

Regenerative Organic Certified®

Terms & Definitions

This document provides the official terms and definitions used within the Regenerative Organic Certified® (ROC) Framework. It is intended to ensure consistent interpretation and application of the standard across all stakeholders, including producers, certification bodies, auditors, and supply chain actors. The definitions herein establish a common technical language aligned with relevant international norms and best practices, supporting clarity in implementation, auditing, and compliance.

Soil Health and Land Management

- **Agroforestry:** The practice of incorporating cultivation and conservation of trees as part of an agricultural operation. Agroforestry enhances soil protection, carbon sequestration, soil moisture retention, & biodiversity, while increasing income through the simultaneous production of trees and crops.
- **Biodiversity:** Biodiversity, or biological diversity, is the diversity of life existing at three levels: genetic, species, and ecosystem. Biodiversity includes variety in all forms of life, from bacteria and fungi to grasses, ferns, trees, insects, and mammals. It encompasses the diversity found at all levels of organization, from genetic differences between individuals and populations (groups of related individuals) to the types of natural communities (groups of interacting species) found in a particular area. Biodiversity also includes the full range of natural processes upon which life depends, such as nutrient cycling, carbon and nitrogen fixation, predation, symbiosis and natural succession. Regenerative Organic Certified® requirements in the Soil pillar work towards increasing biodiversity above and below the ground.
- **Carbon Sequestration:** The process by which atmospheric carbon dioxide is taken up by trees, grasses, and other plants through photosynthesis and stored as carbon in biomass (trunks, branches, foliage, and roots) and soils. For agricultural operations, increased carbon sequestration may be achieved through, for example, reduced tillage practices, complex crop rotations which include forages and green manure crops, agroforestry, reforestation, or the use of biomass-containing amendments.
- **Compost:** Compost, when properly managed, results in a high-quality soil amendment. Adding compost may increase the water holding capacity of the soil, helping farmers to produce a good crop even in years of low precipitation. Compost improves soil structure and stability, recycles nutrients, stabilizes volatile nitrogen, converts wastes into resources and suppresses soil-borne diseases. The composting process destroys weed seeds and pathogenic microorganisms, while beneficial microorganisms grow and multiply in great numbers. Synthetic fertilizers can provide soluble nutrients for plant growth, but do not build the soil's long-term biological reserves as well as compost does, and therefore are not permitted under Regenerative Organic Certified®.
- **Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFO):** Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs), as defined by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), are lots or facilities (other than an aquatic animal production facility) where animals have been, are, or will be stabled or confined and fed or maintained for a total of 45 days or more in any 12-month period. Crops, vegetation, forage growth, or

post-harvest residues are not sustained in the normal growing season over any portion of the lot or facility. The EPA provides specific thresholds by animal sector for small, medium, and large CAFOs. For example, a large CAFO for beef cattle is defined as 1,000 or more “animal units” confined for over 45 days a year.

