



**BRIDGING THE GAP:  
INCLUDING SOCIAL OUTCOMES  
IN REGENERATIVE AGRICULTURE PROGRAMS**

What could it look like to incentivize equity, justice, and thriving farm communities alongside positive environmental outcomes in regenerative agriculture?

# BACKGROUND

This toolkit was created by the Growing our Future initiative with the intention to fill a notable gap in standards, certifications, and verification programs focused on regenerative farming-- criteria related to social outcomes. With increasing commitments by the private sector to meet regenerative agriculture benchmarks, a true shift to a regenerative food and agriculture system must include not only changes in farming practices, but also efforts to foster justice, equity, and thriving farm communities.

A 2022 report from the Growing our Future initiative included a benchmark of existing standards, certifications and verification programs and how they measure social outcomes. It found that although farmer livelihoods and farmer-centered practices are often named as an important component of regenerative practice, it is rare for social criteria to be explicitly stated in evaluations and measurement. Furthermore, when social criteria are included, they often focus on risk mitigation or harm reduction rather than prioritizing equity, justice, and thriving farm communities in the regenerative agriculture system.

No criteria related to social impact or outcomes	Social initiatives named as a pillar or priority but not explicitly included in evaluation framework	Social impact criteria included in standard/evaluation framework
<p>Audubon Conservation Ranching protocol Regenagri Soil Regen Regenerative Verified™ Soil Carbon Initiative Farm Standard Understanding Ag, LLC</p>	<p>Danone Field to Market Fieldprint Platform* Nestlé Organic Cotton Accelerator (OCA) Farm Programme One Planet Business for Biodiversity (OP2B)* REGEN1 Savory Institute - Land to Market (L2M)</p> <p><b>FOR EXAMPLE:</b> Farmer-centered processes that are non-punitive Providing farmer education and training Engaging in long-term contract and fair pay</p>	<p>Anchors in Action Aligned Framework [March 2022 Draft] Sustainable Agriculture Initiative Platform (SAI): Farm Sustainability Assessment [Self-Assessment] Regenerative Organic Certification World Benchmarking Alliance: 2021 Food and Agriculture Benchmark Scoring Guidelines</p> <p><b>FOR EXAMPLE:</b> Adhering to local laws and international conventions Mitigating risks Doing good and creating healthy products Prioritizing justice, equity and community (climate justice, racial equity, food sovereignty, building community capacity, etc.)</p>
<p>Source: List of frameworks provided by Growing our Future participants. Benchmarking conducted using publicly available information * Frameworks have publicly shared a commitment to include social impact criteria but specific details or indicators are in development.</p>		

From our June 2022 report: A benchmark of how current food and agriculture assessment frameworks approach social impact

## ABOUT THIS TOOLKIT

### A starter kit for regenerative agriculture standards

This tool includes a list and initial framework of social outcomes, indicators, and resources that emerged from a co-creative process with Growing our Future farm community representatives. With farm community needs as the starting point, this provides guidance on how their visions could translate into social criteria for verification programs, standards, and certifiers to adopt alongside environmental metrics. Given that the standards available to evaluate regenerative outcomes are in various stages of development, some of the proposed criteria will require more development to be adopted by certifiers. However, regenerative agriculture programs should build, test, and validate these criteria in collaboration with farm communities to ensure they are designed for the diverse contexts in which farms and ranches operate.

