

# OFFICIAL FEEDBACK FORM

<b>DIALOGUE DATE</b>	Tuesday, 29 June 2021 13:00 GMT -04:00
<b>DIALOGUE TITLE</b>	From Soil Health to Soil Wealth: Accelerating Regenerative Agriculture for a Resource-Positive Future
<b>CONVENED BY</b>	Field to Market: The Alliance for Sustainable Agriculture
<b>DIALOGUE EVENT PAGE</b>	<a href="https://summitdialogues.org/dialogue/16924/">https://summitdialogues.org/dialogue/16924/</a>
<b>DIALOGUE TYPE</b>	Independent
<b>GEOGRAPHICAL FOCUS</b>	United States of America

The outcomes from a Food Systems Summit Dialogue will be of use in developing the pathway to sustainable food systems within the locality in which they take place. They will be a valuable contribution to the national pathways and also of interest to the different workstreams preparing for the Summit: the Action Tracks, Scientific Groups and Champions as well as for other Dialogues.

# 1. PARTICIPATION

## TOTAL NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS

85

## PARTICIPATION BY AGE RANGE

0 0-18

12 19-30

51 31-50

20 51-65

2 66-80

0 80+

## PARTICIPATION BY GENDER

29 Male

56 Female

0 Prefer not to say or Other

## NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS IN EACH SECTOR

46 Agriculture/crops

0 Fish and aquaculture

Livestock

Agro-forestry

15 Environment and ecology

Trade and commerce

11 Education

2 Communication

2 Food processing

2 Food retail, markets

2 Food industry

1 Financial Services

Health care

Nutrition

4 National or local government

Utilities

Industrial

Other

## NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS FROM EACH STAKEHOLDER GROUP

Small/medium enterprise/artisan

Large national business

17 Multi-national corporation

Small-scale farmer

Medium-scale farmer

14 Large-scale farmer

13 Local Non-Governmental Organization

6 International Non-Governmental Organization

1 Indigenous People

17 Science and academia

Workers and trade union

Member of Parliament

3 Local authority

5 Government and national institution

Regional economic community

United Nations

1 International financial institution

2 Private Foundation / Partnership / Alliance

Consumer group

7 Other

## 2. PRINCIPLES OF ENGAGEMENT

### HOW DID YOU ORGANIZE THE DIALOGUE SO THAT THE PRINCIPLES WERE INCORPORATED, REINFORCED AND ENHANCED?

Field to Market's Cross-Sector Dialogue series is a strategic initiative that brings together diverse stakeholders from across the agricultural value chain to advance shared learning and drive collective action by focusing on seizing opportunities and overcoming systemic barriers to scaling sustainable agriculture. This Dialogue, like the others we convene each year, was grounded in the principles shared with the UN Food System Summit: we recognize the urgency of sustained, meaningful action, and are committed to the Summit and our common vision. Convening stakeholders from across our diverse membership requires a great deal of mutual respect, complementary work and trust. Our Dialogues are designed in a way that recognize the complexity of the environmental challenges US agriculture faces.

### HOW DID YOUR DIALOGUE REFLECT SPECIFIC ASPECTS OF THE PRINCIPLES?

Our Cross-Sector Dialogues facilitate multi-sector collaboration, advance shared learning, and drive collective action within our membership by focusing on seizing opportunities and overcoming systemic barriers to scaling sustainable agriculture. Field to Market's Cross-Sector Dialogues harness the expertise and insights of our membership to drive solutions to agriculture's most pressing challenges. This event opened with a message from A-dae Romero-Briones, Director of Programs, Native Agriculture and Food Systems at the First Nations Development Institute, who grounded the discussion in the understanding that regenerative agriculture has its foundations in indigenous farming. Field to Market follows Chatham House Rule to protect the ability of individuals to participate with respectful candor and the breakout groups are balanced across our five membership sectors.

### DO YOU HAVE ADVICE FOR OTHER DIALOGUE CONVENORS ABOUT APPRECIATING THE PRINCIPLES OF ENGAGEMENT?

Field to Market believes that we can tackle the most pressing challenges facing agriculture, society and the planet only through pre-competitive collaboration. By uniting nearly 150 member organizations across the full food and agriculture value chain behind a shared vision, Field to Market strives to provide collaborative leadership that is transparent, grounded in science and focused on outcomes. We invite interested stakeholders to join us in advancing this collaborative approach for the food and ag value chain, ensuring all sectors and voices are represented in surfacing solutions to advance sustainable agriculture.

# 3. METHOD

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The outcomes of a Dialogue are influenced by the method that is used.

**DID YOU USE THE SAME METHOD AS RECOMMENDED BY THE CONVENORS REFERENCE MANUAL?**

**Yes**

**No**

# 4. DIALOGUE FOCUS & OUTCOMES

## MAJOR FOCUS

Our Dialogue focused on building a shared understanding about how sustainable, regenerative and conservation agriculture systems intersect while exploring mechanisms to accelerate resource-positive outcomes.