- **Crop Rotation:** Crop rotation is a systematic approach of growing different annual and herbaceous perennial crops in succession in the same field. The goals of crop rotation are to help manage organic soil fertility and also to help avoid or reduce problems with diseases, pests and weeds. The more complex and long the rotation, the greater the benefits. Seven year rotations that include at least three years of herbaceous perennials are ideal for building soil health. Crop rotations as such are not applicable to woody perennial cropping systems such as orchards and vineyards.
- **Green Manure Crops:** Cover crops grown specifically for soil building. These typically include shallow tilling to incorporate the crop while it is still green. Roller crimping or irrigating after laying down the crop is an alternative way to help the green manure crop break down, especially in perennial systems.
- **High Conservation Value (HCV):** High Conservation Value (HCV): Biological, ecological, social, or cultural values of outstanding significance or critical importance within a landscape, which require specific management to maintain or enhance. These values typically include areas with high biodiversity (such as endemic, rare, or threatened species), large landscape-level ecosystems, critical ecosystem services (e.g., water regulation or erosion control), as well as sites fundamental to meeting the basic needs or cultural identity of local communities.
- **Fallow agricultural land** refers to arable land, not under cultivation of a crop that is set aside for some time before it is cultivated again. The period is managed by the operations based on the existing local agriculture environment. A fallow period practice intends to improve natural resources such as increasing soil health and fertility, reducing the need for cultivation or weed control, increasing water retention, providing habitat for natural enemies, pollinators, and wildlife, and allowing grazing or pasturing of livestock.
- **Intercropping or interseeding** is the growing of two or more crops within the same field or growing area, simultaneously or at the same time.
- **Invasive Species:** Invasive plants and animals that are non-native (or alien) to the ecosystem under consideration and whose introduction causes or is likely to cause economic or environmental harm or harm to human health. Invasive species can be plants, animals, and other organisms (e.g. microbes). Human actions are the primary means of invasive species introductions.
- **Mulching:** The practice of covering the soil surface with organic, biodegradable materials of natural origin, such as crop residues, straw, leaves, wood chips, compost, or other plant-based matter, to protect soil, conserve moisture, suppress weeds, regulate soil temperature, and enhance soil biological activity. Synthetic materials, including plastic or other non-biodegradable coverings, are not considered mulching under this definition.
- **Pasture:** Pasture is a land use type having vegetation cover comprised primarily of native or introduced forage species that is used for livestock grazing.

- **Perennial Crops:** Crops which are alive year-round and are harvested multiple times before dying. Apples and alfalfa are examples of perennials (apples being a woody perennial and alfalfa an herbaceous perennial) that are already commercially grown and harvested. Perennial plants develop much greater root mass than annual crops and protect the soil year-round, leaving fields less vulnerable to wind, water, and soil erosion.
- **Quick Acting Fertilizers:** Quick-acting soluble fertilizers are defined as highly water-soluble nutrient inputs that release nutrients immediately upon application, providing rapid plant uptake and causing short-term nutrient availability rather than gradual soil-mediated release. These fertilizers are typically applied to supply readily available nutrients, particularly nitrogen, and are associated with increased risks of nutrient leaching, volatilization, and disruption of soil biological processes.
- **Riparian Areas:** Plant communities contiguous to and affected by surface and subsurface hydrologic features of perennial or intermittent moving and standing water bodies (e.g. rivers, streams, lakes, or drainage ways). Riparian areas have one or both of the following characteristics: 1) distinctly different vegetative species than adjacent areas, and 2) species similar to adjacent areas but exhibiting more vigorous or robust growth forms. Riparian areas are usually transitional between wetland and upland.
- **Rotational Grazing:** Rotational grazing is a livestock production system where livestock graze in one portion (a paddock) of a pasture that has been divided into several paddocks. Livestock are systematically moved from paddock to paddock based on the stage of growth of the forages and on the objectives of the grazing system. While one paddock is being grazed, the rest of the pasture rests. This rest and recovery time maintains forage plants and builds soil organic matter.
- **Silvopasture:** A form of agroforestry, the practice of combining forestry and grazing of animals in a mutually beneficial way. A properly managed silvopasture operation enhances soil protection and increases long-term incomes due to the simultaneous production of trees and grazing animals.
- **Soil Health:** Soil health, also referred to as soil quality, is defined as the continued capacity of soil to function as a vital living ecosystem that sustains plants, animals, and humans. Soil isn't an inert growing medium, but rather is teaming with billions of bacteria, fungi, and other microbes that are the foundation of an elegant symbiotic ecosystem. Soil is an ecosystem that can be managed to provide nutrients for plant growth, absorb and hold rainwater for use during dryer periods, filter and buffer potential pollutants from leaving our fields, serve as a firm foundation for agricultural activities, and provide habitat for soil microbes to flourish and diversify to keep the ecosystem running smoothly. Improving soil health is one of the key targets of Regenerative Organic Certified®.
- **Surrounding Ecosystem:** The natural ecological systems and processes located within and adjacent to an agricultural operation, extending to a minimum radius of 3 kilometers (1.8 miles) from the operation's managed area, that are influenced by, or interact with, the operation's management activities. This includes, but is not limited to, soil and subsoil, surface and groundwater, native and managed vegetation, wildlife and pollinators, ecological corridors, riparian areas, wetlands, and other habitats that contribute to ecosystem functions such as biodiversity, nutrient cycling, water regulation, and climate resilience.
- **Tillage:** Preparation of soil by mechanical agitation of various types, such as digging, stirring, and overturning. Biological principles and mechanical termination of cover crops may reduce or eliminate

