges like packaging and business models. Benefits include better soil conditions, stronger community ties, and shared learning on consumer involvement. Though farmers often hesitate to discuss structural barriers, peer exchange helps build confidence and innovative solutions. End-users can apply these insights by adopting regenerative techniques and engaging consumers more actively in food production. The approach strengthens business resilience and opens new paths for sustainable farm governance.

## 2.6 The German Community of Practice

The main objective of the German CoP is fostering collaboration and bringing together knowledge to support establishing a regional cycle for soil health. Key challenges faced to date include maintaining stakeholder engagement between CoP workshops and transferring responsibilities from the project partners to the CoP members. Specific barriers related to institutional/policy, finance and culture have been identified by the CoP in achieving regional cycle for soil health in the area. These may be overcome through financial and moral policy support, communication campaigns, learning environments, certification of ecosystem services and the active involvement of landowners.

To build a successful SHBM in the area, broad stakeholder involvement is key. Motivated partners and multipliers keep momentum strong. Policies must back SHBMs not just financially, but through visible commitment, especially on regional and local levels. Clear communication on soil health—targeted at policymakers, land managers and the public is vital. Peer-to-peer exchange, and up to date practical training and advisory services can help land managers to become part of a regional cycle for soil health. Financing can stem from cost savings or ecosystem service certification, though frameworks are still needed. Landowners, especially in the case of short leases, must also be engaged in learning environments and communication campaigns and held accountable.

## 2.7 The Belgian Community of Practice

The Belgian CoP brings together farmers, public biomass managers, and local authorities. It shows that farm-scale composting of regionally sourced, publicly owned biomass – combined with redirecting waste processing fees to farmers – can boost soil health and autonomy, while lowering costs and improving environmental compliance. A core principle is to “take care of the soil carer”, in other words, meeting farmers’ needs so they can manage soil more sustainably, through affordable, high-quality organic fertilization. Lessons learned so far prompt us to recommend investing in farmer-led, regionally anchored initiatives. In the fragile initial stages of establishing a novel SHBM, this requires on-farm expert guidance throughout the composting

process, from windrow setup and monitoring to quality assurance and corrective actions (e.g., turning, watering). Farmers also need a representative to coordinate with public biomass holders on logistics (e.g., storage, distribution, timing interventions). Finally, including both participating and nearby farmers encourages knowledge exchange and helps grow the initiative. For broader adoption, we need (i) a supportive legislative framework for on-farm composting, and (ii) strengthened farmer solidarity by accepting public biomass only when disposal fees are fairly redistributed.

## 2.8 The Portuguese Community of Practice

Portuguese Montado farms, which are typified by cork production, struggle greatly with tree mortality and, therefore, profitability. This happens because most of the farms are passed through generations and are typically hundreds of years old. New generations of land managers are becoming increasingly concerned about this problem, prompting the uptake of alternative management strategies centred around soil health within the SoilValues project. Specifically, the Portuguese CoP focusses on assessing whether introducing animals, applying soil corrections, or combining both can improve soil health in a cost-effective manner, reducing the loss of trees.

The Keyline technique was initially considered for the Portuguese TG. This soil management method optimizes water distribution, prevents erosion, and improves fertility through contour ploughing and strategic water channel placement. However, since the terrain lacks sufficient slope, experts ruled out this option and instead recommended focusing on animal impact and soil corrections. The current strategy centres on field trials, supported by a growing stakeholder community. Soil experts indicate that combining grazing animals with targeted soil amendments could double grass productivity, enhancing soil health and, over time, leading to healthier trees, though results will take years to become visible.

Farmers in Montado systems should assess the role of livestock in soil health, balancing benefits with tree protection, especially for younger trees. Soil correction may complement this, but needs clear baseline data, so soil testing is crucial. Engaging local experts early helps avoid missteps, and collaborating with farmer groups or cooperatives can support knowledge sharing and scaling. The CoP also contributes positively to the development of possible incentives that lead to the implementation of good practices that will decrease tree mortality, working closely with policy makers.

## 2.9 The Polish Community of Practice

The Polish CoP aims to work together with farmers and local partners to develop a strong SHBM called Soil Profit. From the very beginning, farmers and other actors in the sugar beet value chain have played an active role in shaping this process – sharing their feedback on early concepts and participating in a SWOT analysis.

