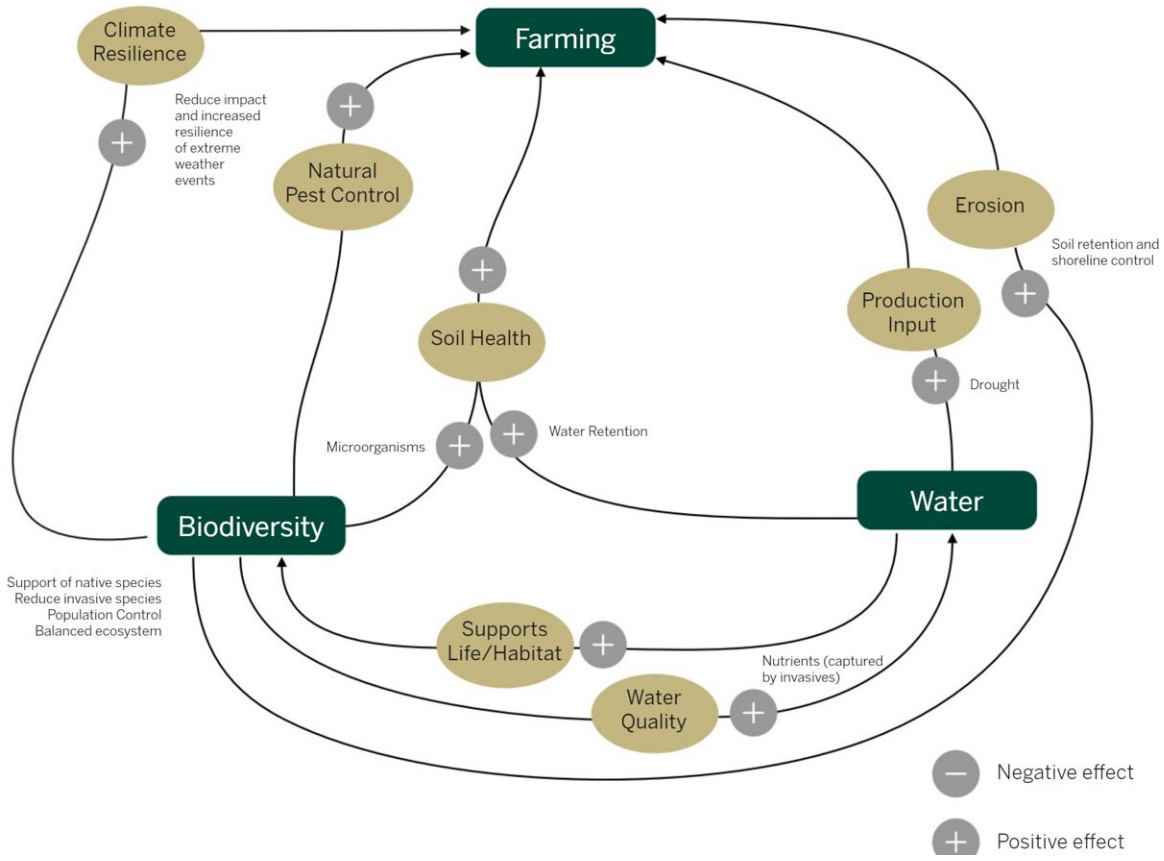
Report makes five recommendations to promote regenerative farming

February 22 2024



Natural Flows Diagram, positive flows of how biodiversity and water support farming. Credit: *Advancing Regenerative Agriculture in Canada: Barriers, Enablers, and Recommendations*

In a new report, researchers at Ivey Business School offer evidence-

based research, best practices, and critical recommendations for farming that supports ecosystems through natural agricultural principles, a method known as regenerative agriculture.

The report, Advancing Regenerative Agriculture in Canada: Barriers, Enablers, and Recommendations, was led by Ivey professor Diane-Laure Arjaliès, founder and lead of the Ivey Sustainable Finance Lab. She said she has observed an abundance of scientific research—both Western and Indigenous—pointing to the economic and ecological merits of regenerative agriculture. Despite this widespread knowledge and farmer consensus, the practice has yet to find its ground.

"Farmers want to have healthy land, see their yields increase over time, and do better for our resilience to climate change. But, when we look at the numbers, we don't see a huge adoption of regenerative practices," she said.

This type of agriculture, said the researchers, was once a longstanding, sustainable practice in Canada. However, industrial innovations and population growth led to the dominance of large-scale mechanical practices in the sector. Despite boosting yields and productivity, this shift came at the cost of environmental health and future yields.

While Canadian farmers may recognize regenerative agriculture's vast environmental and financial benefits, the report notes many hesitate to adopt the approach due to perceived risks. The financial reality of relying solely on land yields, coupled with concerns about inflation, climate threats, and labor shortages, makes it challenging to shift away from industrial technologies, which are seen as essential for meeting current demands.

The researchers point out that implementing regenerative practices is also not a quick fix with clear timelines, a particular challenge in a

profession reliant on timing. The transition from implementation to consistent yield may span multiple years, which is costly for farmers without substantial investments. Additionally, for the nearly half of Canadian farmers who rent their land, making multi-year investments in soil health and ecosystems poses a significant financial risk.

To boost the widespread adoption of regenerative agriculture, the researchers made five key recommendations for stakeholders and rightsholders throughout the food value chain:

- The meaning of "regenerative agriculture" and its role in supporting current farming practices needs to be clarified. Greater education and clarity around the term will aid increased adoption.
- The value of nature in agricultural production needs to be taken into account. Developing innovative instruments that value biodiversity may attract sustainability-minded investors.
- An inclusive financial infrastructure, in cooperation with various actors along the value food chain, needs to be developed. Transitioning to regenerative agriculture involves shared financial responsibility across the entire food value chain, not just the farmers.
- A just transition by empowering other ways of knowing and doing needs to be made. It's important to seek perspectives often marginalized in agriculture, such as Indigenous and racialized communities and migrant workers.
- Systems-level solutions are needed to create a system shift. The report highlighted the transformative power of small changes from various system actors. Policy-makers, planners, financial services, and the agricultural industry all play a pivotal role in driving change.

In response to the report, the Ivey Academy and the Ivey Centre for

Building Sustainable Value—where the Sustainable Finance Lab is hosted—convened a livestream panel event, Regenerative Agriculture: The Role of Finance & the Value Chain, as the second part of their Future of Agri-food Series.

The discussion, moderated by the Ivey Academy's Bryan Benjamin, addressed how regenerative agriculture could transform Canada's food system, aligning finance with sustainability and the role of partnerships in driving this transition.

Regenerative farming, said Arjaliès, is a key component in challenging climate change, and she is dedicated to advocating for its widespread adoption.

"Everyone benefits, everyone is committed to it, but no one is ready to change the business model, the value chain, and the valuation model to really prioritize this," she said.

In September 2024 Arjaliès and her team at Ivey's Centre for Building Sustainable Value will engage in an extensive new study with collaborators across the country to measure the impact of innovation on regenerative agriculture practices. The study will be conducted as a large, randomized control trial, with a goal to foster a community of practices, encourage collaborations, and test for increased adoption. Arjaliès extended a wide invitation for new partners to join the study.

More information: Report: online.flippingbook.com/view/1022071935/

Provided by University of Western Ontario