the need for tilling. Tillage operations can be divided into the following categories:

- **Primary tillage:** Operations include the use of the moldboard plow, chisel plow, or disk plow. It is often the most intensive form of tillage. For example, moldboard plowing inverts the soil over the entire field. Primary tillage marks the end of one cropping season and the beginning of the next and creates a dramatic visible change on the landscape.
- **Secondary tillage:** Operations used to prepare the seedbed. This may include the use of tandem or off-set disks, field cultivator, harrows, packers and coulters.
- **Tertiary tillage:** Operations that disturb the soil during seeding, management, or harvesting the crop
- **Vegetative Cover:** A vegetative cover is the maintenance of plants in place to reduce soil erosion and prevent desiccation of soil microbial communities, resulting from soil left exposed. Vegetative cover will suppress weeds, recycle nutrients back to the soil, increase soil organic matter, sequester carbon in the soil, increase soil moisture and reduce erosion. Maintaining a living vegetative cover year round is ideal, but not possible for most annual production systems.

Animal Welfare

- **Beak Trimming / De-Beaking:** The removal of all or a portion of a bird's beak.
- **Body Condition Score:** A system of measuring how thin or fat an animal is by reference to a standardized scale
- **Carrying Capacity:** The average number of animals that can be rotationally grazed on a given area of pasture for a year without harming it. It is a measure of a pasture's ability to produce enough forage to meet the requirements of grazing animals.
- **Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFO):** Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs), as defined by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), are lots or facilities (other than an aquatic animal production facility) where animals have been, are, or will be stabled or confined and fed or maintained for a total of 45 days or more in any 12-month period. Crops, vegetation, forage growth, or post-harvest residues are not sustained in the normal growing season over any portion of the lot or facility. The EPA provides specific thresholds by animal sector for small, medium, and large CAFOs. For example, a large CAFO for beef cattle is defined as 1,000 or more "animal units" confined for over 45 days a year.
- **Commercial Livestock Operation:** Animals are raised with the primary purpose of generating a profit. Non-commercial animals are those that generally have functions outside of or alongside profit, such as draught power, transport, manure production, or for educational purposes. The Five Freedoms described below must be demonstrated for all animals. Contact the ROA for additional guidance on determining if your livestock operation is considered commercial under the Regenerative Organic Certified®.
- **Dehorning:** The practice of removing or routinely trimming/tipping horns. To earn Regenerative Organic Certified®, dehorning and routine trimming/tipping of horns are prohibited. The use of polled breeds is recommended. Trimming of the horns is only permitted for medical purposes when the health of the cow is negatively affected by their horn length (e.g., horn tips are rubbing the eyes) or when the length could negatively impact the welfare of other animals, but this procedure must be performed by an experienced individual using a method of low-stress handling and restraint along with adequate analgesic and

anesthetic pain control. Additionally, trimming must avoid the live innervated tissue within the horns.

