SRP Position paper:

Contributions of best practices under the SRP Standard towards Regenerative Agriculture outcomes

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Regenerative Agriculture (RA) has gained increasing attention in recent years across the stakeholder community, reflecting the sentiment that the global food system is broken and requires urgent and radical solutions. This interest appears to be clearly driven, at least in part, by the promise that carbon sequestration in the soil can contribute to mitigating climate change and supporting livelihoods of farm communities. Additionally, private sector interest in RA is typically linked to corporate commitments to abatement or achieving 'net-zero' carbon emissions in their own supply chains.

Nevertheless, despite its long history and common usage in alternative/organic agriculture circles in the USA since the early 1980s, there appears to be no agreed definition for the term 'Regenerative Agriculture'. RA is an outcome-based farming approach that addresses main issues: enhancing overall soil health (physical, biological, and chemical components of the soil), soil carbon loss, water stress, biodiversity loss, climate risks, low income among farmers, and food insecurity. In general, there is greater agreement on good practices that contribute to RA, including minimizing tillage and maintaining soil cover to promote infiltration, enhance the soil's water holding capacity and controlling erosion. These practices are also said to improve biological nutrient cycling and maintain and enhance soil carbon stocks. Emphasis is also placed on diversification through crop rotation and integrated farming systems (e.g., inclusion of livestock) and reduced reliance on external inputs (Giller, 2022).

Following from the above, desired '**RA Outcomes'** can be summarized as follows: *Enhanced soil health, carbon sequestration, conservation of water and biodiversity, and improved farming livelihoods for improved profitability and resilience of farming systems and landscapes*.

However, the vast diversity of farms, farming systems and landscapes necessitates a flexible and adaptive approach in order to identify and adopt effective and practical location-specific practices for each production and ecological context. That possibly also explains the absence of internationally recognized standards and certification systems for RA in conventional production systems[1].

[1] The Regenerative Organic Alliance (a collaboration of farmers, businesses, and experts) has established a certification program for regenerative agriculture, intended as an add-on to *organic* agriculture certification systems.

Though not always readily incorporated in typical rice farming systems, a number of practices advocated under RA can help address challenges such as reduced soil fertility, loss of biodiversity, water stress, and GHG emissions. RA is thus fully aligned with SRP's mandate to foster climate-smart farming systems that preserve ecosystem integrity, build soil health and deliver resilient and sustainable productivity at landscape level, and improved farming livelihoods.

Alignment of SRP Standard with RA Environmental Outcomes

A recent mapping exercise commissioned by SRP has demonstrated close alignment between the contributions of many practices advocated under the SRP Standard to the following key RA outcomes:

1) Enhanced soil health;
2) Carbon sequestration;
3) Water savings; and
4) Conservation of biodiversity.

These contributions represent important drivers of productivity and resilience at farm and landscape levels, and are most evidently delivered through compliance with the majority of the 41 requirements listed under 7 out of the 8 themes underpinning the SRP Standard, namely: 1) Farm Management, 2) Pre-Planting, 3) Water Use, 4) Nutrient Management, 5) Integrated Pest Management, 6) Harvest and Post-Harvest, and 7) Health and Safety.

Table 1: Alignment of SRP Standard requirements with RA outcomes

RA Outcomes		SRP Standard requirements with Clear Positive Contributions (++)	SRP Standard requirements with Positive Contributions (+)
Soil Health		15,16,17,24,25,34	1,2,4,5,6,10.3,12,14,18.1-6, 28,33
Carbon Sequestration		6,8,16,24,25	1,2,10.3,15
Water Savings		6,8,10.1,10.3	1,2,3,10.2, 11, 13
Biodiversity Conservation		6,7,15,18.1-6, 24,25, 34	1,2,10.3,11,12,14,16,28,30,33

Listed in Table 1 above are the SRP Standard requirements that can contribute towards RA outcomes. A detailed analysis of the extent to which best practices promoted under the SRP Standard contribute to RA environmental outcomes is available in the full mapping exercise (Annex 1).