The CoP meetings are designed to strengthen the community: participants vote, make decisions, and can see how their input leads to real change. One of the key events took place on a farm, demonstrating how no-till practices can improve soil structure and boost yields – serving as both a live demonstration and a real-time knowledge exchange. Subsequent sessions focused on identifying barriers and incentives, with the group working together to design creative solutions. This process not only provided valuable insights, but also expanded the network to include more consumers. For farmers, the benefits of this novel SHBM are tangible: higher yields, stronger markets, and a shared sense of responsibility for a model built collaboratively from the ground up.

## 2.10 The Dutch Community of Practice

The Dutch CoP is centred around a single CSA farm, where the aim is to achieve fair compensation for the farm's broader societal contributions such as soil health, biodiversity, water quality, and social cohesion. The work conducted within the CoP has triggered a national-level collaboration between actors within the agricultural sector. The key challenge: the dominant agricultural model in the Netherlands focuses on cheap, high-yield production, making it difficult for nature-inclusive farms to achieve a strong market position due to their higher prices. To tackle this, farmers, researchers and civil society actors teamed up to boost visibility and build a shared narrative around the real value these farms offer. Though creating one story proved complex due to diverse views, the focus shifted to shared opportunities and solutions. This positive, hopeful approach created strong energy and unity. One major result was a national event with 90 participants to push regional food systems onto the policy agenda. Practical takeaway to date highlight that when farmers work together and show how healthy soils support healthier communities and ecosystems, they can build stronger market positions and attract public support.

### 3. Conclusions

This first batch of 10 practice abstracts provides a concise overview of the lessons learned from the SoilValues CoPs within the first 36 months of the project. From these practice abstracts we can identify two key take-aways. First, the first 36 months of the project have highlighted the central importance of peer learning and collaboration within a CoP. Whether through farmer-to-farmer exchange (as is the case in the Danish, Polish and Portuguese CoPs), multi-stakeholders involvement (highlighted by the German, Belgian and Dutch CoPs), or shared demonstrations and training, every CoP highlights that knowledge exchange, community building, and cooperative problem-solving strengthen adoption of soil health practices and business resilience. Second, results highlight the need for supportive structures (policy, finance, and governance) for effective scaling. All CoPs recognize that technical practices alone are not enough; structural support such as fair business models (identified by the Danish and Dutch CoP), financial or policy backing (identified by the German, Belgian, and Portuguese TG), and collective organization (identified by the Polish and Belgian CoP) are critical for long-term viability. Creating enabling frameworks ensures that soil health management goes beyond isolated initiatives and becomes embedded in broader food systems.

A second batch of 10 additional practice abstracts will be formalised by month 46 (in D3.6) and will focus on presenting the output of the TGs and the scaling of the CoPs at project end.

## Acknowledgements

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Appendix A: First bench of 10 practice abstracts

### Problem encountered and objective

Although many land managers are motivated to reduce environmental impact and enhance soil ecosystem services, the adoption of sustainable management practices often requires incentives, which are frequently insufficient or lacking. The SoilValues project addresses this gap by incorporating the added value of soil ecosystems services within soil health business models. These business models are designed, tested and improved within designated testing grounds. A testing ground consists of (a group of) farm(ers) within a geographic region, all engaged in creating added value through the same business model.

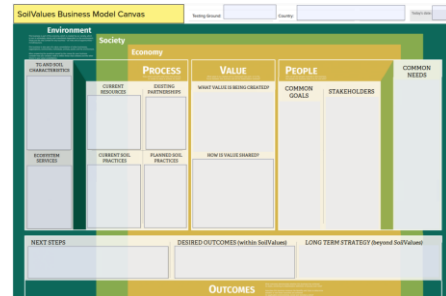
### Main results and outcomes

Six testing grounds were successfully established across Europe within the first year of the project. This created a foundation for building participatory soil health business models developed using tools like the [SoilValues Business Model Canvas](#) and SWOT analysis. These testing grounds form the core for the subsequent Communities of Practice that focus on ensuring long-term viability of the soil health business model(s).

### Practical recommendations

In establishing a testing ground, the following considerations are important:

- Testing grounds are best formed with local actors who are committed to a shared soil health case.
- A testing ground should drive early co-design activities. For this, structured tools such as the SoilValues Business Model Canvas and SWOT analysis are valuable to explore feasible business models.
- Identify stakeholders within each testing ground to engage in a community of practice for long-term viability of the business model.
- Engaging testing ground members with communities of practice activities ensures the latter are grounded in real, locally anchored experiences and can build on tested, stakeholder-validated insights, ultimately increasing the impact and replicability of soil health business model.



