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Soil health, The playground of the European Green Deal

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*Scientific Advice
Mechanism (SAM)*

Towards a Sustainable Food System

*Group of Chief Scientific Advisors
Scientific Opinion No.8, Mar 2020*

**Independent
Expert
Report**

A European legal framework is still lacking, as evidenced by several preparatory documents of the Green Deal strategies (e.g. the "from Farm to Fork" strategy, published in 2020).



The evidence review (SAPEA 2020a: 5.2) states that the **EU environmental policy** has traditionally given much attention to regulating the externalities of food production, e.g. through the nitrate and water framework directives, although an EU policy on soil quality is notably absent. Recently there has been a shift toward an

With the first Thematic Soil Strategy, the EU attempted to give itself a directive for soil protection. The Commission's proposal was approved by the Parliament, but was blocked by the opposition of five Member States. The proposal for a soil directive was formally withdrawn on 21 May 2014 by the European Commission.



2015-2020

A growing level of awareness has emerged in international fora: there are no national boundaries to the problems of soil degradation.

SDG 15.3, target
“land degradation neutral World”, by 2030



...maintaining or improving global soil resources is essential to meet humanity's need for food, water and energy security'.

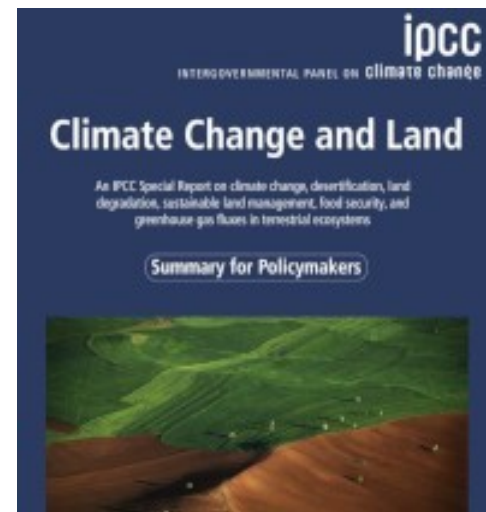




“... combating soil degradation is an urgent priority for the protection of biodiversity and ecosystem services that are vital to all life on earth, and for ensuring human well-being

The assessment report on
**LAND
DEGRADATION AND
RESTORATION**

“Soil is both a carbon sink and a source of greenhouse gases, and plays a key role in the exchange of energy and water between the earth's surface and the atmosphere.”