Leading food, beverage and retail companies are moving beyond traditional sustainable sourcing policies to embrace regenerative agriculture goals and principles within their supply chains. These commitments have the potential to accelerate investment and impact at the farm level, yet many growers are expressing confusion about evolving expectations and desired outcomes. A panel representing Walmart, Unilever and PepsiCo shared their companies' aspirations for scaling regenerative agriculture, as well as the role downstream brands and retailers can play in spurring innovation and forging deeper partnership to unlock benefits for farmers and nature.

The group imagined what would the innovation landscape look like if conservation organizations became the next venture capital investors. The Nature Conservancy shared a behind-the-scenes look at their new approach to unleashing the innovation flywheel to create an engine of impact to realize a triple win: scaling profitable ag-tech startups, improving farmer profitability, and positively impacting the environment.

Next, the group considered what could be possible if the \$863B restaurant industry in the United States was harnessed as a force for reversing climate change. Zero Foodprint, described their innovative emerging crowd-funding model that could unlock up to \$8B a year to help farmers.

Participants next learned about underway research to unlock a new kind of "hardware" for agriculture in the form of perennial crops. The Land Institute invited participants to visualize a future in which humanity depends on perennial varieties for all major row crops, creating new possibilities to both feed the planet and regenerate the asset on which farmers make a living —rich, vibrant and healthy soil.

### ACTION TRACKS

<input type="checkbox"/>	Action Track 1: Ensure access to safe and nutritious food for all
<input type="checkbox"/>	Action Track 2: Shift to sustainable consumption patterns
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Action Track 3: Boost nature-positive production
<input type="checkbox"/>	Action Track 4: Advance equitable livelihoods
<input type="checkbox"/>	Action Track 5: Build resilience to vulnerabilities, shocks and stress

### KEYWORDS

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Finance	<input type="checkbox"/>	Policy
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Innovation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Data & Evidence
<input type="checkbox"/>	Human rights	<input type="checkbox"/>	Governance
<input type="checkbox"/>	Women & Youth Empowerment	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Trade-offs
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## MAIN FINDINGS

To scale regenerative agriculture and improve soil health in US farmland, ambitious and courageous steps must be taken to diverge from the "business-as-usual" paradigm. Participants in this Dialogue emphasized two primary mechanisms that require widespread, multi-stakeholder support. The first is funding. Asking farmers to implement changes to their operations that are known to improve soil health and other environmental outcomes is risky. Producers are largely responsible for shouldering this risk, and although they are likely to enjoy improved economic outcomes eventually, the start-up costs are often prohibitive. Further, suppressed yields can sometimes be expected for a few years after initial implementation of new practices. The second mechanism is education. Growers, their employees and their trusted advisers need access to crop and region-specific information to help guide decisions about the best approach to applying different agronomic practices. Good data must drive technical support and inform decision making on financial investment and risk.

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### KEYWORDS

- Finance
- Innovation
- Human rights
- Women & Youth Empowerment
- Policy
- Data & Evidence
- Governance
- Trade-offs
- Environment and Climate

## OUTCOMES FOR EACH DISCUSSION TOPIC - 1/4

Lasting, systematic change requires supporting farmers as they adapt their operations. Clear messaging and support from the federal government was identified as a fundamental stepping stone. One form of this support is providing baseline data to have a firmer understanding of where the industry stands now and called for USDA-NASS (National Agriculture Statistics Service) to track annual use of standard sustainable practices like cover crops and no-till. That data will enable the whole industry to set realistic goals and make continuous improvement together. Another form of governmental support could come in the form of targeted policies to ensure crop insurance is more inclusive of practices supporting regenerative outcomes.

Because collecting and interpreting data is central to understanding where an operation is starting and to measure progress as it happens, farmers need access to reliable broadband. Until greater access to stable broadband is available to all agricultural communities, it will be very difficult for growers to fully participate in programs that require data reporting.

Farmer education on the economics of regenerative agriculture was identified as another fundamental ingredient to catalyzing systematic change. There is not a lot of room for unknowns in agriculture when factors such as weather are already unpredictable. There is a notion among growers that implementing any new practice will harm yields and ultimately, profitability. Despite ongoing projects to encourage cover crops, in Illinois, only 3% of farmland is in cover crops in the state. An affiliate sector representative said that despite the great research that has been generated since the 1980's about best agronomic practices to support regenerative outcomes, that information is still very slow to reach the producers. The gap between university research and growers that do not regularly access Extension programs must be closed for advancement to be possible.

Growers need realistic information breaking down implementation costs and the typical yield losses that can be expected to result from the target practice. Grower representatives stated that because there is still no premium for crops produced in a more sustainable way, the connection between profitability and environmental outcomes is still weak and current incentive structures are not widespread and accessible enough. To capture the attention of growers that have been watching from the sidelines, education should promote the potential for lower input costs that comes with some practices. Growers cautioned against creating incentive structures that exclude early adopters.

