



**WORLD FARMERS'  
ORGANISATION**

**WFO POLICY ON  
THE CONSERVATION  
AND SUSTAINABLE USE  
OF BIODIVERSITY AND  
NATURAL RESOURCES**

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## **World Farmers' Organisation**

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## Preamble

Biodiversity faces unprecedented threats as it deteriorates on a global scale; all the while, natural resources are increasingly under pressure due to a combination of population growth, changing lifestyle and climate change. The United Nations Environment Programme ([UNEP](#)) states that "The planet is experiencing a dangerous decline in nature. One million species are threatened with extinction, soils are turning infertile, and water sources are drying up." In response to this crisis, national and regional initiatives, as well as major multilateral efforts, including the Paris Agreement and the Kunming Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, are sounding the alarm and calling for urgent action.

Amidst this urgency, farmers, who manage over 1/3 (36.79%, FAOSTAT, 2021) of the world's land, emerge as key players in the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and natural resources. It is essential to balance the call to conserve biodiversity and improve the management of natural resources with the obligation to secure sufficient production of healthy and safe food for all. To this extent, the World Farmers' Organisation (WFO) wants to work within the relevant processes and fora to ensure that farmers and agriculture are part and partner in the development of viable solutions.

Declining biodiversity, soil health and water quality and quantity are not only a crisis in and of themselves; they exacerbate the effects of climate change and have a direct impact on food, fibre, and fuel production and, therefore, on farmers' income and livelihoods. A sound environmental policy that halts then reverses the nature crisis is simply in the interest of the world's farmers who depend on biodiversity and natural resources like soil and water for essential services such as pollination, natural pest control, maintenance of soil structure and fertility and water regulation.

Just as farmers depend on the environment, often the environment depends on farmers who actively and in cooperation with nature manage the land, including<sup>3</sup> but not limited to tasks such as moving livestock across biomes and pastures, carrying out pest and weed control, and integrating biodiversity corridors. A large share of species relies upon habitats that depend upon or can profit from agricultural activities. This occurs worldwide,<sup>1</sup> and farmers can play a critical role in restoring native plants and wildlife within agricultural landscapes.

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<sup>1</sup> For example, according to the European Environment Agency (EEA), 50% of all species in the European Union (EU) rely upon 63 agricultural habitats (See EEA Website: [https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/sustainability/environmental-sustainability/biodiversity\\_en](https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/sustainability/environmental-sustainability/biodiversity_en)). Other studies focus on low-impact agricultural lands in the developing world. (See for instance: Wright, H., L., Lake, I., R., Dolman, P., M., (2012). Agriculture—a key element for conservation in the developing world, *Conservation Letters* 5 (1), 11-19.)

Soil and water are the foundations of our production systems, and biodiversity<sup>2</sup> is crucial to the functioning and resilience of agroecosystems. In this context, supporting farmers in the adoption of sustainable and locally appropriate agricultural practices and techniques is crucial<sup>3</sup>. With the right infrastructures in place and adequate financial and policy support, farmers are well-positioned to support positive outcomes for biodiversity, soil health and water quality and availability whilst contributing to food security.

Yet farmers work with very tight margins to provide affordable products to consumers while struggling with volatile market prices and low bargaining power vis-à-vis industry actors within the value chain. Too often, government decisions and policy settings have little consideration for the ecosystem services that sustainably managed agricultural systems provide to society, ranging from the provision of food, fibre and fuel to the conservation of biodiversity, the sequestration of carbon in soils and the regulation of water, but including also the support to rural economies and local communities and the promotion of cultural heritage and traditions. To ensure farms remain viable and can continue providing all of these services, environmental policy must recognise, support and promote sustainable agricultural production, including strengthening the enabling environment and addressing issues of land tenure and access to finance.

Furthermore, there is an urgent need to develop adequate incentive structures, exploring innovative financial mechanisms and the development of biodiversity markets to help farmers sustainably manage biodiversity and natural resources as an integral part of their farming operations. Globally, trillions of dollars are potentially available to influence and support nature-positive outcomes in the agricultural sectors (for instance, FAIRR, 2022); these must be demonstrably and equitably available 'inside' the farm gate.