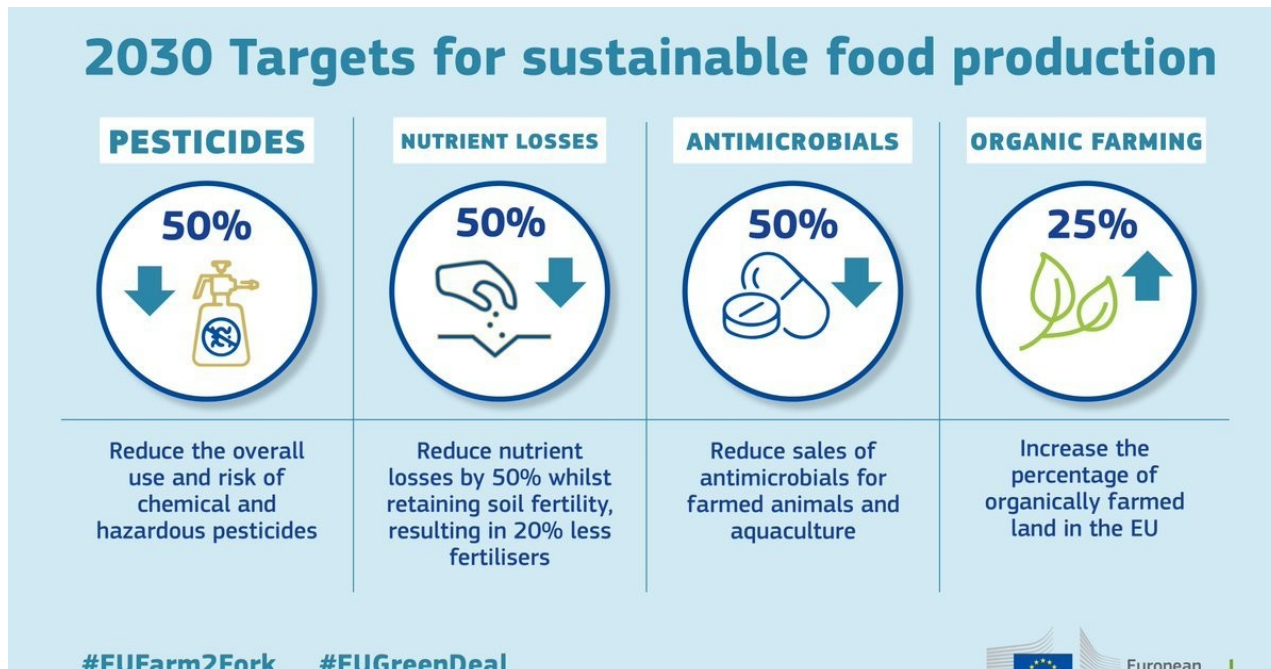


2019, Green Deal: the ambition of Ursula and Frans



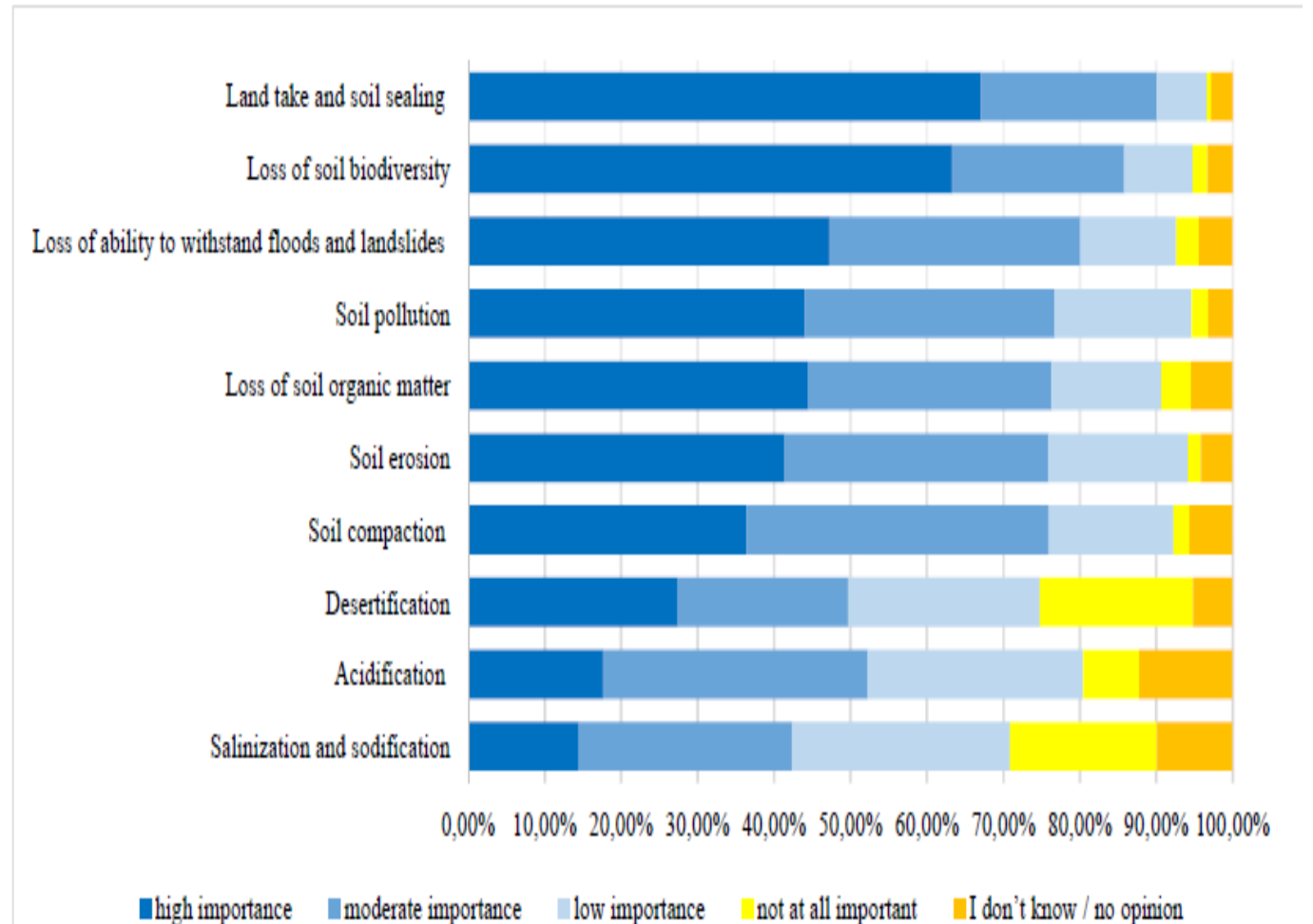
2020: the “Farm to Fork” and “Biodiversity 2030” strategies

