Regenerative Agriculture, greenwashing, and food system power dynamics

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Introduction

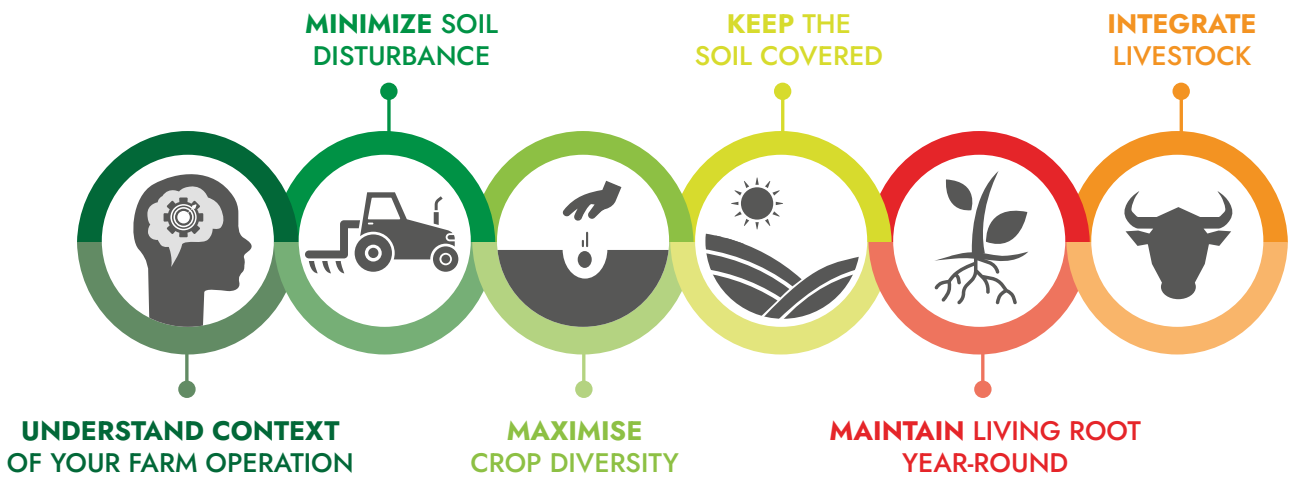
With most major UK food businesses now having Net Zero targets, businesses are under increasing pressure to reduce greenhouse gas emissions (GHGEs), in addition to meeting biodiversity and nature goals. For food companies, reducing emissions will have to include a focus on tackling indirect emissions generated along their supply chains (Scope 3 emissions) as these account for around 90% of their carbon footprints (Defra, 2024). An increasing number of businesses have moved to support and invest in regenerative agriculture approaches along their supply chains, purportedly as a part of strategies to reduce climate and nature footprints.

Regenerative Agriculture (Regen Ag) aims to generate farming systems that yield environmental benefits. Its core approach is founded on applying five (sometimes six) key principles to improve soil health that include: keeping the soil covered, using cover crops for continuous root activity, crop diversity, minimal soil disturbance and crop-livestock integration (see Figure 1). Benefits from practicing Regen Ag sometimes claimed include soil carbon sequestration and enhanced biodiversity. Beyond these, greater resilience, reduced carbon emissions (due to fewer chemical inputs), higher profit margins and better work-life balance for the farmers are other outcomes claimed to be associated with Regen Ag. For others, the benefits go beyond the farm gate and include enhanced nutritional value in crops and animal products produced from regenerative systems, as well as more social benefits.

Although there is some consensus around the key principles, there is no fully agreed, formal definition of Regen Ag. Different stakeholders — with various sets of goals and agendas — emphasise different potential benefits, and they often have differing views on the role Regen Ag can play in meeting the diverse objectives associated with it. As Regen Ag has increased in popularity, so too have the concerns raised that existing power imbalances between food system actors will lead to larger corporations co-opting the definition of Regen Ag for their own interests.