### The engagement process is equally critical

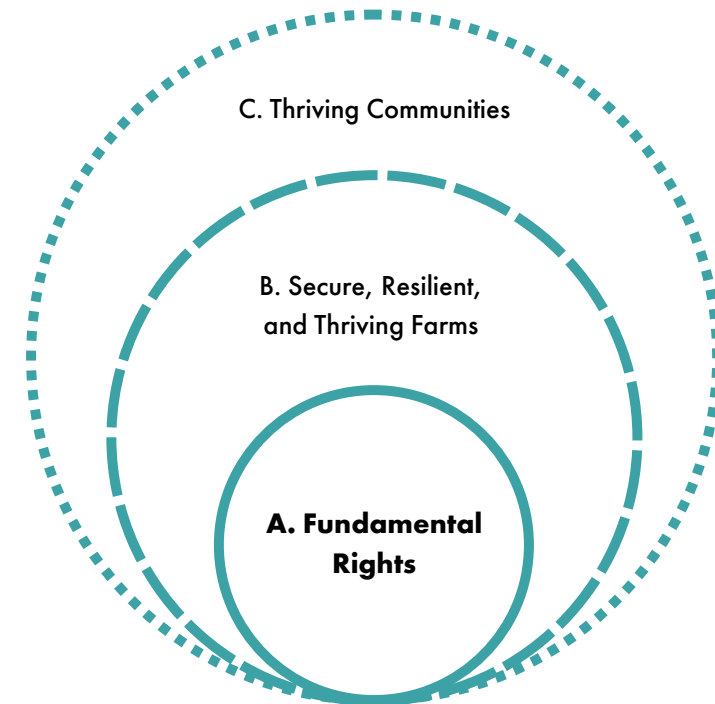
While inclusion of social metrics in existing regenerative agriculture programs is critical, there must also be changes to the way standards are developed and enforced; by engaging meaningfully with historically underserved farming and ranching communities, building trust, and reducing the burden of cost and time that reporting processes have on producers. Social metrics alone will not build an equitable agriculture system if the process of adoption, measurement, and enforcement remain inequitable.

### Equity must be centered in the process

Certification and verification programs often disproportionately burden small acreage producers and historically underserved farmers. When reviewing these criteria, programs must ensure they are:

- Sharing costs of compliance: Ensuring costs are shared by buyers and don't result in a disproportionate burden on small acreage farms
- Reaching out to historically underserved producers: Proactively addressing historical harm and barriers to access through technical assistance, support, and financing mechanisms
- Reducing the reporting burden: Supporting small acreage farms by reducing reporting requirements and leveraging existing data, surveys, and reports.

## WHAT'S IN THIS TOOL?



Within this toolkit is an initial framework for ensuring fundamental rights, thriving farms, and thriving communities are at the heart of regenerative agriculture practices. It considers how to ensure benefits for producers and their communities — a need often stated explicitly by farm community representatives. The tables below include:

- Outcome: The social outcome that must be ensured by the regenerative agriculture system (Source: Growing our Future farm community representative interviews)
- Rationale: Brief reasoning highlighting the importance and context for inclusion
- Indicator(s): Ways in which outcomes might be measured (Source: farm community representative interviews or existing resources)
- Resources/References: Existing frameworks that provide greater data or detail on the specific criteria

## A. Fundamental Rights For Workers On Farms

Fundamental rights for workers include living wages, benefits, health and safety protocols, and good working conditions. Although the aim is for the agriculture system to collectively go beyond risk mitigation and compliance, this does not presume that all farms are meeting this baseline. The US Agriculture is rife with human rights violations, such as [the loophole in US labor law that allows children as young as 12 to work unlimited hours on farms](#) as long as they do not miss school, or the [forced labor and human trafficking of migrant farm workers](#) on US farms.

Table A below highlights the outcomes named by Growing our Future farm community participants, but it does not encompass the exhaustive list of worker rights, legal guidelines, and indicators. Ample resources already exist to advance these critical areas; we hold the assumption that following the law, [ILO Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work](#), and the [UN Global Compact](#) are the baseline and minimum responsibilities for all farms and companies.