‘Moving towards a more healthy and sustainable EU food system: a cornerstone of the European Green Deal’



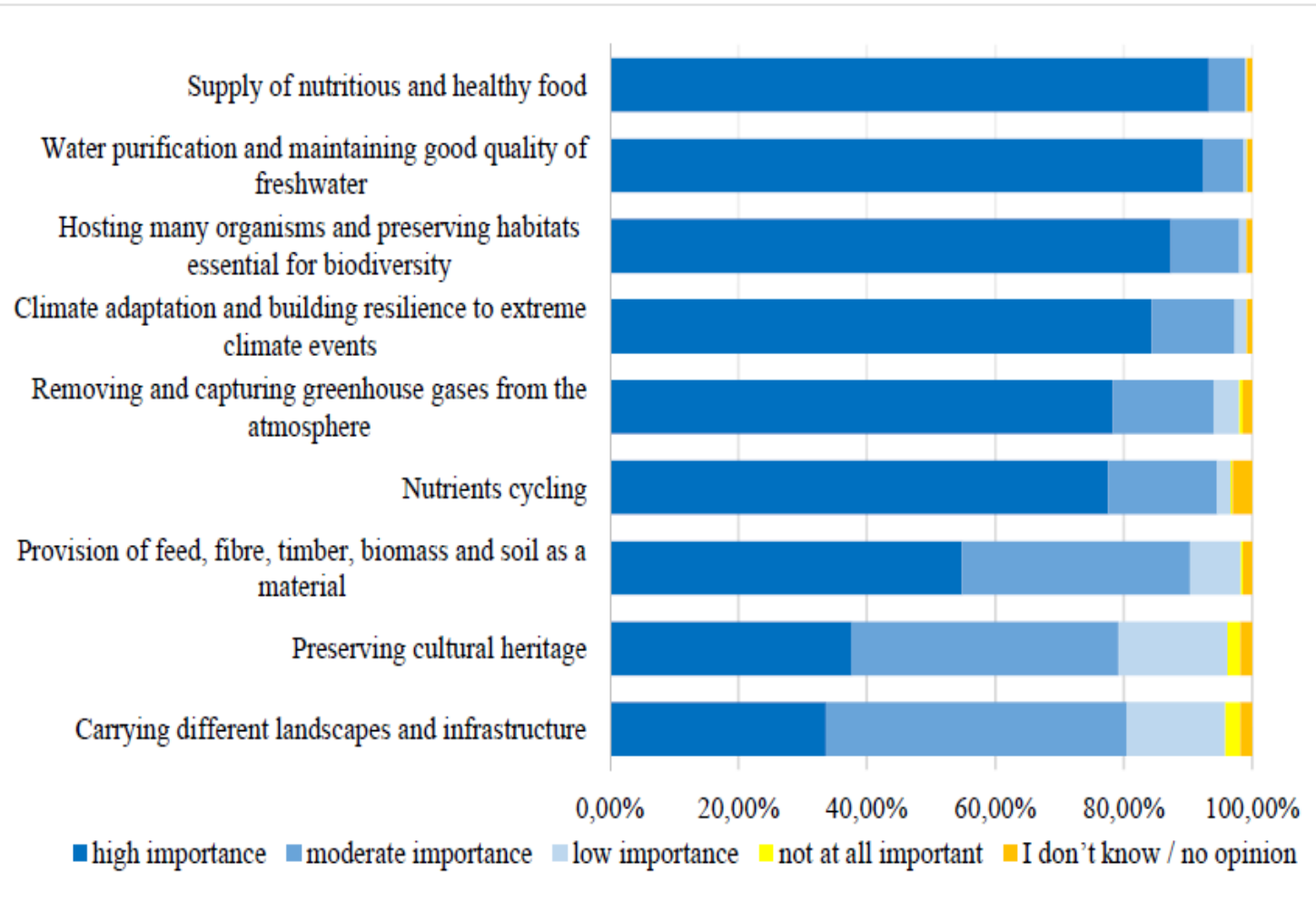
QUESTION 6. TO THE BEST OF YOUR KNOWLEDGE, WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING SOIL AND LAND DEGRADATION PROCESSES ARE THE MOST ACUTE IN YOUR COUNTRY?