This briefing explores these risks, setting out some of the different ways in which greenwash, and other types of 'washes' are a concern in relation to Regen Ag and within the context of existing food system power dynamics. It aims to provide a resource for policymakers when planning food and farming policy, and the potential inclusion or expansion of Regen Ag.

FIGURE 1
The six principles of regenerative farming



Source: Unknown

Reckoning with Regeneration: Agile research sprint by TABLE

This briefing is based on insights from TABLE's "Reckoning with Regeneration" project, a research initiative which aims to provide a comprehensive, qualitative analysis of definitions, roles and potential of Regen Ag in the UK, enabling policymakers and other stakeholders to navigate this complex and evolving topic.

By collaborating with a wide variety of stakeholders in developing a picture of Regen Ag and its implications, it unpacks perspectives, motives, and assumptions around its potential to meet food system goals (around biodiversity, climate change, nutrition, diets, public health and equity) to support informed policy and stakeholder choices.

TABLE's insights were gathered via the following methods:

- **a detailed survey completed by around 300 respondents**
- **a literature review**
- **a scenarios workshop**
- **interviews with over 30 different stakeholders**
- **regular engagement sessions with a core stakeholder group of around 20 organisations which included farmers, NGOs, academics and businesses from along the supply chain, convened to learn from their experiences, identify areas of consensus and disagreement in relation to Regen Ag**

What is greenwashing?

According to the United Nations, greenwashing refers to organisations misleading the public by making them believe that a company or other entity is doing more to protect the environment than it actually is. Greenwashing activities can promote false solutions to the climate crisis that distract from and delay concrete and credible action (UN, 2025).

For food businesses, greenwashing can be a way of marketing to customers by using false or overstated environmental claims to connect with existing customers and attract new ones. This can be by implying positive brand values that appeal to target customers, and even by focussing attention away from the less desirable attributes associated with a business or products (e.g. the poor nutritional quality of an environmentally sustainably produced biscuit).

However, the reasons for companies greenwashing products and processes are often nuanced. While some claims may be deliberately misleading, for others, greenwashing is sometimes a result of internal barriers or ineffective communication. For example, it may not be possible to undertake adequate due diligence on suppliers and growers and their agricultural production processes due to resource constraints or inadequate supply chain management and engagement processes. Marketing teams making public claims may be siloed from those closer to supplier relationships, with more direct knowledge of what is actually being achieved by producers.

Additionally, there is growing concern from industry as well as other sustainability professionals that fear

of scrutiny, criticism, and action from the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) is leading to 'greenhushing' - the practice whereby companies under-report or deliberately keep back information on their environmental efforts and achievements for fear of criticism. This potentially risks hindering opportunities for learning, accountability, and transparent conversations on how best to achieve environmental objectives.

Businesses supporting Regen Ag approaches

In recent years, many global food and agricultural companies have started to endorse and implement Regen Ag approaches. While this has been met with criticism from some quarters – with DeSmog, for example, naming Regen Ag as one of six key greenwashing terms to look out for at COP28 (DeSmog, 2023) – for others it represents a positive step forward in food businesses beginning to address the damage that current production methods along their supply chains are having on climate and nature. Below are just a few of the companies currently making claims about Regen Ag approaches.

- We aim for 20% of our key ingredients to be sourced from farmers adopting regenerative agriculture practices by 2025
- We aim for 50% of our key ingredients to be sourced from farmers adopting regenerative agriculture practices 2030 (Nestlé, 2025).

- Implement regenerative, restorative or protective practices across ten million acres by 2030 (PepsiCo, 2025).

- By 2025 have regenerative agriculture initiatives in each of our priority supply chains, including beef, potatoes and dairy, to promote soil health, water management and biodiversity (McDonalds, 2025).

- Source UK meat, milk, eggs, fruit and vegetables from farms that use regenerative practices by 2035 (Waitrose, 2025).

