Soil Manifesto

soil4life

What is essential is invisible to the eye

CCIVS.ORG/SOILMANIFESTO

INTRODUCTION

Healthy, living soil is essential for all life to thrive. With this manifesto we provide a tool for advocacy, a call to positive action and good practice on our living Earth. We recognise and acknowledge the work of people actively engaged in restoring balance and justice, who work the land and together regenerate soil and ecosystems, as well as those who volunteer for this essential cause.

Soil Manifesto

The time to act is Now!

Our planet and the beings who reside here and make up the complex, whole, living system on which all life depends are under serious threat. Life functions are being threatened by exploitation, short term thinking, and a worldview that values economic and financial growth over the continuity of life and living systems.

The complex, interconnected systems through which life on our planet has been able to flourish and grow over millennia have been misunderstood, misrepresented and ill treated for too long. We, as humans, have attempted to detach ourselves from the web of life. We have created a hierarchical worldview and placed our species at the top, instead of playing an integrated part in its life processes. This attitude and behaviour is destroying our planet´s ecosystems, creating desertification, malnutrition, hunger, species-loss and other dangerous and destructive effects that will be felt for generations to come. This anthropocentric worldview and entitled behaviour needs to transform now.

There is still a window of possibility to transform our governance systems, shift the economic priorities, by placing our focus on restoring the Earth and the systems we depend on for life.
The tools we need are available. The knowledge, skills and methods to regenerate and restore soils are available. If the global resources spent on war alone were redirected to ecosystem restoration, reconciliation and the recognition of all living organisms as having responsibility to the whole, the harmony and balance could be restored. A shift is required to see the Earth, not as belonging to us to receive and exploit, but as a common responsibility, entrusted to us, placed in our care, to nurture and protect, that we may be nurtured and protected in return. We need to come back into balanced reciprocity with the living biomes that sustain us.

We have the right to live, but with that right comes responsibility to protect and care for all that gives us life. This common responsibility needs to be at the centre of decision makers´ focus and energy.

This is not a mystical concept. The source of life, health and all well-being is found in the Earth, air, water, sun, soil and sky. These elements are the foundation of life itself. If we cause harm or damage in any way to them, we are, in fact, damaging ourselves.

The time to restore our Earth is now. The time to recognise our dependence on living soil and the soil microbiome has come- for what is essential to life, is often invisible to the human eye and only recognised and valued in the moment of death.

We urge leaders and local, national and international decision makers to have the courage and heart to make immediate choices and actions that respect the environment for the present and future generations, and to step bravely into actions on behalf of life.
Can there be any greater reason than our very own lives depending on it?

Healthy, living soil is essential for all life to thrive. In recent human history quality and care of soil has been largely ignored and misunderstood and due to mismanagement soils are under serious threat. Soils must be understood as a complex, living creation formed as a result of a multitude of inter-related micro and macro organisms working together in a web of nutrient exchange. The complex, living nature of soil is still largely unstudied and misunderstood.

The vital role that living soils play in our ecosystems needs to be recognised, protected and restored. Soil is where 95% of all our food comes from: living, biodiverse soil means healthy food and healthy people. Soil and access to land is directly linked to the right to local, food sovereignty. Human health is directly linked to the food we consume and the environment, which is founded on the ground we live on and the living soil that fulfills our need for nourishing, nutritious, vital food.

Living soils, and the microflora and macroscopic organisms that form them, are not only the foundation for vital and life-sustaining food, they are the main source of fuel, fibre and medicinal products. Living soil is essential to all ecosystems, playing a key role in the carbon cycle and all other nutrient cycles, storing and filtering water, improving resilience and mitigating impact of floods and droughts. Indeed the soil microbial flora serve as important carbon sinks, which have a direct impact on climate change mitigation. The ecosystem services which soil offers are vital and immeasurable!

Soil is alive!
Soil health is directly related to human survival and wellbeing.
It is life for future generations.
We must protect and regenerate it immediately in order for life to continue, not just humankind, but all life on Earth.