Farmers not only have a responsibility but also an interest to conserve, restore, and sustainably use biodiversity and natural resources; however, distorted market incentives and inappropriate top-down regulations are driving down the ability of farmers to increase the efficiency of on-farm production without impacting on environmental outcomes worldwide. Farmers must be recognised as stewards of biodiversity and natural resources and empowered to innovate and unlock sustainable solutions to some of the world's most urgent challenges.<sup>4</sup>

2 Including soil and microbial biodiversity, pollinators, crop varieties, and domesticated animals (livestock).

3 Including sustainable livestock management, effective water management, integrated pest management, crop diversification and agroforestry.

4 Amidst these challenges, plastics pollution is a case in point posing a significant threat to farmers and agriculture. While plastics have become an integral component in agricultural production in many parts of the world, there is evidence that degraded plastics are contaminating water and soils. Addressing this challenge requires a keen focus on food security considerations in the pursuit of viable alternatives. As stewards of biodiversity and natural resources, farmers play a pivotal role in shaping solutions that simultaneously safeguard our environment and ensure a secure food supply and should therefore be actively involved in the discussions on plastics pollution including the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee on Plastics Pollution.

## Guiding Principles

- **The need to balance the fundamental priority of achieving food security and ending hunger** with a commitment to protect and restore nature as a key enabler of farming operations by ensuring farmers are appropriately rewarded for their stewardship.
- **A recognition of farmers as stewards of biodiversity and natural resources** who play a crucial role in the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and natural resources while supporting local economies and communities and contributing to global food security.
- **The centrality of soil health, fertility, and biodiversity in the discussion on agrobiodiversity** and the importance of protecting and restoring agricultural land and curbing soil consumption in order to meet biodiversity, climate, and environmental targets, support rural development, and promote sustainable living.
- **The adoption of a bottom-up approach** through the active and systematic engagement of farmers and their organised structures at various levels, fostering collaboration and promoting inclusive decision-making to shape policies that resonate with on-the-ground realities, instil ownership and catalyse sustainable practices.
- **The development of context-specific policies and regulatory frameworks** that take into account the diversity of local conditions and priorities and are informed by the daily experience of farmers and the latest scientific knowledge.
- **Mainstreaming gender and youth considerations in biodiversity conservation and natural resource management initiatives in agriculture** in a way to ensure that young and women farmers have equal access to resources, information, and decision-making processes.
- **The link between biodiversity, the diversity of agri-food systems and local diets, and the vibrancy of community life**, whereas homologation and standardisation of productions put at risk the traditional seeds and products, engendering losses in varieties of productions, restricting the choice available to farmers and consumers and the connection between food production and local communities.

## Policy Objectives

- **Recognise and leverage the inherent potential of agriculture to simultaneously support the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and natural resources and produce food, fibre and fuel for the global population**, including by promoting crop diversification, intercropping and co-cultures.
- **Empower farmers and farmers' organisations as key decision-makers and partners in the process of policy development and implementation.**
- **Increase the capacity of farmers for sustainable production and responsible management of natural resources**, creating an enabling environment where farmers can produce sustainably while keeping farm operations profitable and assisting them with the knowledge, tools, and financial resources they need to identify, implement, and scale up locally appropriate solutions.
- **Ensure fair and equitable returns for the farmers**, and women in particular, for the valuable biodiversity-based activities, products, and services they provide through their work, including by providing a financial recognition for farmers for the important ecosystem services delivered through agriculture and ensuring the fair and equitable sharing of benefits from the utilisation of genetic resources.
- **Increase and strengthen farmers' access to natural resources and control of productive assets**, both tangible (land, water, etc.) and intangible (information and knowledge), with a view to improve the production of goods and services and their marketing in sectors and value chains that allow farmers to increase their income and facilitate their inclusion in the market economy by strengthening their resilience.
- **Facilitate the conservation and sustainable management of diverse agroecosystems**, initiating a dynamic multi-stakeholder dialogue and fostering collaborative approaches that integrate farmer knowledge and practices, providing the needed financial and cultural support.