- $5 million investment over 5 years with Cargill to support cattle ranchers committed to addressing climate change through regenerative agriculture practices in the US (Waitrose, 2025).

- Implement regenerative agriculture practices across 1 million hectares of agricultural land by 2030 (Unilever, 2025).

- Invest $100 million by 2030 in research and development projects to assist producer efforts to strengthen and scale regenerative farming practices, including carbon sequestration and on-farm emission mitigation technologies (JBS, 2021).

Why is Regen Ag appealing to businesses?

Preliminary evidence indicates there can be positive impacts of Regen Ag practices on environmental outcomes such as improved soil health and enhanced on-farm biodiversity. Improving soil health could be highly beneficial, for example leading to better resilience to extreme weather events and potentially carbon sequestration – although this is debated.

Businesses can therefore have positive motivations for engaging with more sustainable production practices such as Regen Ag, for example (and it should be noted that the evidence for the claimed outcomes listed here varies in strength):

- **A desire to reduce their risk exposure and increase resilience to future supply chain shocks**. Businesses face growing material and reputational risks as environmental degradation and climate change impact on supply chains, for example negatively impacting on: yields, insurance and liability costs, and supply chain disruptions and shortages.

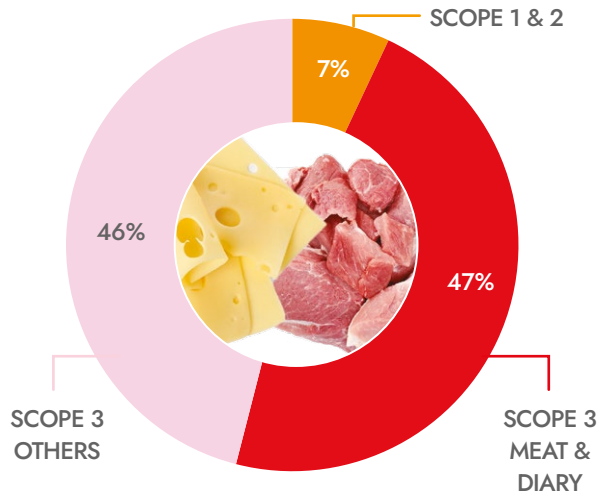
- **Recognising the need to tackle their Scope 3 emissions**. Most large food businesses in the UK have Net Zero plans and ambitious commitments to reduce their environmental impact. Yet for food businesses to get to grips with their carbon emissions they must tackle their Scope 3 emissions (indirect emissions that occur along the supply chain). This category of emissions accounts for around 90% of their carbon footprint (Defra, 2024), with the majority of food businesses' emissions coming from animal sourced products, if they have these in their portfolio (Figure 2). Minimising soil disturbance might involve reducing artificial fertiliser and tillage; while the former can reduce emissions, the latter has a complex relationship with environmental benefit as it may lead to increased herbicide use.

- **Recognising the need to shift farming practices**: Food production and diets – particularly those rich in animal-based foods – play a critical role in driving both climate change and a catastrophic loss of biodiversity and nature. For example, in the UK, high-intensity livestock operations contribute significantly to water and air pollution through run-off of waste, antibiotics, and hormones, as well as emissions of ammonia and methane, which also affect climate systems. Intensive farming and mono-cropping practices also rely heavily on chemical inputs, which pollute soils, rivers, and marine environments, and can harm non-target species including pollinators and aquatic life (The Food Foundation, 2025). The Climate Change Committee (CCC) recommends farmers adopt low-carbon farming practices and machinery to reduce agricultural emissions, in addition to reducing livestock numbers. They estimate that emissions from agricultural soils, mainly from the application of organic and chemical fertiliser onto grassland and cropland, account for 24% of total emissions from the agricultural sector (CCC, 2025). However, there is debate as to the extent to which Regen Ag aligns with the CCC's recommendations given the lack of consensus on how Regen Ag would impact on livestock production. The Regen Ag principle of integrating grazed livestock onto farms could lead to a reduction in numbers should this lead to less industrial livestock production and a reduction in the need for using nitrogen fertilizers; or conversely to an increase in livestock numbers if new livestock are brought in by farmers previously focussed exclusively on horticulture.

