



# MANIFESTO

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## SAVE ORGANICS IN SOIL



**Soil is a vital, non-renewable resource for ecosystems, playing an essential role in services such as water purification and food production. It is also a major global carbon sink, with significant potential to remove climate-changing gases from**

**the atmosphere. However, the ability of soil to deliver ecosystem services — in terms of food production, as a biodiversity pool and as a regulator of gasses, water and nutrients — is under severe pressure.**

### **THE ROLE OF THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS - SDGS**

At the global level, the notion of preserving soil functionality has been embedded in the land-degradation-neutrality concept as part of the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**, agreed by the United Nations General Assembly in 2015. The SDGs also include targets on soil quality, soil contamination, the management of chemicals and waste. Implementation of the SDGs can provide an important vehicle for soil protection measures in Europe.

serious challenge. It provides that by 2020 land is managed sustainably in the Union, soil is adequately protected and commits the EU and its Member States to increasing efforts to reduce soil erosion and increase soil organic matter and to remediate contaminated sites.

The subsequent Horizon 2020 programme stresses the importance of increasing organic matter in soils as a way of improving soil fertility, increasing agricultural production, and mitigating climate change.

However, only a few EU Member States have specific legislation on soil protection. Currently soil is not subject to a comprehensive and coherent set of rules in the Union.

### **EUROPEAN UNION SOIL ORGANIC MATTER DEGRADATION**

A Technical Report issued in November 2015 by the European Commission's Joint Research Centre and the Norwegian Institute of Bioeconomy Research pointed out that CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by EU soil organic matter losses amount to 173 M ton CO<sub>2</sub>/year: it means that the EU is, after Indonesia and before the Russian Federation, the World's second largest emission hotspot due to organic soil degradation, mainly induced by human activities.

Existing EU policies in areas such as agriculture, water, waste, chemicals, and prevention of industrial pollution do indirectly contribute to the protection of soils.

But since these policies have other aims and scopes, they are not sufficient tools to ensure an adequate level of protection for soils in Europe.

### **EUROPE'S TRANSITION TOWARDS A CIRCULAR AND GREEN ECONOMY**

Land-use data at European level, although underestimated, display an annual trend of approximately 100.000 hectares of land lost per year because of sprawling growth of settlements and infrastructures over green fields. According to the European Environment Agency (EEA) land recycling, such as reusing neglected sites and turning roads or parking lots to green spaces or residential areas, can have positive impacts on the environment and support Europe's transition towards a circular and green economy.

### **THE LACK OF AN ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION STRATEGY**

The conclusions of the recently issued 'Inventory and Assessment of Soil Protection Policy Instruments in EU Member States' (Feb 2017), commissioned by the EC, highlight that the lack of a coherent, strategic EU policy framework is not consistent with the objectives of an economic and political Union that should provide for uniformity of rules, and ensure equal opportunities for citizens and businesses, with a common level of environmental and health protection.

### **EU RESEARCH AND INNOVATION PROGRAMMES**

The Seventh Environment Action Programme, which entered into force in January 2014, recognises that soil degradation is a

### **THERE IS NO COMPREHENSIVE EU POLICY TOOL**

According to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the UN, we are striving for a land degradation neutral world by the year 2030. The European Commission wants to achieve no more net land take in Europe by 2050 at the latest. Yet no comprehensive EU policy tool to achieve that goal in a well coherent and coordinated way is in place.

## REDUCE SOIL EROSION AND INCREASE SOIL ORGANIC MATTER

The urgency for the wider land use sectors to increase efforts to address climate mitigation and adaptation has increased since the signing and ratification of the Paris Agreement, with its ambitious targets. Therefore, the fresh challenge for policy makers is to develop instruments to better balance private and societal interests while swiftly moving towards sustainable, climate-proof land management practices, according to few priorities, such as:

- Protecting the existing carbon stock of carbon rich soils. It is a priority to ensure the protection of remaining carbon rich soils where they occur in Europe, both through preventing the ploughing of those soils already under permanent grassland and minimizing further losses of carbon from cultivated carbon rich soils;
- Maintaining soil organic matter by respecting the biological cycle. Therefore, adding stabilised organic matter from the biological treatment of sustainable biomass (e.g. bio-waste) should be promoted;
- Minimising losses of, and increasing, soil organic matter on all soils;
- Encouraging the use of recycled nutrients and the more efficient management of nutrients on agricultural land. This would not only benefit the climate but also be particularly beneficial to improve water and air quality.



### MAIN PRIORITY GOALS

To encourage policy makers to develop instruments to move Europe towards implementing sustainable, climate-proof land management practices, according to the priorities:

#### INCREASING

Soil organic matter in arable soils

#### PROTECTING

The existing stock of carbon in soils

#### ENCOURAGING

The use of recycled nutrients and a more efficient management of nutrients on agricultural land

This would not only benefit the climate but also be particularly beneficial to improve water and air quality.

#### MAINTAINING

A high level of organic fertility in soil by applying stable organic matter from biomass

#### MINIMIZING

Further losses of carbon from cultivated carbon rich soils

#### ENSURING

That the European Commission adopts a Soil Framework Directive



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