

# Is Your Certification Designed with the Farmer in Mind?

Farmer and rancher recommendations  
to regenerative certification bodies



# Certification Potential

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Over the past 15 years, multiple regenerative management certifications have cropped up. Because these certifications are fairly new, **certification bodies have a unique opportunity to review and adjust their standards based on feedback** from early adopters and those considering certification.

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Certifications have already moved the needle on improving agricultural practices. Organic certifications created a cultural movement for both producers and consumers, and there is potential for regenerative certifications to do the same. Large companies are encouraging their farmers to switch their management practices to regenerative so they are able to purchase certified crops. However, feedback from land stewards suggests that certification bodies need to consider adjusting their standards to make achieving certifications more feasible.

Making these changes can increase the potential for the regenerative movement while increasing the client base of the certification body.

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We interviewed 12 land stewards and conducted focus groups with 15 ranchers to understand:

- 1) motivations for pursuing regenerative agriculture, and
- 2) their opinions on regenerative agriculture certifications

# Main takeaways

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1

## Pricing is too high

The most common comment from land stewards was that enrollment and recurring fees are too high. These prices are not conducive for farmers and ranchers who are already incurring new costs to transition their land practices.

2

## Extensive administrative workload

Many farms do not have the administrative capacity to add more tasks to their workload. This is particularly challenging for small-scale operations with limited workforce. Additional paperwork and field monitoring can prove to be burdensome.

3

## Uncertain financial benefit

There is little publicly available data from certification bodies about expected increases to revenue or price premiums from certifications. Farmers feel an increased level of risk by pursuing a certification without data based on what other farmers are experiencing financially once certification is achieved.

# Suggestions



1

## **PLACE COST BURDEN ON CONSUMERS OR COMPANIES SOURCING REGENERATIVELY PRODUCED PRODUCTS**

To ensure farmers are reducing their operational and financial risk, certification bodies should link farmers to suppliers. The land stewards we interviewed who are already pursuing certifications expressed that *certification bodies* reached out to them to be a pilot farm, or a *company* requested they pursue a specific certification for their supply chains. Since these farms were already managed regeneratively, the risk was low in pursuing a certification. If certification bodies can bridge the gap between buyers and farmers, this would create more assurance for farmers wanting to make the transition.

2

## **REDUCE/STREAMLINE SAMPLING AND PAPERWORK REQUIREMENTS**

Certification bodies should consider the methodology of their peer organizations. Farmers that are currently certified tend to have multiple certifications. If sampling protocols were more aligned, land stewards could streamline their monitoring to pursue more than one certification at a time. Streamlining sampling and methodology would save time and costs.

Another way to reduce the time and financial costs would be to incorporate emerging technology into sampling guidelines. Emerging technologies such as Yardstick (1), Laserag (2), Teralytic (3), Agrology (4), EarthOptics (5), Soil In Formation (6), and satellite data could be used to measure soil metrics and indicators where possible. Modifying sampling standards to make room for incoming technology could make testing soil metrics far easier, more cost and time effective, and potentially more accurate.

3

## **RESEARCH AND SHARE THE CHANGES IN REVENUE OR PRICE PREMIUMS LAND STEWARDS CAN EXPECT FROM CERTIFICATION**

It would be helpful for certifying bodies to provide real examples they have seen in premium pricing restructures once a land steward has gained a certification. Addressing this concern would greatly reduce the hesitancy many land stewards currently feel when considering certification. Given that the market for regenerative products is still new, it is reasonable to provide modeled estimates of changes to pricing based on predictions of potential price premiums. Farmers additionally expressed interest in having greater transparency from certifications about which farms are pursuing or have obtained certification.

# Conclusion

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We share this feedback to encourage communication between land stewards and certification bodies. With greater communication and understanding, there could be an increased interest for regenerative certifications.

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Certifications must take into consideration the challenges farmers may experience as they continue operations, transition their land to regenerative practices, and pursue a certification. By increasing accessibility to certifications, certifying bodies can attract a greater client-base, as well as further support the regenerative movement.

Many land stewards shared that they are daunted by certifications that are “all in or all out”. There is greater interest in programs that allow for progressive enrollment and a reduction of inputs over time. Rather than having such stringent standards, certification bodies should help farmers transition to regenerative management over time. Increasing accessibility and feasibility for farmers to gain a regenerative certification would benefit the agriculture system as a whole.

Through continued adaptation and communication with other certification bodies, businesses, farmers and consumers, certifications can have a more significant impact.

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# Appendix // Specific Stories

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Our conversations, interviews, and focus groups incorporated a diversity of land managers, including individuals that:

1. Aspire to own land and practice regenerative management
  2. Practice conventional farming and want to transition to regenerative management
  3. Practice regenerative management and are considering regenerative certification
  4. Practice regenerative management and have received regenerative certification(s)
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*Land Stewards interviewed are kept anonymous*

## **Farmer 1** - Owner and manager of regenerative farm

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Farmer 1 did not have to change any practices to achieve certification. However, the sheer amount of paperwork and sampling required to achieve Regenerative Organic Certification (ROC) was burdensome. Farmer 1 had to submit 100+ pages of support documents and it took months to complete the enrollment process. Farmer 1 is excited about the potential for regenerative certifications, but currently would not recommend ROC to other land stewards.

## **Farmer 2** - Second-generation rancher managing family farm

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Experienced similar workload concerns. Baseline sampling for Ecological Outcome Verification (EOV) was a two day effort on the 1,000 acre ranch. Farmer 2 is highly uncertain whether pursuing certification will generate any revenue increases. They would suggest everyone switch to regenerative practices, but would not currently recommend regenerative certification to land stewards. Additionally, they do not recommend that other land stewards become their own EOV monitor because they feel the cost savings are not worth the effort and time commitment.

## **Farmer 3** - Owner and manager of ranch

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The ranch is fully regenerative and they encourage others to pursue regenerative management. The owner considers Allan Savory, the president and co-founder of the Savory Institute, a mentor. Despite that, they do not feel there is enough evidence that pursuing a regenerative certification would benefit their operation. They would rather spend their time and energy investing in the well-being of their cattle.

# Appendix // Soil Testing Technology

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- 1.) **Yard Stick:** <https://www.useyardstick.com/>
- 2.) **LaserAg:** <https://www.laserag.com/>
- 3.) **Teralytic:** <https://teralytic.com/>
- 4.) **Agrology:** <https://www.agrology.ag/>
- 5.) **Earthoptics:** <https://earthoptics.com/>
- 6.) **Soil in Formation:** <https://www.sif.earth/>