In summary, the SRP Standard is closely aligned with RA outcomes that restore and enhance the health of rice ecosystems. We invite ideas and suggestions as part of the ongoing revision process for the SRP Standard to enhance this alignment. To facilitate substantiation, SRP is considering additional Performance

Indicators (PIs) to allow quantitative assessment of soil health and carbon sequestration impacts of SRP practices and tracking of RA outcomes.

Permitted Claims for SRP-Verified Rice

The SRP Assurance Scheme does not permit on-pack or off-pack claims relating to regenerative agriculture. However, in line with the requirements set out in the SRP Assurance Scheme v2.0 and the SRP Brand Manual and Claim Guidelines, SRP members may make the following types of corporate value statements but should also be able to substantiate them:

- *"We are a proud member of the Sustainable Rice Platform, a global alliance dedicated to helping small rice farmers, protecting the environment and improving farming livelihoods: www.sustainablerice.org"*
- *"[Company name] is an active member of the Sustainable Rice Platform – a global alliance working to promote best management practices, empower small farmers and reduce the environmental footprint of rice. Learn more at www.sustainablerice.org"*
- *"Working with the Sustainable Rice Platform, [Company name] helps small farmers grow rice sustainably and increase their resilience to climate change. Learn more at www.sustainablerice.org"*

References to useful RA publications and other relevant resources:

- FAO (2022). The Soil Microbiome: A game changer for Food and Agriculture. Executive Summary for Policy Makers and Researchers: *https://www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/cc0717en*
- Giller, K. et al. (2021). Regenerative Agriculture: an agronomic perspective: *https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0030727021998063*
- Giller, K. (2022). Why the Buzz on Regenerative Agriculture? : *https://www.growingafrica.pub/ga11-kdvj4583/*
- Khangura, R. et al. (2023). Regenerative Agriculture—A Literature Review on the Practices and Mechanisms Used to Improve Soil Health. Sustainability 2023, 15, 2338. *https://doi.org/10.3390/su15032338*
- Lal, R. (2020). Regenerative agriculture for food and climate. Journal of Soil and Water Conservation. *https://doi.org/10.2489/jswc.2020.0620A*
- Lankford B and Orr S (2022) Exploring the Critical Role of Water in Regenerative Agriculture; Building Promises and Avoiding Pitfalls. Front. Sustain. Food Syst. 6:891709. Doi: 10.3389/fsufs.2022.891709. *https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fsufs.2022.891709/full*
- Newton, P. et al. (2020). Frontiers | What Is Regenerative Agriculture? A Review of Scholar and Practitioner Definitions Based on Processes and Outcomes (frontiersin.org)

- Qamar, M.K., et al. (2023). Agriculture and Water. In: Ahmad, M. (eds) Water Policy in Pakistan. Global Issues in Water Policy, vol 30. Springer, Cham. *https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-36131-9_10*
- Regenerative Organic Alliance: Regenerative Organic Certified: Farm like the world depends on it (regenorganic.org)
- Reicosky, D. (2018). Managing soil health for sustainable agriculture. Volume 1: Fundamentals. Burleigh Dodds Series in Agricultural Science #48. 334 pp.
- Reicosky, D. (2018). Managing soil health for sustainable agriculture. Volume 2: Monitoring & Management. Burleigh Dodds Series in Agricultural Science #49. 442 pp.
- Vamshi, M. et al. (2024). The Revolutionary Impact of Regenerative Agriculture on Ecosystem Restoration and Land Vitality: A Review. Journal of Geography, Environment and Earth Science International, 28(4), 1–14. *https://doi.org/10.9734/jgeesi/2024/v28i4760*

Annexes:

Annex 1: Mapping exercise contributions SRP Standard good practices towards Regenerative Agriculture Outcomes (available online here).