- **Efficiency and cost-cutting opportunities**. Although the evidence is still emerging, more resilient yields in the face of extreme weather offers opportunities for businesses procuring food from suppliers using Regen Ag approaches. Additionally, there may also be cost saving opportunities for farmers if Regen Ag leads to a reduced reliance on chemical inputs and feed, although if these cost efficiencies are passed onto the downstream businesses procuring supplies these will be of limited benefit to farmers.

FIGURE 1

Scope 3 emissions from along the supply chain comprise 93% of emissions for food retailers



Sources: Madre Brava, 2024

However, motivations could also include:

- **Profit maximisation**. Using associations with Regen Ag to market a product and/or add a price premium for health halo claims or alleged higher environmental standards. While profit making is the main objective of commercial organisations and driven by fiduciary duty to stakeholders, those managing firms should also be impelled to improve their impacts on people and planet.

- **A CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) tick box mentality** - using engagement in Regen Ag as a reason to neglect looking at other drivers of emissions and nature loss e.g., livestock production and consumption, deforestation in supply chains, food waste etc.

- **Brand reputation**, and a desire to appeal to target audiences using Regen Ag marketing claims even where not supported by evidence of impact or adherence to the principles of Regen Ag.

It should also be noted that some of the environmental outcomes associated with Regen Ag principles remain reliant on emerging and incomplete evidence bases.

For example, there is significant debate around the extent to which more regenerative, grassfed livestock rearing systems could potentially aid the process of soil carbon sequestration. Grassfed systems can stimulate plant growth and increase organic matter below ground: thus, potentially capturing carbon and offsetting emissions (FCRN, 2017). However, there is limited empirical evidence on the potential for grassfed systems to reduce GHGEs (FCRN, 2017). Carbon sequestration is a time-limited benefit and poor on-farm emissions data means it's currently hard to quantify the potential of such an approach (Wang et al., 2023). Additionally, increasing stocks of grassfed livestock would increase other GHGEs such as methane and nitrous oxide, though artificial fertiliser use on arable crops could be cut if livestock are raised in mixed farming systems. Conversely however, no till and minimal till practices can lead to increased use of herbicide.

As a result, despite the many benefits of more sustainable production practices, the evidence is not conclusive enough to support Regen Ag being used as the sole solution for reducing Scope 3 emissions and, unless they base their claims on robust evidence of improved outcomes, businesses should be cautious of adopting Regen Ag to this end.

How should be the term regenerative be used and by who?

Concerns around the risks of Regen Ag greenwashing have led to debate as to who should use the term Regen Ag and in what context. For example:

1. **Can and should the term apply to products or brands?** Where a number of large companies who are widely known household brand names have committed to sourcing more Regen Ag produced produce (e.g. McDonalds or Waitrose), it may not always be accurate for the brands to use the term to describe their overall brand ethos and sourcing strategies and in brand marketing. For instance, only a small proportion of products in their portfolios may have been produced according to Regen Ag principles. In this instance, brand claims may therefore be misleading, and it would be more accurate for Regen Ag claims to be used only for those individual products in question.

2. **Should it be used for ingredients in composite products?** There are questions as to whether Regen Ag claims should have limits. For example, once Regen Ag produced crops and commodities have gone through processing and been incorporated into composite foods (e.g. wheat grown according to Regen Ag principles and used as an ingredient in pizza), is it still right to ascribe a Regen Ag claim to the pizza? This may be misleading to consumers if the other ingredients in the product have not been produced to Regen Ag principles. It also risks healthwashing, whereby Regen Ag claims provide unhealthy products with a health halo.