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### Date

August 2025

### Key words

Regional cooperation, soil health business model


### About SoilValues

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## Problem encountered and objective

Farmers and stakeholders face fragmented approaches to enhancing soil health, limiting collaborative action. The objective of the SoilValues Communities of Practice is to establish multiple networks of actors around individual soil health business models to ensure continuity of the agronomic practices and cooperation beyond the boundaries of the project. This is fostered by (1) extending land manager interests by attracting new members (horizontal cooperation), (2) introducing and linking farmers to downstream partners to realize business models (vertical cooperation), and (3) building bridges and raising awareness of all stakeholders.

## Main results and outcomes

A phased approach supports community of practice formation, centered around future vision co-creation, shared action planning, and reflexive learning. This fosters alignment, stakeholder motivation, and concrete steps to scale the soil health business model. Diverse participants gain ownership of solutions. Six communities of practice have been established centered around six distinct business models, across six study areas: Belgium, Denmark, Germany, The Netherlands, Portugal, and Poland.

## Practical recommendations

- A community of practice starts with a strong management body bringing together case study leaders, researchers, and facilitation experts.
- Conduct stakeholder mapping and informal interviews to uncover urgent local challenges and (soil) ecosystem services priorities.
- Select 10–15 diverse stakeholders based on motivation, roles, and complementarity.
- Co-create a shared narrative and action agenda that clarifies goals, motivations, and collaboration needs.
- Use participatory tools such as the Flourishing Business Canvas and Policy Delphi workshops to identify barriers, design incentive mixes, and assess scaling potential.
- Promote learning, celebrate milestones, and plan for continuity beyond the project.



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## Key words

Community of Practice, stakeholder engagement


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## Problem encountered and objective

There is limited clarity on how soil-related ecosystem services are integrated into business models and how their impacts are measured. This inventory aims to map existing soil-health-focused initiatives and assess their monitoring indicators and methods.

## Main results and outcomes

The study identified over 70 soil health business models and programs across Europe and beyond, all of which integrate soil health or ecosystem services. Most use soil parameters and farming practices as indicators, with carbon sequestration being the most frequently addressed ecosystem service.

## Practical recommendations

For farmers, the key takeaway is that there are growing opportunities to get compensated for good soil practices, particularly through carbon farming schemes. To benefit, farmers should keep records of their practices, consider soil tests, and join initiatives with clear and fair monitoring systems. Getting involved can lead to better soil, extra income, and reduced risks through future-oriented farm management.

When developing soil health business models, prioritize business models that combine farming practices with measurable soil parameters like soil organic carbon. When designing or evaluating a model, assess whether it is activity-based (rewarding actions) or results-based (rewarding outcomes), keeping in mind the trade-off between cost and precision. Incorporate both qualitative and quantitative methods and consider modeling tools like the Cool Farm Tool or RothC to improve scalability. Remote sensing and lab analyses can enhance data reliability, while simpler tools like questionnaires may suit early-stage pilots or low-budget initiatives. Balance transparency, scientific rigor, and farmer engagement to ensure meaningful, scalable soil health improvements.



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## Key words

Soil parameters, monitoring indicators, payment schemes


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# Incentives for SHBMs

## Problem encountered and objective

Healthy soils provide crucial ecosystem services, but many soils are at risk of losing these functions, as maintaining soil health often involves upfront costs with delayed benefits. While many incentive (schemes) exist to overcome these challenges, a comprehensive overview of the effectiveness of these incentives is often missing. We develop a framework based on adoption, soil health contribution, and economic impact for farmers to evaluate a number of soil health incentives.

## Main results and outcomes

The various identified incentives can be categorized into three categories: (1) security, which focuses on reducing uncertainty associated with current and future financial statuses, (2) technical support, which equips farmers with essential knowledge and tools needed to implement new practices, and (3) financial support, which provides immediate or future financial gains to encourage adoption of new practices.

Stakeholders highlight the importance of combinations of financial and non-monetary incentives. In addition to financial instruments such as carbon finance, price premiums and targeted public sector funding, non-monetary incentives such as mentoring programmes and peer-to-peer learning are seen as crucial for the stabilization and scaling of soil health business models.

## Practical recommendations

- Focus on farmers' needs, recognizing the specificities of the local context, and combining practice and outcome-based targets to design incentives that benefit both farmers and the soil.
- Mix financing, de-risking, and technical support to equip farmers with all the necessary resources to navigate the challenges of the initial stages of transition.
- Aggregate farmers and enabling multi-stakeholder collaboration for scale.

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## Key words

Soil health, blended finance, carbon finance


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### Problem encountered and objective

The community supported agriculture (CSA) model remains largely novel and underrepresented in Danish agriculture. CSA farmers practicing regenerative agriculture sought to strengthen peer-to-peer learning and exchange to strengthen their activities.