Fundamental Rights		
Outcome	Rationale	Resources and References for Indicator(s)
<p><b>Living Wages</b> Farmers, workers and their families have an improved standard of living</p>	<p>Households with noncommercial farms (bringing in less than \$350,000 in gross cash farm income) reported median farm income of -\$250 in 2022 (USDA). Improved farmer income can allow communities to adopt better crops and technologies, increase profitability, and improve quality of life.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Anchors in Action Aligned Framework</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Rainforest Alliance Sustainable Agriculture Standard (5.4)</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Regenerative Organic Certified (8.2)</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Sustainable Agriculture Initiative (SAI): Farm Sustainability Assessment</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">World Benchmarking Alliance: 2021 Food &amp; Agriculture Benchmark (D10)</a></li> </ul> <p>Living Wage Resources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">MIT Living Wage Calculator</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Global Living Wage Coalition</a></li> </ul>
<p><b>Access to Safe Water and Food</b> Farmers and workers have access to clean and safe water</p>	<p>Access to safe water and sanitation is essential to enable healthy and productive livelihoods as it has important links to nutritional outcomes and gender equality. A safe and healthy working environment is a fundamental right at work as mandated by the ILO.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Anchors in Action Aligned Framework</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Rainforest Alliance Sustainable Agriculture Standard (5)</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Regenerative Organic Certified</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Sustainable Agriculture Initiative (SAI): Farm Sustainability Assessment</a></li> </ul>
<p><b>Access to Healthcare</b> Workers and their families have access to quality healthcare</p>	<p>Farming has one of the highest occupational fatality rates of all occupations. Farmers are also at high risk for work-related lung diseases, noise-induced hearing loss, skin diseases, and certain cancers associated with chemical use and prolonged sun exposure.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Regenerative Organic Certified [Partial criteria]</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Sustainable Agriculture Initiative (SAI): Farm Sustainability Assessment [Partial criteria]</a></li> </ul>
<p><b>Good Housing</b> Workers and families living on-site have access to safe, clean, and decent housing</p>	<p>Farmworkers tend to have limited access to safe, healthy, and affordable housing choices. Furthermore, in areas that are typically not subject to standards or regulations, available rentals may be substandard and expensive relative to farmworkers' incomes (Farmworker Justice).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Rainforest Alliance Sustainable Agriculture Standard (5)</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Regenerative Organic Certified</a></li> </ul>
<p><b>Fair Contracts</b> Employment contracts are executed and honored in good faith. Workers are made aware of their rights and terms including safe hours of work, freedom of association, etc.</p>	<p>Farm workers, especially undocumented workers are often vulnerable to exploitation by employers, including withheld income and health and safety violations, with limited legal recourse with or with the fear of retaliation. Fair contracts in which workers are made aware of their rights, can reduce risks of exploitation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Anchors in Action Aligned Framework</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Regenerative Organic Certified</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Sustainable Agriculture Initiative (SAI): Farm Sustainability Assessment</a></li> </ul>

## B. Secure, Resilient, and Thriving Farms

While the criteria above are critical, the regenerative agriculture system must move beyond the mindset of risk mitigation and compliance and towards ensuring secure, resilient, and thriving farms. Producers named that their vision for a just agriculture system is one in which they can “grow [their] own food”, “afford to get kids in extracurricular activities,” and “keep and pass their farms to the next generation,” – in short, producers want to experience positive economic and health outcomes enabled by their own farms. The criteria below explores how social standards could measure outcomes in the same way that regenerative agriculture programs measure environmental and landscape outcomes. What might it look like to label a regenerative farm as one where outcomes for producers are improving as well?