3. **Who should profit from Regen Ag?** Many see Regen Ag as being a primarily farmer-led movement, as one of Regen Ag's core principles is the need to understand the local context of farm operations. As such, some question whether it is appropriate that large downstream operations use the term with customers for their own credit in marketing material, if and when it refers exclusively to on-farm practice rather than any actions those operations are themselves taking. Otherwise, this could risk a situation where, if the ingredients are regenerative but the process by which they are obtained is through unfair supply chain practices, farmers are squeezed and the profits end up going to the consumer facing businesses.

The issue of power dynamics in the food system, and who stands to benefit and profit the most from adoption of Regen Ag practices, lies at the heart of many of these

debates. The UK system is currently dominated by a small group of downstream businesses. Deep-rooted power imbalances mean that profits and power are concentrated with these businesses, leaving farmers and citizens feeling the squeeze. Retailers for example have continued to come under scrutiny for their large profits, record levels of executive pay, and shareholder pay outs against a backdrop of high food inflation and food insecurity. Among the poorest fifth of the population, households with children would need to spend 70% of their disposable income on food just to afford the government's recommended healthy diet (The Food Foundation, 2025b). At the other end of the food chain, growing numbers of farmers and growers are struggling to make a living, with 61% of British farmers saying they are likely to give up their farm in the next 18 months (Riverford, 2024). As a result, there are concerns that Regen Ag stands to benefit larger corporations more than the farmers adopting these practices.

Would a formal definition of Regen Ag or a certification scheme reduce opportunities for greenwashing?

Coming up with a clear definition of Regen Ag is often suggested as a strategy for ensuring that companies cannot use Regen Ag for greenwashing purposes. Certification schemes, which would ensure that anyone affiliated with a scheme must adhere to a minimum set of standards, are also proposed as a strategy for minimising the risk of greenwashing. Organic certification offers one example. If you produce, prepare, store, import, export or sell organic food, an approved UK organic control body must certify your food and business, and anyone calling food 'organic' when not certified is breaking the law (Defra, 2016). To be certified as an organic farmer a set of strict rules governing organic farming methods must be followed.

However, one of the defining six principles of Regen Ag is a focus on context specificity and adapting farming practices to the local context (Figure 1). The fact that flexibility and adapting methods to the local context are ingrained in how Regen Ag approaches are implemented is one of the main complexities in coming up with a clear definition or establishing a set of standards for what is or isn't considered Regen Ag. As such, there is no fully agreed definition of Regen Ag, although there is a certain amount of consensus and commonality around the key principles (Table, 2025).

Many supporters of Regen Ag believe that a narrow definition of Regen Ag could exclude those on 'a journey' towards Regen Ag, and that moving towards a standard definition and certification or labelling schemes risks undermining the respect Regen Ag shows for farmer knowledge and skill, moving from a bottom-up, 'farmer knows best' model to a more bureaucratic top-down approach.

Additionally, for many people the appeal of Regen Ag lies in its potential to rebalance food system power dynamics by amplifying farmer voice and agency, and a Regen Ag certification scheme would undermine this even while reducing the risk of greenwashing. This is supported by the survey results from the Agile sprint project, which found that 35% of respondents thought, of all food system stakeholders, farmers most deserved to be given more power over what food we produce and how. In contrast, only 1% thought processors and retailers should have more power, while there was consensus agreement that power imbalances exist between different actors in the UK food system, with 0% of respondents expressing the view that the food system is already fairly well balanced.

What do people think about the impact of Regen Ag being formally defined or certified?

Here we explore perspectives gathered during the Agile sprint project on the following narratives connected to Regen Ag, power and greenwashing. These prevailing opinions clarify and help identify areas where stakeholders might be relying too much on limited evidence or making assumptions.

From a consumer transparency perspective, most stakeholders (74%) thought formally defining Regen Ag would be most relevant to limiting greenwash by constraining what retailers and processors could claim about products, while 66% thought it would be most relevant to helping customers understand the environmental pros and cons of the food they buy.