New Soil Thematic Strategy (published Nov 2021): outputs from the public consultation



QUESTION 2. WHICH SOIL ECOSYSTEM SERVICES DO YOU CONSIDER AS THE MOST IMPORTANT?

Prioritary Soil Ecosystem services:
provision of food,
freshwater, biodiversity
conservation, climate
adaptation and
mitigation, mineral
nutrients cycling



April 2021, the EU Parliament vote a **'Resolution on soil Protection**

"Calls on the Commission to design an EU-wide common legal framework... for the protection and sustainable use of soil..."

November 2021: 10 MSs ask the EC **"a new legal framework for soil protection"**, in synergy with the water, air and biodiversity agendas, as far as the PAC and the EU Green Deal

17 November 2021: EU Soil Strategy for 2030
'Reaping the benefits of healthy soils for people, food, nature and climate'



Brussels, 17.11.2021
COM(2021) 699 final

"the Commission will present a specific legislative proposal on soil health by 2023 which will enable the objectives of this strategy to be pursued and achieve good soil health across the EU by 2050."

COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN
PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL
COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

EU Soil Strategy for 2030
Reaping the benefits of healthy soils for people, food, nature and climate

{SWD(2021) 323 final}

Key actions in the Soil Strategy

-  **To make Sustainable Soil Management the new normal:**
 - Propose a scheme for land owners to get their soils tested for free
 - Promote sustainable soil management through the Common Agricultural Policy and share best practices
-  **To boost circular economy:**
 - Investigate streams of excavated soils and consider proposing a '**soil passport**'
 - Integrate a '**land take hierarchy**' to enhance reuse of land and less use of new land, reaching **no net land take by 2050**
-  **Restore degraded soils and remediate contaminated sites**
-  **Act to prevent desertification**
-  **Increase research, data and monitoring on soil**
-  **To mitigate and adapt to climate change**, consider proposing legally binding objectives to halt the drainage of wetlands and organic soils, and to restore managed and drained peatlands
-  **Mobilise the necessary societal engagement and financial resources**

Consultation about the proposal of a Soil Health Law
Position Paper, March 2022

**SOIL HEALTH:
CIVIL SOCIETY CALLS FOR EUROPEAN LEADERSHIP IN THE CHALLENGE
TO COMBAT LAND DEGRADATION**

**European leadership means:
proper application of the principle of subsidiarity
principle**

- one common playground,**
- participatory and site-specific solutions**

trends in Europe requires action programs, inclusive and coordinated, whose effectiveness depends on a sound European leadership and a concurrence of responsibilities by all Member States, with the proper application of the principle of subsidiarity: subsidiarity is not a limit to action, but a positive tension for

Innovative tools in soil governance to overcome knowledge gaps and acknowledge a value to healthy soils

improvement of soil governance, which only policy can be increasingly improved by the improvement of soil governance techniques. For this reason, we consider the development of a tool such as the **soil health index** at the level of individual land parcels, to be calculated and used in each single land transactions, to be a **key innovation**: understanding that the commercial valuation of soil cannot disregard its health status is an element of