Secure, Resilient, and Thriving Farms			
Outcomes	Rationale	Suggested Indicators	References for Indicator(s)
<p><b>Positive economic outcomes for producers</b> Producers (particularly small acreage and historically underserved) are thriving economically and farming is perceived as a safe, good job.</p>	<p>Improved incomes can allow farmers to adopt high-yield crops and technologies, increase profitability, improve financial security and allow for improvements in farmer quality of life.</p>	<p>↑ Increase in farmer income ↑ Increased share of profits from food costs ↑ Increase in children of producers in extracurricular activities ↑ Improved educational outcomes for children of producers ↑ Increased interest in farming employment (“youth pipeline”) ↓ Decrease in farmer debt</p>	<p>The indicators emerged from interviews with Growing our Future farm community participants. Farm-level assessments may be needed to measure these outcomes.</p>
<p><b>Secure land tenure</b> A diverse community of producers have secure land tenure and seed sovereignty.</p>	<p>The current food system has been built on forced land removal, racial discrimination, and exploitation. To address this legacy and reorient our food system to a just and regenerative one, programs must ensure land tenure is secure among historically underserved groups—including but not limited to Black, Indigenous, Latine, and immigrant farm communities, as well as young and beginning farmers, farmworkers, undocumented farmers, and small acreage producers.</p>	<p>↑ Increase in population with secure tenure rights to land, with (a) legally recognized documentation; and (b) who perceive their rights to land as secure ↑ Increase in secure land tenure among historically underserved populations ↑ Increased support for <u>heirs’ property rights</u> ↑ Increased use of open source seeds and sharing seeds with other farms</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">World Benchmarking Alliance: 2021 Food &amp; Agriculture Benchmark</a> [Partial criteria: Remediation for land conflicts]</li> <li>• <a href="#">Sustainable Agriculture Initiative (SAI): Farm Sustainability Assessment</a> [Partial criteria: Remediation for land conflicts]</li> </ul> <p>Greater investment is needed in data collection, reporting, and research on farmland tenure, ownership &amp; transition (see <a href="#">National Young Farmers Coalition: One Million Acres campaign</a>)</p>
<p><b>Positive health outcomes for producers</b> Producers and their families are thriving</p>	<p>Improving positive health outcomes for producers can increase the supply of a variety of healthy, sustainably produced foods near the communities where they may be consumed. Recent studies have suggested that increased availability of these foods can improve community health outcomes.</p>	<p>↑ Improved health outcomes among producers (eg. asthma, heart disease) ↓ Decrease in child hunger</p>	<p>Data on public health outcomes at a community-level is publicly available. This can provide initial information on existing health burdens and opportunities for improvement.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">EPA’s Environmental Justice Screening and Mapping Tool</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">CDC Places</a></li> </ul>
<p><b>Greater accountability from buyers</b> Buyers have responsibilities to farmers that prioritize fairness, long term-relationships, <u>collaboration, and trust with producers and suppliers.</u></p>	<p>The current agricultural marketplace greatly incentivizes benefits for large farms and large buyers. However, it does not deliver the livelihood outcomes needed and farmers farming regeneratively have limited market access. Buyers form an important part of the value chain and can accelerate greater responsibility and transparency.</p>	<p>↑ Increase in procurement budgets that prioritize fair prices to farmers and suppliers (AiA) ↑ Increase in share of profits going to suppliers and farmers ↑ Farmers can access multiple buyers ↑ Increase in buyer trust reported from producers ↑ Increase share of food sourced from historically underserved producers ↓ Decrease in lobbying against producer demands</p> <p><b>Proof of buyer practices</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engagement in fair and long-term contracts with transparent communication of pricing and terms.</li> <li>• Supplier diversification policy and commitment to prioritize sourcing from historically underserved producers. (AiA)</li> <li>• Engaged in public policy advocacy in alignment with producer communities (AiA)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anchors in Action Aligned Framework (Values-based procurement)</li> <li>• <a href="#">Agricultural Justice Project Social Stewardship Standards</a> (Buyer Responsibilities)</li> <li>• <a href="#">Regenerative Organic Certified (Fair Contracts)</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Sustainable Agriculture Initiative SAI: Farm Sustainability Assessment</a> (Fair Contracts)</li> </ul> <p>Farm coalitions and advocates such as the <a href="#">National Family Farm Coalition</a> have developed policy recommendations to improve buyer contracts. Buyers support ongoing momentum on the ground and ensure their <u>policy advocacy</u> is aligned with demands from farmers.</p>

## C. Thriving Communities

A just regenerative agriculture system should be one that delivers benefits to the immediate community. Producers named that they want the food they grow to directly increase “access to healthy food in their community” and they want the farms they grow it on to “create positive impact through engagement with the community.” Regenerative farms should be enriching the people around them, improving community health, and making them more resilient.

While this concept resonates with most practitioners of regenerative agriculture and in local food movements, it proves to be challenging through the lens of existing measurement and verification methods. There are very few examples of how to directly attribute one farm’s action with wider community outcomes – yet, this is the critical outcome farm communities want to see. Below is an initial exploration of what it might look like to directly translate those desires into indicators. They emerged from a co-creative process with farm communities unburdened by the lens of methodological feasibility. While these indicators may not be easily adaptable at first, they shed light on a gap in existing approaches and an opportunity to develop new program practices. This is an opportunity for brands and programs to develop new methodologies for community engagement and accountability, and find new forms of measurement by integrating and investing in existing data reporting mechanisms such as [USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service \(NASS\)](#), or [EPA’s Environmental Justice Screening and Mapping Tool \(EJScreen\)](#).