In terms of how a formal definition would affect producers, 65% thought a clear definition would help farmers not yet using regenerative approaches better understand how they should change their practice. However, opinion was divided over whether a definition would ensure and support farmers to be paid a premium for their produce, with only 41% believing it would. It should be noted that while price premiums may lead to reduced access to food for those on low-incomes, there are other models which would make Regen Ag viable for farmers which don't necessarily require price premiums at the consumer end, for example through a reduction in input costs.

When it came to considering a certification for Regen Ag — i.e., an official verification, on the basis that product is produced and processed according to a set of standards — stakeholders thought some sort of baseline would be useful to be able to assess what is measurable e.g., levels of nitrates usage, although most were concerned that full certification would stifle progress.

Overall, the survey found that only very few (6%) stakeholders ranked certification as their highest choice for levers that would contribute the most amount of success to Regen Ag. 'Financial incentives for regenerative land practices' was the top choice for this question, with 25% of stakeholders ranking this first.

How do power dynamics and greenwash relate to different visions of Regen Ag?

There are different ways of mitigating the risk of Regen Ag greenwashing that depend on the role that we want Regen Ag to play and what this means for the power dynamics between Regen Ag farmers and downstream food companies.

The following table looks at the different risks and benefits associated with the different visions for scaling up Regen Ag approaches that were discussed during the deliberative workshop hosted as part of the Agile research sprint project.

Vision	Risks	Benefits
Regen Ag as a movement. In this pathway Regen Ag focuses on bringing together farmers in a community of practice, improving farmer livelihoods while delivering on environmental, social and food security goals. Here, Regen Ag is not focussed on becoming a label or standard – rather, it sets up farmers with the community, knowledge and confidence to choose to adopt sustainability standards.	• The knowledge circulated is dominated by information from companies with vested interests in particular agricultural products and methods. • The downstream supply chain absorbs any financial benefits farmers realise through mutual learning. • Pinning down standards or Regen Ag approaches associated with specific practices and outcomes may divide this movement and take away the space for learning and proactive engagement by farmers who hold different perspectives. This lack of clear definitions and standards hinders the ability to link Regen Ag to specific environmental and health outcomes. • In turn this inhibits business and government funding and support for Regen Ag and prevents it from being scaled up. • Farmers highlight Regen Ag benefits without supporting evidence, risking greenwashing upstream in the supply chain.	• A broad community of interest maximises learning opportunities, helping to refine Regen Ag for impact • The focus is on supporting farmers, with informal or formal convening of farmers supporting with community knowledge exchange. This in turn would centre the importance of farmers and farmer knowledge in Regen Ag, reducing the risk of greenwashing through industry involvement in farmer decision-making.
Regen Ag as a supply chain led certification scheme. In this pathway, single firms or groups of collaborating firms produce Regen Ag standards and associated measurements focusing either on practice or outcomes. These aim to produce what is already considered better in terms of production efficiencies and environmental outcomes.	• Limited space for farmer innovation and autonomy. • As standards are set by downstream actors in the supply chain this creates risks for farmers. E.g. suppliers may drop farmers who do not meet outcomes or struggle with practices • Price premiums linked to certification may place Regen Ag foods out of reach for many, limiting accessibility and reducing the ability of Regen Ag to scale • Focus of Regen Ag shifts to a narrow focus on single practices or products, reducing the potential wider food system benefits Regen Ag approaches can bring. • External influences on outcomes (e.g., an extreme weather event hitting on-farm biodiversity, or a neighbouring farm driving biodiversity gain across a wide area) may lead to unfair rewards or penalisation. • Regen Ag standards focus on carbon sequestration over the wider benefits of Regen Ag approach such as improved soil health and biodiversity.	• Opportunities for rapid private sector investment to scale Regen Ag as firms control the standards and the process. • Reduced risk of greenwashing claims by downstream actors due to a clearer definition of what Regen Ag entails. • Farmers may benefit from reduced input costs (fewer inputs, no chemicals etc) and/or from a price premium that may be put on Regen Ag certified foods.

