On the Importance of Regenerative Farming Practices in Caring for Creation

_____Presbytery overtures the 227th General Assembly (2026) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to:

1. Call on Presbyterians to learn about and support regenerative farming practices, which restore soil, foster biological diversity, heal the land, embody our biblical mandate to care for creation and advance the goals of previous General Assembly policy positions;

2. Direct the Office of Public Witness and OGHS ministries of the Hunger Program, Disaster Assistance and Self-Development of People to equip Presbyterians with a deeper understanding of the theological, scientific, economic, and social bases for public policy advocacy and lifestyle choices in support of soil care and regenerative farming;

3. Encourage Presbyterian congregations and members to:

A. model faithful soil stewardship in our own farms, gardens, and yards;
B. support local and regional food providers, as a witness to values of earth care; And
C. Encourage Presbyterians who feel so called, to consider farming as a vocation.

4. Advocate for:

A. national and international regenerative farming policies and
B. governmental support of family farms, particularly ownership of farms by people of color.

Rationale

The 221st (2014) General Assembly enacted the “Food Sovereignty for All” Overture, which envisioned affordable and healthy food, grown sustainably as the most faithful means for fulfilling the biblical mandate to ensure that people are fed[1]. In the intervening years since the adoption of that overture, farmers and scientists have continued to develop an approach to agricultural production called regenerative farming which has proven to be a means of addressing both the nutrition of humanity as well as an important step in the care for the web of life that is our planetary ecosphere. This approach was lifted up in the ACSWP policy document: “Investing in a Green Future: A

[1] Leviticus 19:9-10, Zechariah 7: 9-10, Psalm 12:5, Matthew 14:13–21, Mark 6:30–44, Luke 9:10–17, John 6:1–14, Matthew 15:32–39 and Mark 8:1–9.

Vision for A Renewed Creation," which was adopted by the 225th (2022) General Assembly. In regard to regenerative farming, this policy states:

> *"8. h. Urge the U.S., state and local governments to:*
> *vii. Incentivize a shift away from fossil-fuel and chemical intensive industrial agriculture and invest in regenerative and agroecological farming, which have the added benefit of sequestering from the atmosphere large amounts of carbon into the soil.*
>
> *viii. Invest in food system conversion to help communities form thriving local food systems, which make healthy food more accessible and reduce the use of fossil fuels in the fields and in the transportation of food from farm to table."*

In light of the worsening climate crisis and other factors which threaten our two-fold mission of earth care and neighbor love, the current overture is focused on how these agricultural practices may be matters not only for government action (i.e. public witness), as the policy now frames it, but also for PC(USA) members, congregations, camps and conference centers and other church-related institutions.

Regenerative farming practices improve soil health, increase biodiversity, and work with nature to heal and strengthen the land for future generations. Regenerative practices, based in agroecology, have at least three important benefits. First, more carbon is sequestered in the soil, reducing the amount of carbon dioxide which traps heat in our atmosphere.[2] Second, they provide agroecological alternatives to conventional methods of tillage, fertilization, and pesticide use, which have degraded the soil, raising concerns about food security within a decade. Third, improved soil structure enables better water retention, reducing damaging runoff and floods. In all these ways, regenerative farming honors our responsibility to care for God's creation.

To meet global food demands after World War II, farmers increasingly came to depend on the use of large machinery and chemical inputs. These capital-intensive processes served to favor consolidation of increasingly larger tracts primarily operated by corporations to the detriment of smaller family farms, which had previously served as the backbone of American agriculture. Faced with an increasingly technological and capital-intensive model of agriculture, a growing number of farmers are turning to regenerative practices as a way to lower costs, strengthen soil resilience, and ensure the long-term financial sustainability of their operations. This shift deserves support as it promotes both sustainability and long-term food security. Decision makers should also

[2] Agriculture contributes around 30% of total atmospheric carbon emissions. Regenerative farming practices can potentially reduce that number by contributing less and sequestering more than the typical capital intensive, chemically based practices used by many U.S. farmers..

craft policies that ease the pressures on rural communities and provide real support during times of agricultural transition.

Core Regenerative Practices include the following:

- Minimum tillage: the less the soil is plowed and disked, the less erosion and disruption of communities of helpful soil microbiota.[3]
- Cover crops: after the cash crop is harvested, a mixture of species of cover crops will not only protect the bare soil from erosion and heat, but also exude surplus sugars through the roots that attract communities of helpful bacteria and fungi; the remains of the cover crop then can serve as mulch, restraining weed growth and retaining moisture around future cash crops;
- Applications of chemical pesticides are reduced or ceased; populations of damaging insects are restrained by their natural predator species, which maintain their vigor because of minimal use of insecticides that would disable them as well as the target insects;
- Managed grazing by cattle, sheep, hogs, or chickens serves to restrain the cover crops from excessive growth, and their manure contains nutrients for the soil and bacteria that add to the diversity of the soil's microbiota.

The increased biodiversity of soil microbiota enables them to supply micronutrients to the cash crops that make grain, fruit, and vegetables significantly more nutritious.[4]

Extensive research and real-world trials demonstrate that regenerative practices consistently achieve crop yields comparable to or exceeding those of conventional farming, particularly over the long term and during environmental stress like drought. But typically, it takes about four years for a farmer's field to regain similar productivity after they shift it from conventional practices to the practices highlighted above. Grants from the U.S. Department of Agriculture have enabled working farmers to withstand reduced income during that transition period. There is considerable farmer interest because regenerative practices reduce input costs, and there has been a waiting list for those grants. In recent years, the Natural Resources Conservation Service has been training and enabling staff to assist farmers in shifting to regenerative practices. And because farmers trust the experiences of other farmers, peer-to-peer support is helpful and is being supported by non-governmental entities as well. We can

[3] Microbiota is a complex community of microorganisms that play vital roles in maintaining soil fertility and plant and animal health.

[4] David Montgomery & Anne Biklé, What Your Food Ate: How to Heal our Land and Reclaim our Health (Norton,2022).

hope that this overture, and possibly such expressions by other religious bodies, can help to enhance the perceived stature of regenerative practices in farming culture.

More extensive use of regenerative farming practices may help to reverse heavy U.S. reliance on imported produce because so much U.S. farmland is dedicated to commodity crops, principally corn and soybeans. Imported fruit and vegetable varieties have been bred to survive long transportation chains to the detriment of their nutritional value. Regenerative farmers, using diverse domestic varieties, would help expand domestic fruit and vegetable production, bringing prosperity for smaller/family farmers and improving human nutrition and health.

PC(USA) members and churches can testify to these values with how we tend to our own farms, gardens, and yards. Compost, soil inoculants, fewer pesticides, and minimal tillage can give our soils better texture and nutrients. With participation in community gardens, purchases at farmers' markets, and subscriptions to local sustainable farmers, we can support growth of regional food systems that are more resilient and environmentally-sustainable. Learning about and supporting regenerative agriculture provides a connection point with indigenous nations that are recovering their traditional land-use practices. Finally, supporting regenerative agriculture would help our rural congregations that are trying to attract younger farmers and build a more sustainable rural economy.

Conclusion

In embracing regenerative agriculture, we answer God's call to be faithful stewards of creation, nurturing the soil that sustains life and protecting the vulnerable among us by securing our shared food future. By supporting this vital shift, the Presbyterian Church (USA) can affirm its commitment to justice, hope, and care for God's earth, inspiring communities to cultivate flourishing lands, resilient ecosystems, and abundant harvests for generations to come. Let us rise together to this sacred responsibility and lead boldly toward a healed and thriving creation.