### Main results and outcomes

A vibrant network of 10–20 CSA farms has been established, enabling regular meetings for knowledge exchange on regenerative practices, soil health, and community-supported farming. Farmer engagement is high, though structural barriers remain difficult to address. The most significant barriers, namely broader political and legislative structures such as CAP dynamics, remain challenging for farmers to overcome.

### Practical recommendations

- Facilitation support of farmer-led learning networks focused on sharing practical experience, especially where innovative production models are still emerging.
- Create space for both technical exchange and broader reflection, even when participants are hesitant to reflect on existing structural barriers.
- Engage diverse stakeholders (municipalities, financiers, and consumers) to strengthen shifts in ownership and governance.
- Recognize that motivation often comes from small, tangible improvements rather than abstract policy shifts. Regenerative agriculture festivals and similar events can anchor ongoing collaboration.

Among other practical recommendations, it is also important to involve local municipalities that own land to help ease land rents for regenerative, soil-friendly farms. Such farms may not only protect ecosystems—such as drinking water resources—by avoiding chemical use (organic practices) but also strengthen local food systems by selling directly through CSAs. By improving the conditions for CSA-based regenerative agriculture, more farmers will be able to establish operations close to cities and contribute to resilient, community-centered food systems.



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### Key words

CSA farms, peer-to-peer learning


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### Problem encountered and objective

The main objective of the German Community of Practice is to foster collaboration and bringing together knowledge to support establishing a regional network for soil health management, called 'Landwirtschaft Plus'. This should increase both soil health including nutrient management and the valorization of ecosystem services and lead to the development of a knowledge network. Key challenges are maintaining stakeholder engagement between workshops and transferring responsibilities to the CoP members.

### Main results and outcomes

The *Landwirtschaft Plus* business model creates value through cooperation among farmers, biogas plants, municipalities, and citizens. Building a regional cooperative for soil health faces institutional, economic, and cultural barriers—for example, farmers doubting the profitability of sustainable agriculture. These can be addressed with financial and policy support, communication, education, certification of ecosystem services, and landowner involvement.

### Practical recommendations

To build a successful soil health business model, broad stakeholder involvement is key. Motivated partners and multipliers keep momentum strong. Policies must back business models not just financially, but through visible commitment, especially on regional and local levels. Clear communication on soil health—targeted at policymakers, land managers and the public is vital. Peer-to-peer exchange, and up to date practical training and advisory services can help land managers to become part of a regional cycle for soil health. Financing can stem from cost savings or ecosystem service certification, though frameworks are still needed. Landowners, especially in the case of short leases, must also be engaged in learning environments and communication campaigns and held accountable.



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### Date

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### Key words

Partnership networks, nutrient management, knowledge network


### About SoilValues

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### Problem encountered and objective

The Belgian Community of Practice aims to develop farm composting as a soil health business model. As interest grew—from 3 to 20 pilots—the group faced logistical and financial challenges, needing new strategies to scale efforts and secure stakeholder support. One challenge in particular is the lack of a clear legislative framework on farm composting in Flanders, Belgium.

### Main results and outcomes

Cross-border learning with a Dutch cooperative and hands-on field visits created strong engagement and shared knowledge. The CoP succeeded in launching pilot sites and attracting new farmers and funders, including the Province of Zeeland and Antwerp Port Authority, and therefore gained the possibility to scale up in summer 2025. The pilot cases have proven a powerful example to advocate for the establishment of a facilitating legislative framework for farm composting and regional circular landscapes.

### Practical recommendations

- Foster early engagement through joint field visits, advisory support and farmer-to-farmer exchanges to build trust and shared learning.
- Seek out existing models (e.g., cooperatives) for inspiration and collaboration, especially across regional borders if possible.
- Plan for scaling from the start: as momentum builds, anticipate growing needs for coordination, funding, and stakeholder negotiation.
- Include governmental actors from the outset, they are crucial for long-term support and enabling policy environments.
- Use each event (workshops, demos, meetings) as a stepping-stone to grow the network and refine the model based on real-time feedback.
- Encourage continuous reflexivity to adapt to new actors and shifting conditions without losing the core vision.
- Take care of the “soil carer” to enable farmers to meet the increasing societal demands for environmental and climate-related performance



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Composting, peer exchange, scaling


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## Problem encountered and objective

Portuguese Montado farms, typified by cork production, struggle with tree mortality and profitability because most farms are passed through generations and are hundreds of years old. New generations of land managers are becoming increasingly concerned about this, prompting the uptake of alternative management strategies for soil health within the SoilValues project. The Portuguese CoP focusses on assessing whether introducing animals, applying soil corrections, or combining both can improve soil health in a cost-effective manner, reducing the loss of trees.