Vision	Risks	Benefits
Regen Ag is standardised with independent certification. In this pathway Regen Ag is regulated to strict standards that function as a deepening of organic standards, ensuring that the term is clearly defined and associated with a set of standards to avoid misuse. This pathway is not directly constrained via control by specific buyers with specific product demands (processors, retailers).	• Might encourage box ticking; limited space for farmer innovation and autonomy. • Price premiums on more sustainably produced food may place Regen Ag foods out of reach for many, limiting accessibility and reducing the ability of Regen Ag to scale. • Any price premiums kept by retailers and not passed through to farmers. • Higher prices and profit margins on Regen Ag food increase industry involvement in farmer decision-making • Focus of Regen Ag narrows in line with the set standards, reducing the potential wider food system benefits Regen Ag approaches can bring and risking a narrow focus on e.g. carbon over nature.	• Reduced risk of greenwashing claims by downstream actors due to a clear and standardised definition of what Regen Ag entails. • Opportunities for increased government and business funding to scale Regen Ag uptake as impact can be more easily evaluated. • Downstream supply chain firms may benefit from certification, but they do not control it as certification is independent. • Certified farmers have the potential to explore different markets. • Farmers may benefit from reduced input costs (fewer inputs, no chemicals etc) and/or from a price premium that may be put on Regen Ag certified foods. • Independent certification bodies may be motivated to increase certification prices or to 'over-claim' about the benefits of their scheme – creating a new potential source of greenwash.
Regen Ag is part of a broader food system transition. In this pathway regen ag is part of a wider shift towards more mixed farming methods and more local markets being created for food via localised supply chain infrastructure. This pathway is driven by collaborative working, and rather than top down, centralised schemes, and greenwashing may be addressed by approaches such as Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS).*	• This pathway is ambitious and relies on many changes beyond the farm-gate that are not directly linked to Regen Ag, including; shifts in land ownership, policy change, and a change in the current status quo in terms of food system power dynamics. • A lack of standards and clear outcomes inhibits business and government funding and support for Regen Ag and prevents it from being scaled up. • Increased GHGEs because of the expansion of mixed farming.	• Collaborative schemes such as Participatory Guarantee schemes reduce the risk of greenwashing • Standards may in this case be determined more locally and drawing on social ties; reducing the risk of industry involvement leading to greenwashing. • Positive environmental and social outcomes flow from this change in perspective without the need for top-down

**PGS initiatives are quality assurance systems for products that rely on the active participation of producers, consumers, and other stakeholders to verify compliance with standards (IFOAM, 2023). They are designed to be locally relevant and often come with lower costs and less paperwork than third party certification, so are more accessible.*

Risks, trade-offs and nuances

Depending on the pathway that is taken the outcomes are likely to be nuanced, with a range of associated risks and trade-offs. These might include:

- That the burden of measurement falls entirely on the farmer, with retailers or other types of food business subsequently able to make claims that benefit them. This could be expensive and time-consuming for farmers.
- That claims that are relevant at farm-scale or across a system are misapplied to individual products (e.g., 'this carrot was grown regeneratively' could be viewed as greenwash if every other field on the farm was high input and intensively run; 'this milk is regenerative' could be viewed as greenwash if, despite the farm the milk was sourced from enacting all the Regen Ag principles, the supply chain itself was exploitative etc).
- That firms may be able to claim that their farms have lower GHGEs, even if this is being driven by a reduction in yields with a subsequent offshoring of intensive production overseas to fill the supply gap. To reduce this risk, yield change should be accounted for when measuring emissions and other on-farm metrics.
- That corporate Regen Ag frameworks and indicators vary widely between companies, which could result in:
  - Only selected Regen Ag practices that are easy to adopt being implemented, without businesses tackling core issues such as improving soils or environmental improvement across the whole of the food system (UK Parliament, 2025).
  - Regen Ag being relied on as the primary or sole strategy for reaching emissions targets, replacing the need for businesses to consider other necessary changes, for example reducing food waste and the need to reduce sales of meat.
  - Overselling the benefits of Regen Ag for GHGE reduction claims. Regen Ag is associated with lower use of chemical inputs made from fossil fuels, thus lower on-farm GHGEs. However, as there is no agreed baseline or way of assessing what an appropriate level of chemical input ought to be, the levels being used could vary widely. In addition, Regen Ag is claimed by some to sequester carbon by building soil health, however the effectiveness of various regenerative practices at increasing carbon sequestration is unclear, with some emerging evidence, but quantifying carbon reduction accurately in relation to Regen Ag is difficult (Tan & Kuebbing, 2023; Villat & Nicholas, 2023).