Public support to research, innovation, soil monitoring and testing, also at the farm level

We call for the establishment of a system of public **funding for independent research and investment in innovation** supported by farms in the area of improving soil health and biodiversity, including the carrying out

Protection and correct management of sensitive soil habitats, crucial for the provision of ecosystem services

We ask that a special chapter of the Soil Health Law be dedicated to the **protection of intact soils**, such as those covered by forests, pastures, bogs, wetlands or grasslands: they contain the largest continental stock of organic carbon and host the most significant repository of terrestrial biodiversity in the entire European

soil health doesn't mean externalise land degradation towards third countries providing raw material to EU economy!

minerals and hydrocarbons, the Soil Health Law must cooperate with other mechanisms, treaties and food system regulations, and support investments in circular economy and bioeconomy, to **stop the outsourcing of soil degradation**. In order to reduce the import of inputs and the production of environmental externalities while preserving the long-term fertility of European soils, it is necessary to pursue a reasonable balance between the intensity of agricultural production and, in particular, livestock density, compared to the carrying capacity of the land.

Combating soil degradation is a Green Deal challenge, the road map must be consistent with the other soil-related targets

We urge the European institutions to fully commit to the soil-related **targets of the Green Deal strategies**: reduce the application of **fertilizers and chemicals** in agriculture and animal husbandry, increase the land covered by **organic farming** and **natural landscapes** in rural areas, promote the agroecological transition, restore natural habitats in rural areas, reclaim and regenerate the soils of **degraded, sealed or contaminated sites**.

Zero net land take by 2050: intermediate, closer targets are required for reducing soil sealing by urbanization, promoting the re-use of urban areas

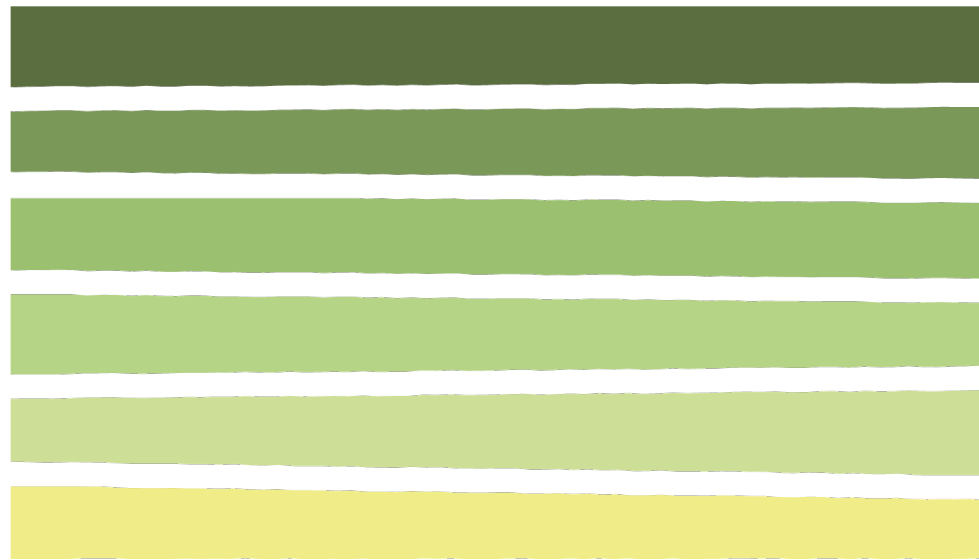
We call for an update of the **'zero net land take by 2050'** target, introducing a binding timeline, including **short- and medium-term milestones**, and targets for the **reuse** of urban areas and the conservation and regeneration of permeable and vegetated urban surfaces essential for the provision of ecosystem services

Organic inputs to the soil, e.g. from organic wastes, must guarantee high quality standards

We further urge that the opportunity provided by the possibility of regenerating soils through the **biocycle of organic wastes** is not lost. With the whole EU starting of separate food waste collections and treatment from 2024, the opportunity is to return up to 15 million more tons p.a. of high quality compost to soil. To ensure

snil4life

L'essenziale è invisibile agli occhi



Thanks for your attention

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