Thriving Communities		
Outcomes	Suggested Indicators	References for Indicator(s)
<b>Improvements in economic outcomes in the community</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>↑ Increase in money staying in community</li> <li>↑ Increase in income</li> <li>↑ Improvement in educational outcomes</li> <li>↓ Reduction of food costs in community</li> </ul>	Public data resource: <a href="#">American Community Survey</a>
<b>Improvements in community public health</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>↑ Increase in nutritional value of food in community</li> <li>↑ Increase in community health services</li> <li>↓ Decrease in public health disparity (eg. asthma, heart disease)</li> <li>↓ Decrease in child hunger</li> </ul>	Public data can provide initial information on existing health burdens and relevant indicators: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">EPA's Environmental Justice Screening and Mapping Tool</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">CDC Places</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">American Community Survey</a></li> </ul>
<b>Strengthened community relations and interactions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>↑ Increased investment from buyers in community</li> <li>↑ Increase in share of food that is distributed locally</li> <li>↑ Increase access to culturally relevant food</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anchors in Action Aligned Framework</li> </ul>
<b>Increased community resilience</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>↑ Investment from buyers emergency and climate adaptation preparedness planning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anchors in Action Aligned Framework</li> </ul> Public data resource: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">EPA's Environmental Justice Screening and Mapping Tool</a></li> </ul>

# WHAT NEXT?

With the rapid growth of market-driven incentives for regenerative agriculture, we must ensure that equity, justice, and thriving communities are prioritized alongside positive environmental outcomes. Otherwise, we risk reinforcing an inequitable and mechanistic food system. Regenerative agriculture has the potential to not only transform our landscapes but also our connection to farmers, land, and food. These criteria were developed through a collaborative process with farming and ranching communities. What emerged was a transformative vision for what a just agriculture system must deliver and the underlying limitations and of existing methods.

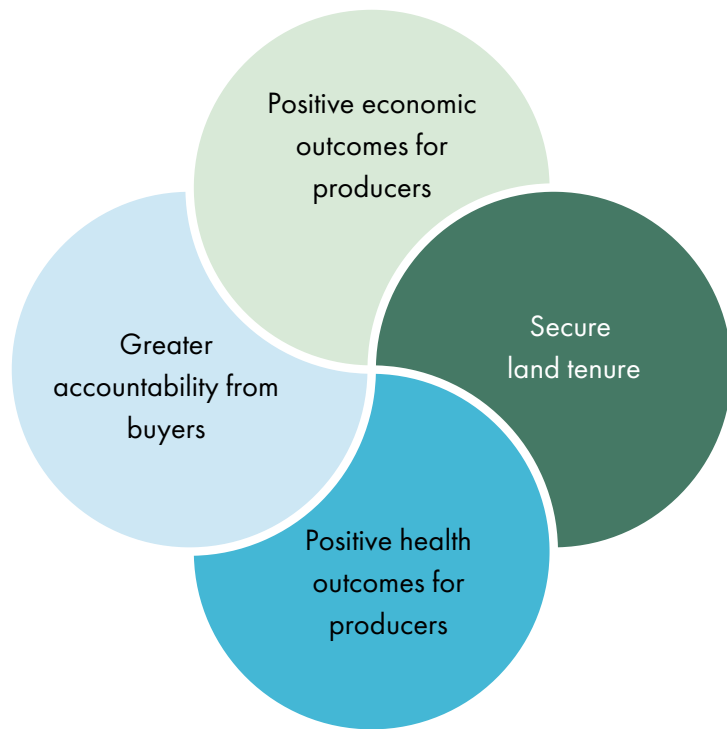
We invite technical solution providers and other stakeholders across the agriculture system to explore what it truly takes to embed social outcomes into measurement programs – building relationships with farming and ranching communities, and developing a formal governance model and engagement process to co-create this work over the long term.

This toolkit was developed by the Growing our Future initiative in 2023, with input from participating stakeholders including changemakers at Latino Farmers and Ranchers International, Rural Coalition, Tuskegee University, and many more vital voices. For more information or to join our work on Social Outcomes for regenerative agriculture, led by Natasha Mehta, please [contact Natasha](#).

## APPENDIX

The following diagrams visualize the initial recommendations for certifiers to incorporate into existing and emerging standards. It is crucial to note that these four outcomes for each category are starting points based on the learnings gathered through the Growing our Future network. In order to build more comprehensive frameworks for standards, certifiers can use these pillars as a foundation from which to build robust mechanisms for ensuring social outcomes are prioritized within regenerative agriculture programs.

### Initial foundational pillars visualized for Section B. Secure, Resilient and Thriving Farms



### Initial foundational pillars visualized for Section C. Positive Community Outcomes

