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WILDFARMED
REGENERATIVE STANDARDS

**“FOOD PRODUCTION
IS THE NUMBER
ONE CAUSE OF SOIL
DEGRADATION,
DEFORESTATION
AND BIODIVERSITY**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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We know we can grow abundant and affordable food in a way which restores soils and ecosystems. If we do so across 70% of the UK that is farmland, it will transform landscapes in a country that today has less biodiversity than that of any G7 nation.

With the NHS in crisis, it is seldom mentioned that health begins with the quality of what we eat and the quality of what we eat depends on the soils in which our food is grown. How we farm is fundamental to water quality. Today even more of our rivers are polluted by agricultural runoff than they are by sewage. It is for these reasons that regenerative farming is increasingly held up as the answer to so many of our problems.

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BUT WHAT DOES “REGENERATIVE” MEAN?
The answer, increasingly and unfortunately, is anything to anybody. We are at a critical moment when the momentum to change our food system must be seized if we are to genuinely restore landscapes.

We have visited farmers of all types to hear the challenges they face and have spoken to people across all sections of the food system, from regional grain networks to policymakers, to soil scientists, notably at Rothamsted, one of the world’s oldest agricultural research stations, now a Wildfarmed partner in our R&D.

With our own 15 years of research, and the learnings from our Wildfarmed community of growers, all this has been distilled into the Wildfarmed Standards. The standards set out how we farm in a way which combines accessibility and flexibility for growers with regenerative outcomes and traceability for our customers.

All of the research in fact came down to a fairly simple set of parameters. Nature’s foundational principle is diversity and we need to apply this not just in the margins around the fields, but in the fields themselves. This means keeping the soil covered with a diversity of plants, growing cereals with companions rather than as monocultures, and planting diverse cover crops to fill any gaps in the cycle.

It means integrating grazing into cropping systems, growing without pesticides and using soil and plant testing to ensure that any nutritional amendments are only those required for the health of the crop. These standards will be subject to independent third party auditing by Control Union.

Whilst this framework is simple, it’s the detail and execution that is hard. It requires community and knowledge support for farmers together with a field to plate supply chain to give price stability. Community support and price stability are critical for farmer wellbeing. Swings in commodity and farm chemical prices mean that DEFRA’s Farmer Opinion Tracker found mental health issues were some of the biggest concerns facing farmers.

Wildfarmed growers are a connected, mutually supportive farming community, provided with access to expert advice, a set of crop and soil monitoring tools to manage their transition, crop varieties suited to low input systems, our R&D trials, tailored online resources and farm open days. Farming under our Standards can not only produce enough food, but better food and a more resilient supply. Healthy soil increases both nutritional quality and capacity to retain moisture which means that it is the basis of food security in a changing climate.

A third party life cycle analysis found that flour produced under Wildfarmed standards is carbon negative and year one findings show a 30% increase in antioxidant levels in Wildfarmed crops compared to those conventionally grown. The diverse plant mixtures required in Wildfarmed cereal fields mean that they are full of pollinator flowers. When comparing Wildfarmed and conventional fields at a BBC Springwatch site, the Wildfarmed field had a fivefold increase in invertebrates.

But it isn't enough to build a farming community that's properly supported and a field to plate supply chain. All of this is a huge project, but all of it will falter if procurement budgets aren't used to support it. Procurement budgets are the only thing that can change landscapes.

NATURE'S FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLE IS DIVERSITY



REGENERATIVE IS NOT JUST A SLOGAN.

The purpose of the Wildfarmed Standards is to offer a practical alternative to conventional grain production that can supply the high street at affordable prices. If we don't find a way to put the natural world at the heart of day to day economic reality, then conservation, in the words of Wendell Berry, will be nothing more than "rear-guard defensive actions on a dying earth". On the Wildfarmed growers WhatsApp group a farmer shared a picture of a bi-crop of wheat and beans with the caption "Having never grown an arable crop without pesticide & fungicide before, this crop is blowing my mind". This is an example of the real, field by field transformation that Wildfarmed customers are supporting.

Regenerating our soils, health, water, wildlife and food requires a complete mindset shift; from control to nurture, linear to circular, extractive to regenerative. It requires community and a new kind of supply chain. It's not easy. But with so little ecological road left, the time for action is now. There are of course many ways to build regenerative systems, and a wide diversity of solutions will be the beauty of it. The Wildfarmed Standards aim to help ensure that regenerative farming, something with such potential to provide us with a better future - doesn't just become a slogan.



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