

Regenerative Organic Agriculture (ROA)

HOW FEDERAL ACTION CAN MAKE A PROFOUND DIFFERENCE

What Is ROA?

Regenerative Organic Agriculture (ROA) is a sustainable, climate-smart approach to producing nutritious foods, restoring farm and ranch lands, generating a cleaner environment, and improving farm and ranch economics. ROA methods include composting, cover crops, rotational cropping and grazing, reduced tillage, and elimination of chemicals and synthetics.

Regenerative and organic crop and pasture management substantially draws down annual emissions by pulling carbon from the atmosphere and storing it in the soil. For example, ROA methods for grazing management enable livestock to increase carbon sequestered in the soil to a degree that more than offsets their greenhouse gas emissions. Similarly, ROA methods in the farming of fruits and vegetables regenerate ecosystems, restore biodiversity above and below ground, and produce crop yields that can exceed conventional yields, enabling the food supply and its nutritional value to rise in tandem.

How Can ROA Improve Farming, Health, and the Environment?

ROA is a proven strategy for improving the agricultural environment, combating climate change, and supporting U.S. farmers and ranchers. For example, a 2019 report of the United Nations International Panel on Climate Change found that conventional agriculture is responsible for nearly a quarter (24%) of all global greenhouse gas emissions. Making even a dent in our climate crisis means tackling the root causes of climate change, and ROA is widely seen as a game changer for feeding our planet in a more sustainable way.

Indeed, ROA is central to improving population health: America's chronic disease crisis reduces our quality of life, is directly associated with premature death, drives rising health care costs, weakens our fiscal and national security, and makes our nation more susceptible to pandemics. Since chronic disease is integrally linked to food, ROA is a vital means for producing foods with considerably higher nutrition content.

What Steps Should be Taken Now?

Cover crops and other ROA methods increase farm productivity and financial sustainability by improving soil health, increasing organic matter, protecting fields from wind and water erosion, and reducing weeds and pests. In light of these advantages, the share of U.S. farmland planted with cover crops has increased by more than 50% over the past 10 years, from just over 10 million to more than 15 million acres. However, U.S. acreage utilizing ROA methods still accounts for less than 5% of total cropland in America.

A national initiative expanding the use of ROA is vital to fixing our broken food system. Dedicated funding for a national-scale program modeled on the Maryland Cover Crop Program would promote significant change, offering grants to farmers who plant cover crops to help offset seed, labor, and equipment costs. Likewise, crop insurance options that remove disincentives for organic agriculture and reward farmers and ranchers who improve the sustainability of the land and livestock should be given strong consideration.