## Main results and outcomes

The Keyline technique was initially considered for the Portuguese testing ground. This soil management method optimizes water distribution, prevents erosion, and improves fertility through contour plowing and strategic water channel placement. However, since the terrain lacks sufficient slope, experts ruled out this option and instead recommended focusing on animal impact and soil corrections. The current strategy centers on field trials, supported by a growing stakeholder community. Soil experts indicate that combining grazing animals with targeted soil amendments could double grass productivity, enhancing soil health and, over time, leading to healthier trees, though results will take years to become visible.

## Practical recommendations

Farmers in Montado systems should assess the role of livestock in soil health, balancing benefits with tree protection—especially for younger trees. Soil correction may complement this, but needs clear baseline data, so soil testing is crucial. Engaging local experts early helps avoid missteps, and collaborating with farmer groups or cooperatives can support knowledge sharing and scaling. The CoP has also the role of positively contributing to the development of possible incentives that lead to the implementation of good practices that will decrease tree mortality, working closely with policy makers.



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Montado farms, cork production, grazing animals


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## Problem encountered and objective

The Polish CoP aims to develop a viable soil health business model through active involvement of groups of stakeholders within and along the value chain, as well as those who directly or indirectly support its operations. The challenge faced by the CoP in its establishment was the engagement of diverse actors early in the process and maintaining their commitment while shaping a model suited to local conditions and needs.

## Main results and outcomes

The Polish CoP has built a strong network of over 50 stakeholders around the co-designed "SOILPROFIT" model in the sugar beet industry. Through workshops and on-farm meetings, farmers, advisors, industry (processors, producers, industrial consumers), certification entities, and government representatives jointly identified barriers and discussed solutions such as shared funding responsibility, simple barrier-mapping tools, and farm demonstrations. Participants valued knowledge exchange, practical advice, and cross-sector cooperation. The CoP not only developed a locally adapted model but also strengthened collaboration and trust, increasing the chances of long-term adoption.

## Practical recommendations

Engage stakeholders from the start, emphasizing their role in co-creating solutions. Foster ownership by involving stakeholders in naming and decisions-making. Use interactive tools such as SWOT, barrier-mapping, and farm demonstrations to connect ideas with real benefits. Ensure continuity through regular meetings and voting and adapt methods flexibly to context. In the Polish CoP, barriers included unstable land leasing, weak advisory services, high costs, limited markets, and complex procedures. Solutions focused on long-term leasing, stronger advisory support, living labs, certification, short supply chains, and financial/digital tools. Trust-based cooperation between farmers and business partners proved most effective.



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## Key words

Sugar beet, shared funding  
responsibility, trust-based  
cooperation


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## Problem encountered and objective

The Dutch CoP aims to support small-scale farmers (e.g., CSA farms) in gaining recognition and compensation for the farm's broader value, including soil health, biodiversity, water quality, and social cohesion, amid a national system focused on high-yield and efficient food systems.

## Main results and outcomes

The Nationaal Voedselberaad (*National food council*, formerly simply called the Dutch CoP) brings together farmers, researchers, and organizations to promote sustainable farms and regional food systems. Despite challenges in forming a shared narrative, it organized a successful national event with 90 participants on local policy. Its focus is to influence municipal elections, advocating food as an overarching theme to address climate adaptation, biodiversity, social cohesion, and health. By reconnecting production with ecosystems, local food policy recognizes the broader value of sustainable farming and strengthens local networks while building community resilience through collaborative strategies.

## Practical recommendations

- To support sustainable farming, focus on making the added value of soil-friendly, socially engaged farms visible to the public and policymakers.
- Foster broad, inclusive alliances around shared goals rather than narrow narratives to avoid excluding potential partners.
- Highlight positive impacts of small-scale farms in the context of societal challenges, such as soil health for healthy food and community benefits for healthy, resilient communities, to build momentum.
- Use regional events and networks to raise awareness and advocate for systemic change.
- Promote regional food systems that reward ecosystem services, enabling farmers to ask fair prices and collaborate with local stakeholders.
- Keep engagement strong by organizing around diverse themes and maintaining the collective spirit through shared ownership (e.g., by establishing a cooperative, paying the farmer in advance or adoption programs) and celebration of progress.



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Regional food systems, CSA farms, local food policy


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