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## OUTCOMES FOR EACH DISCUSSION TOPIC - 2/4

Agreeing on the definition of “regenerative” could get in the way of moving the needle in the right direction and keeping the focus on definitions will likely serve to slow progress in reaching industry goals. Participants echoed the need for consistency and careful messaging to growers: Changing the terminology from “conservation” to “sustainable” to “regenerative” may be perceived as changing goals and what is expected of them.

Recommendations for crafting messages to grower:

- The message must be consistent across sectors so the suppliers that are doing most of the heavy lift don't become discouraged that they are chasing a fad.
- Keep the message simple and find the appropriate, trusted messenger to deliver it.
- Demonstrating the profitability of regenerative agriculture will be far more effective in motivating farmers than top-down mandates from consumer brands and retailers.
- Despite the urgency for improved environmental outcomes, change takes time. Participants recommended patience and managing expectations in the journey.

Alignment is also needed on metrics and measurement. As an industry, we should focus on the metrics that matter most in regenerative agriculture and agree on the outcomes everyone can align on. It should also be considered that not all agriculture is happening in the Corn Belt. Western states are dealing with other environmental challenges, mostly around water availability, that should also be addressed in conversations about regenerative agriculture. Quantifying the resilience to shocks that regenerative agriculture provides is needed. We understand it on an anecdotal level, but getting beyond that to making larger scale assumptions has not yet been possible.

Attendees discussed the most critical factors in helping farmers meet these corporate supply chain aspirations, and considered different strategies and approaches needed to scale regenerative ag with early, middle and later adopters.

An important strategy for reaching growers is taking a community approach to outreach. By getting a variety of trusted advisers on board and engaging them at every opportunity, the message of regenerative ag is reinforced with growers representing a variety of perspectives. Select the messenger carefully, because of their distance from the farm, downstream companies may not be the best suited to talk about the needed strategies to improve soil health. Form and maintain close relationships with land grant universities to ensure they are speaking the language of sustainability.

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## OUTCOMES FOR EACH DISCUSSION TOPIC - 3/4

Attendees showed enthusiasm for the three audacious ideas presented. From impact investment to largescale composting of restaurant waste to perennial crops, all of these strategies have a place in the future of agriculture. How these niche ideas move into the norm depends on funding, partnerships and education.

Asking growers to take on additional risk without a wide support net surfaced as a primary concern for participants. Plus, it is assumed that implementation will have costs which will likely be absorbed by the farm operator. In addition to the cost of new equipment, training field staff in the proper usage of such equipment and helping them understand the implications for field operations carries costs that may not be fully understood until the transition is underway. Additional support is provided through a variety of mechanisms, suited to growers representing diverse experience and cropping systems.

Offering financial incentives is supported by grower groups, but other mechanism can also be helpful. Using warranties to de-risk conservation practice adoption could have widespread appeal to growers. A grower sector representative pointed out that it takes years to reap the benefits of most new practices, warranties can help improve farmer confidence during that time. It was pointed out that lending institutions and crop insurance providers should also play a role in de-risking during transition period.

Corporate funding was identified as a powerful mechanism for taking transformative technologies to scale. by both Civil Society and Affiliate sector representatives. Groups have been able to provide some financial incentives to landowners with funding from corporate partners. This community, conservation-based approach allows landowners the flexibility to choose how they use the funds, and the NGO tracks progress on biodiversity, water quality and soil carbon goals.

Growers also need access to skilled labor and highly trained trusted advisers to minimize risk. Farmer-to-farmer networks supporting peer mentorship is another way to support the transition inexpensively.

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## OUTCOMES FOR EACH DISCUSSION TOPIC - 4/4

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### KEYWORDS

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|  | <input type="checkbox"/> Environment and Climate |

## AREAS OF DIVERGENCE

There was some divergence regarding who should carry the message of regenerative agriculture to the grower. Although it is widely agreed that efforts should engage the grower's trusted adviser, there is a great deal of diversity within that group. Not all trusted advisers are fully-versed in the language of sustainability and may not enthusiastically support supply chain efforts to drive large-scale practice adoption.

Landownership is a complex issue in regenerative agriculture. A large portion of US farmland is leased, and the terms of those leases are widely variable.

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# ATTACHMENTS AND RELEVANT LINKS

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## ATTACHMENTS

- **Field to Market Cross-Sector Dialogue Summary**  
[https://summitdialogues.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Field-to-Market-Regenerative-Ag-Cross-Sector-Dialogue-Summary\\_6.29.21.pdf](https://summitdialogues.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Field-to-Market-Regenerative-Ag-Cross-Sector-Dialogue-Summary_6.29.21.pdf)