- **Disbudding:** The removal or destruction of horn-producing cells before an animal's horns become attached to its skull. To earn Regenerative Organic Certified®, this practice is prohibited in calves over three weeks of age. Hot iron cauterization allowed up to three weeks of age, which must be preceded and followed by administration of appropriate anesthetic and analgesia to provide short- and long-term pain relief. The procedure must be performed by an experienced individual using low stress handling and restraint techniques (e.g., sedation, disbudding crate). Any other methods of disbudding prohibited (e.g., caustic paste, scooping). The use of polled breeds is recommended over disbudding practices. If Regenerative Organic Certified® producers disbud, they must demonstrate they are incorporating polled genetics via semen purchase for artificial insemination, herd bull selection, or replacement cow purchase. Producers who are disbudding must use polled genetics for breeding at least 20% of their cow herd year over year or until their calves no longer require disbudding. If the producer is unable to find suitable polled genetics, a record detailing the efforts made to source the genetics and why such efforts were unsuccessful must be made available to the inspector for review at each inspection.
- **Five Freedoms:** The Animal Welfare module leverages the five freedoms for animal welfare, which include:
 1. Freedom from hunger or thirst by ready access to fresh water and a diet to maintain full health and vigor
 2. Freedom from discomfort by providing an appropriate environment including shelter and a comfortable resting area
 3. Freedom from pain, injury, and disease by prevention or rapid diagnosis and treatment
 4. Freedom to express normal behaviors by providing sufficient space, proper facilities and company of the animal's own kind
 5. Freedom from fear and distress by ensuring conditions and treatment that avoid mental suffering
- **Handling:** The handling of animals covers the general treatment of animals during the various tasks performed and requirements of an operation. To minimize stress, pain, and suffering to an animal, Regenerative Organic Certified® prohibits certain practices, such as prodding (jabbing of animal with instrument), wattling (cutting chunks out of an animal's hide to hang under the animal's neck), and dehorning (removal of horns).
- **Mobile Harvesting Unit:** A mobile harvest unit, or mobile slaughterhouse, enables livestock and poultry farmers to slaughter their animals humanely on-site. This decreases the exposure of animals to stressful and inhumane treatment at large scale slaughter facilities.
- **Monogastrics:** Monogastric animals have a simple single-chambered stomach and include dogs, pigs, horses, and rabbits. Their ability to extract energy from cellulose digestion is less efficient than in ruminants, and therefore are permitted to feed on grains.
- **Non-Ambulatory Animals:** Animals that cannot rise from a recumbent position or that cannot walk, including, but not limited to, those with broken appendages, severed tendons or ligaments, nerve paralysis, fractured vertebral column, or metabolic conditions
- **Ruminants:** Ruminant species include cud-chewing animals such as cows, goats, bison, and sheep. Ruminants are designed to eat fibrous grasses, plants, and shrubs. A high-grain diet may cause physical problems for ruminants. Additionally, when ruminants are switched from pasture to grain, they can

become afflicted with numerous disorders, including a common but painful condition called “subacute acidosis.”

Farmer and Worker Fairness

- **Atypical Employment:** The use by an organization of labor arrangements that are designed or applied to circumvent or undermine obligations arising from applicable labor, employment, or social security laws and regulations. This includes, but is not limited to, labor-only contracting, repeated or consecutive short-term or fixed-term contracts, false apprenticeship, trainee or internship schemes, misclassification of workers as independent contractors, or other arrangements that effectively deny workers legal protections, employment security, or access to statutory benefits.
- **Capacity Building:** The process of developing and strengthening the skills, instincts, abilities, processes, and resources to improve the social and economic position of farmers and workers.
- **Democratic Organizations (International):** The ability for small-scale farmers to be democratically organized in order to be able to compete globally. An organization, such as a smallholder cooperative or farmer group, that is governed through participatory and transparent decision-making processes in which members have the right and ability to influence decisions. This typically includes principles such as equal or equitable voting rights, representation, regular general assemblies, access to information, and accountability of leadership to members. Democratic organizations ensure that governance structures reflect the interests of their members and that decision-making authority is not concentrated in a single individual or group.
- **Documented System:** A structured set of documented policies, procedures, records, and controls established and maintained by an operation to ensure consistent implementation, monitoring, and verification of compliance with the Regenerative Organic Certified® (ROC) Framework. The documented system provides evidence of how requirements are met, supports traceability and accountability, and enables effective internal management and external auditing.
- **Equal Opportunity:** The policy of treating job applicants or employees equally without regard to the person’s race, color, gender, pregnancy, sexual orientation, disability, marital status, age, religion, political opinion, national extraction, social origin, or other personal characteristics.
- **Fair Payments:** Payment sufficient to cover cost of production including living wages for any workers and equivalent income to farmers, plus reinvestment in farm.
- **Family Members:** Those relatives who are related in direct line to the producer and live in the same household as the producer. It may include parents, spouses, brothers/sisters and children, but does not include aunts/uncles, cousins or other relatives.
- **Farm Worker:** Individuals engaged in agricultural activities on a farm, including crop production, livestock management, and related on-farm operations, who perform labor in exchange for wages or other forms of compensation. This includes permanent, temporary, seasonal, migrant, and contracted workers, regardless of their employment status or terms
- **Freedom of Association:** The right of workers and producers, without distinction and without prior