The Soil 4 Life Manifesto recognises the principles put forward in the following instruments:

UN Declaration of the decade of ecosystem restoration

Bringing environmental protection nearer to the people

https://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/video/right-land-and-healthy-soils

Status of the World's Soil Resources Report

Natural Capital, Ecosystem Services, and Soil Change: Why Soil Science Must Embrace an Ecosystems Approach

Human rights obligations relating to the enjoyment of a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment

The Intergovernmental Technical Panel on Soils has completed the first State of the World's Soil Resources Report

The impact of soil degradation on human health

Small Scale Sustainable Farmers are Cooling Down the Earth

The Rights to Food Sovereignty and to free, prior and informed consent

Caring for Soil is Caring for Life

Soil Ma

We therefore call for:

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anifesto

Project co-financed by

Coordinating beneficiary

LEGAMBIENTE

Associated beneficiaries

AGRICOLTORI ITALIANI

CCIVS Coordinating Committee for International Voluntary Service

crea Consiglio per la ricerca in agricoltura e l'analisi dell'economia agraria

ERSAF Ente Regionale per i Servizi all'Agricoltura e alle Foreste Regione Lombardia

ISPRA Istituto Superiore per la Protezione e la Ricerca Ambientale

Sistema Nazionale per la Protezione dell'Ambiente

POLITECNICO MILANO 1863 DIPARTIMENTO DI ARCHITETTURA E STUDI URBANI DEPARTMENT OF ARCHITECTURE AND URBAN STUDIES

ROMA

ZELENA ISTRA

1. A Soil Commons- legally based rights for soil and ethical responsibilities

The legal recognition of soil and the microbes that create it, as a living, shared and valuable resource that deserves protection and restoration. The legal responsibility for leaders and decision makers to ethically steward, protect and enhance the natural processes and living matter of the soils they govern at national and global levels.

2. Immediate protection and conservation of living soils

i. ethical: management of soils based on the Ecosystem Approach and the principles of the Convention of Biodiversity
ii. epistemological: (see Article 3 and 7) recognition of the validity and wisdom different knowledge systems including indigenous soil knowledge and use of land (Ethnopedology)
iii. ontological: recognition of the different situations and conditions of soil; depending on the different states, situation, place, function, ways of being and the maturity of soil, different rights and obligations emerge.
iv. The creation of a multi plural governing system on soil protection and conservation through collaboration, a Commons regime and an ethical approach.

3. Updated monitoring of soil, its living organisms and relationships across biologically-diverse systems

Monitoring on the state of global soils through regulatory, mandatory frameworks and existing environmental laws, using targeted strategies, based on validated and updated monitoring systems as well as local, positive conservation practices.

4. Recognition, reward and guaranteed income for small and medium scale farmers, including indigenous peoples and peasants

Based on valuing the benefits, products and services they provide to society, their stewardship of the land, and the ecosystem services they generate;

5. Support for farmers while transitioning to regenerative, organic, chemical free, natural and sustainable methods

For example those who adopt the Voluntary Guidelines for Sustainable Soil Management (VGSSM) and who increase the living quality of the soils they steward.

6. The end to damaging subsidies

Remove scale as the basis for subsidies and instead reward good stewardship and creation of ecological and societal goods and services. It is imperative to end the unjust subsidies to large agri-business and industrial farmers which economically and intentionally favour land practices which cause soil damage and inhibit and prevent small scale and peasant farmers to earn a living and compete on markets. Subsidies are unjust if they do not support and take into account the natural capital that small farmers are more likely to generate; support for farmers to transition to sustainable and organic practices, and reward for the provision of services which they provide to their local ecosystem and societies is essential for soil conservation.

7. Recognition, valuing and protection of traditional wisdom and sustainable land-based cultures

Recognition and protection of Peasant Agroecology, indigenous knowledge and experience relating to soil protection and preservation that enhances the living microbiome in soil. Acknowledgment and support of traditional cultures´ rights to land that has been their heritage and life source for many generations; recognition of the heritage of local competence and intergenerational knowledge regarding soil management of people who work and live on the land, traditionally and historically (small and medium size farmers, landless people, rural women and youth, indigenous people, migrants and agricultural workers)

8. Urgent urban adaptation, regeneration and damage limitation

Support and action for urban initiatives that reform brownfield land* to green space and regenerate and prevent soil sealing. Rewarding green cities with increased living soil and plant coverage.

Integrating soil as a living entity within urban development, and managing it for continued functioning. Improve living soil coverage and common areas in urban planning and development that provide ethical access to growing spaces such as allotments, parks and green belts. Respecting the right to a healthy, secure and safe environment by creating and protecting green areas with living soils that increase biodiversity in our urban ecosystems.

* Brownfield Land definition in urban planning: brownfield land is any previously developed land that is not currently in use that may be potentially contaminated www.wikipedia.org

9. Support for research and education

Support for interdisciplinary research that delivers the knowledge and mechanisms to allow ethical, good stewardship of land. Support for research regarding diversity of soils and their role in our global ecosystem and society. Qualitative assessments, investigation, education and dissemination regarding ethical soil regeneration and conservation strategies Integration and inclusion of soil education at local and international level.