## Policy Recommendations

- **Promote policy integration between biodiversity conservation and other policy areas relevant to agricultural production**, including climate change and natural resources management, adopting approaches that technically and financially empower farmers to drive substantial change.
- **Support active participation of farmers and farmers' organisations in international biodiversity and environmental negotiations**, ensuring their engagement in policy development at all levels, including the revision or update of national biodiversity strategies and action plans (NBSAPs).
- **Secure substantial financial backing for the management of biodiversity and natural resources at farm level**, providing farmers with the necessary means of implementation for global, regional, and national strategies and action plans, including under the Global Environment Facility (GEF), Green Climate Fund (GCF), and Global Biodiversity Framework Fund (GBFF) and also through pathways for direct investment through transparent marketplaces.
- **Facilitate a reduction in the risk from the use of chemicals and other agricultural inputs that may cause harm for humans and the environment** by ensuring that a wide range of effective, affordable, and sustainable alternatives is available to farmers, including by providing access to biosolutions.
- **Promote the integration of bio-economy and circular economy approaches in product and process innovation in the agricultural sector** through the active involvement of farmers.
- **Promote and implement policies to protect, restore and, in some cases, extend agricultural land**, in recognition of its agro-systemic services to the broader community, addressing the challenges of excessive urbanisation and agricultural land-use change and the multiple causes of land degradation, such as sealing, surface erosion, salinisation, organic matter decline, biodiversity loss, local or diffuse contamination, landslides, and floods.
- **Strengthen the enabling environment, allowing farmers to manage and invest in their land in a sustainable manner**, addressing issues linked with land tenure and succession, and improving the policy and regulatory framework enabling farmers' and especially smallholders' access to land and other productive resources (water, forests, oceans, energy, genetic resources, ...), including through the adoption and implementation of relevant international tools and regulations.

- **Provide farmers with tailored financial tools and positive incentives** commensurate with their delivery on biodiversity and environment goals, including through innovative financing mechanisms such as payment for ecosystem services (PES) schemes and exploring the development of biodiversity markets that accurately reflect the role of farmers in environmental sustainability and the establishment of certification schemes recognising a premium price for products obtained through biodiversity-friendly practices.
- **Promote agricultural and food education and strengthen the role of local fresh food markets** as a tool to bring farmers and consumers closer together and supporting consumers' freedom of choice, raising awareness about sustainable agricultural practices and contributing to the sustainable management of local biodiversity.
- **Integrate farmers' needs and expertise in managing biodiversity and natural resources in Research and Innovation (R&I)** programs and priorities aimed to strengthen the know-how of farmers and increase agricultural productivity in a sustainable manner.
- **Support farmers in the access, collection and fair analysis of high-quality information and spatial data** that could support the planning and implementation of environmentally sustainable and biodiversity-friendly agricultural practices while ensuring farmers' data ownership and clear data protection regulations on the information collected by/through the farmers.
- **Provide technical support and strengthen extension and advisory services for farmers and their organisations**, focusing on improving efficiency on farms and supporting the adoption of environmentally sustainable and biodiversity-friendly agricultural practices, including capacity-building programs empowering the youth as environmentally conscious farmers and conservation leaders.
- **Collaborate with farmers to manage and mitigate the impact of damaging invasive species, including predators**, on farms and neighbouring lands, ensuring adequate funding and employing a joint approach for lasting positive impacts on biodiversity and agricultural production.



- **Ensure all farmers have access to a broad spectrum of crop and seed varieties and animal breeds suitable to the local context at affordable prices**, promoting innovation in agriculture while protecting local knowledge with a view to optimizing the diversity of plant and animal species as well as genetic resources, including by supporting local farmer-led initiatives (e.g., community seed banks) as well as outcomes-focused regulations improving market access for farmers.
- **Facilitate the involvement of farmers, especially youth and women and farmers in vulnerable areas, in conservation efforts at the local level and foster greater cross-sectoral collaboration** involving farmers, consumers and other actors in the agri-food value chain, including the private sector, Indigenous people and rural communities, research and academia, environmental groups, foundations and philanthropies, and all relevant ministries and government agencies.



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[www.wfo-oma.org](http://www.wfo-oma.org)  
[info@wfo-oma.org](mailto:info@wfo-oma.org)