authorization, to establish, join, and participate in organizations of their own choosing for the purpose of representing their interests, including trade unions, workers' organizations, and producer associations. This right includes the freedom to organize, elect representatives, formulate programs, and carry out activities without interference, retaliation, or discrimination by the employer, organization, or public authorities.

- **Indigenous People:** Distinct social and cultural groups who identify themselves as indigenous and are recognized as such by others, with historical continuity to pre-colonial or pre-settler societies, and strong ties to their lands, territories, and natural resources. Indigenous Peoples typically maintain distinct institutions, languages, cultures, and belief systems, and are non-dominant within the societies in which they live. This definition is consistent with internationally recognized frameworks, including those of the United Nations and International Labour Organization, and is based on the principle of self-identification.
- **Collective Bargaining:** A process of negotiation conducted in good faith between employers or their representatives and legitimately chosen representatives of workers or producers, aimed at determining working conditions, terms of employment, remuneration, and other matters of mutual interest. Collective bargaining typically results in written agreements that set out the rights and obligations of the parties for a defined period and must be conducted in a manner that is free, voluntary, and without coercion.
- **Living Wage:** The remuneration received for a standard work week by a worker in a particular place sufficient to afford a decent standard of living for the worker and her or his family. Elements of a decent standard of living include food, water, housing, education, health care, transport, clothing, and other essential needs including provision for unexpected events.
- **Protection contracts:** Agreements, whether written or verbal, between an organization and workers, producers, or their representatives that purport to provide benefits, safeguards, or assurances, but which are used to restrict, waive, or undermine legally protected rights, including freedom of association, collective bargaining, access to grievance mechanisms, or statutory labor and social security protections. Protection contracts may include clauses that discourage unionization, require workers to renounce rights, or impose conditions that are less favorable than those provided under applicable law or collective agreements, and are not considered a legitimate substitute for free and good-faith collective bargaining.
- **Remediation:** The process of identifying, addressing, and resolving non-compliances, harms, or adverse impacts identified within an operation, including those affecting workers, communities, or the environment. Remediation involves implementing corrective actions to restore conditions to an acceptable state, prevent recurrence, and, where applicable, provide appropriate remedy to affected parties, in line with applicable laws.
- **Routine Workplace Audits:** Routine third-party audits should assess that producers minimize exposure to disease, ensure access to safe inputs, provide clean facilities, document identification procedures, record use of treatment products, and properly train workers on the operation's protocols.
- **Smallholder:** Small farming operations where land and labor productivity are comparatively low due to limited resources. Smallholder farmers often rely on farming as a primary means of livelihood and are at greater risk of vulnerability in the supply chain. Smallholders rely primarily on family labor for farm operations. Smallholder size may vary by farm type and commodity; however, some certifications set

thresholds so confirm with your certification program, if applicable. Most smallholders are organized by Internal Control System (ICS) for certification purposes. Contact the ROA for additional guidance on determining if your operation is considered a smallholder under the Regenerative Organic Certified®.

- **Trafficked Labor:** Any work performed by a person who has been recruited, transported, harbored or obtained by means of the use of threat, force, coercion or deception for the purpose of exploitation.