Summary

With Defra's current food strategy looking to ensure the UK's food system better supports health, sustainability and resilience objectives, Regen Ag and the expansion of Regen Ag approaches could offer a route into meeting these goals. However, there are many narratives around Regen Ag which are pushed by different stakeholders, posing a variety of risks. Greenwashing potentially threatens the legitimacy of the movement.

Greater clarity of what constitutes Regen Ag approaches and products would help to reduce the risk of greenwashing by food businesses. The flipside of such an approach, however, is the flipside of such an approach is an undermining of the flexibility and respect for farmer knowledge that is core to Regen Ag's principles. Certification schemes also risk Regen Ag becoming more bureaucratic and a 'top-down' rather than 'bottom-up' approach to food system change. This risks further embedding and normalising the current power dynamics within the food system, with power concentrated among a small group of companies operating downstream, instead of being more equitably spread along the supply chain.

However, despite ongoing debate around whether certain stakeholders have the right to use the term Regen Ag or not, there should be a more urgent requirement for stakeholders to be transparent about how they are engaging with Regen Ag approaches in the absence of a clear definition or widely used certification schemes. This would mean being explicit about what that means they're doing and not doing (e.g., not using pesticides but using glyphosate). While most people surveyed as a part of this project felt that a formal definition of Regen Ag would help reduce the risk of greenwashing, there was disagreement as to whether this would support farmers financially and address current power imbalances in the food system, and few supported the notion of formal certification schemes.

One potential solution to mitigate both the risk of greenwashing and fit with the desire for flexibility to be embedded into Regen Ag would be to agree a flexible Regen Ag definition, but on the basis that businesses can only use Regen Ag claims alongside disclosing empirical and quantifiable information from sustainability and carbon foot printing assessments (i.e., Regen Ag claims should only be used alongside established measures of actual outcomes). Large food companies should also be required to be transparent about what they mean when they use the term Regen Ag, and what specific principles are being implemented on their supplier farms. This is particularly relevant for those companies publicly talking about Regen Ag as a key part of their strategy for achieving Net Zero given that currently the evidence is not conclusive enough for Regen Ag to be referred to or relied upon as a primary strategy for meeting Net Zero and scope 3 targets.

Additionally, as Regen Ag is associated with a number of different environmental outcomes (emissions, biodiversity impacts etc.), it will be important to develop holistic sustainability assessments which can provide information over multiple targets to avoid unintended consequences of single target thinking. Frameworks to guide the development of such assessments include the Global Farm Metric and IDEA4 - and assessments are available based on these frameworks. While their use would require action to ensure the burden of data collection is not left solely with the farmer, and that farmers maintain control over the use of such data, these frameworks should be viewed as part of a process of supporting the farmer to make positive changes on farm and consider the farm's own resilience, not only individual indicators associated with external impacts.

Policymakers working on food or health policy should be made aware of the complexities of possible greenwashing in relation to Regen Ag, but also the potential benefits that expansion of Regen Ag could bring, if properly supported.

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