10. Soil and the Sustainable Development Goals

Living Soil affects ALL life on Earth. It is connected to our food, water quality, biodiversity, construction, farming, health and urban expansion. The state of soil is intrinsically linked with a number of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development) but of particular importance are Zero Hunger, Climate Action, Life on land and Sustainable Cities and Communities.

Sustainable Development Goal

#2 Zero Hunger

- Support for sustainable and regenerative agricultural practices and networks of pioneers in this field to create working models that can be imitated and scaled.
- Guaranteed access to arable land and pastures for local and indigenous communities to continue to produce their food and to stop the illegal and forced removal of people from their original lands
- Counteraction of land acquisitions by big enterprises through protective laws and restrictions
- The end to unfair subsidies to industrial farming: instead, we demand support for small farmers by public investments in services for rural communities, such as public transport, schools and health services
- An independent judiciary on the potential negative health effects caused by industrial agrochemicals on soil biodiversity and soil health
- The reduction of the use of industrial agrochemical fertilisers and pesticides, and the promotion of organic and agro-ecological farming methods with an emphasis on encouraging balanced microbial life relationships for fertilisation and pest control.
- Support for the horizontal cooperation and the vertical integration in the food and farming system, in order to increase the added value of local agricultural production and the vitality of agricultural small enterprises, ie. Farm to buyer markets, an end to unfair market subsidies.
- The strict limiting of intensive animal farming which causes degradation, erosion and contamination of soil ecosystems. We demand a reduction in livestock intensity based on local capacity to produce feed for livestock, as opposed to importing feed from foreign areas where soils are degraded in the production process.
- Limits to the allocation of arable land for the production of feed for industrial livestock and biofuels. Instead we call for support in the production of protein-rich crops for human consumption.
- A global effort by the national health services to promote a shift towards less meat and animal product consumption, promoting protein-rich alternatives and disclosure of how concentrated, industrialised meat production is polluting the soils
- The enforcement of clear labeling systems to enable consumers to be able to make ethical decisions about how the food they buy is farmed.

Sustainable Development Goal

#11 Sustainable Cities & Communities

- The permanent end to the transformation of green fields into urban settlements. Always give priority to the reuse of brownfields and to the regeneration of abandoned and under-exploited settlements
- Increased support for the regeneration of degraded soil for creating urban green areas and community gardens
- Increased permeability through the de-sealing and re-vegetation of urban surfaces, in order to realize green infrastructures for water drainage and storage and counteract the urban heating with nature-based solutions
- Updates on infrastructure strategies, in order to face the real needs of communities and enterprises, avoiding a further extension of land-consuming road networks in developed countries and evaluating the alternatives in terms of land efficient use eg. more efficient public transport networks, cycle lanes, etc.
- Adoption of criteria of sustainable remediation and site-specific risk assessment, for the management and reuse of contaminated soils
- Better studies and testing to show pollution and toxicity levels of previously exposed soils (ie near factories)
- Transparency and disclosure of the levels of toxicity in urban soils, particularly in industrial areas

Sustainable Development Goal

#13 & #15 Climate Action & Life on Land

- Preservation and protection of intact soils of forests, pasture lands and permanent meadows, assigning a special status of conservation to peatlands and organic soils - these soils are unique, under threat and little understood, their value is immeasurable and their loss could lead to fatal implications.
- Programs to support local people to choose protection of old forests as a source of potential income over slash and burn methods, thereby valuing and recognising traditional relationships between people and forests and creating new relationships as stewards of forests that have been home to humans over eons.
- Limitation and regulation of the use of fire in the management of crop residues, forests and pasture lands. Fire releases enormous amounts of carbon into the atmosphere and can damage soil diversity and life irreversibly.
- Immediately stop the conversion of forests, savannas and prairies to arable land and to plantations for food for livestock or for biofuel production .
- Halt land degradation and support soil restoration and adoption of regenerative techniques in farming, putting a ban on all harmful and toxic farming practises.
- Support of agroforestry, organic and regenerative agriculture and the conversion of croplands to permanent meadows in order to increase the organic matter in the soil, limiting soil erosion and preventing desertification, also recognising and promoting the economic value of carbon capture as a valuable ecosystem service provided by farmers
- A balanced application of organic fertilisers to soils, rotating the cultures with nitrogen-fixing species and cover crops, and reducing the intensity of livestock farming to ensure a reduction of the greenhouse gas emissions caused by animal farming and industrial fertilisers,
- Investment for the conversion from conventional to organic agriculture with the long term goal to eliminate the use of pesticides and industrial fertilisers entirely.
- Recognition and payment for the accountable provision of societal- and *ecosystem-services from sustainable farming (*ecosystem services like increased carbon content, water holding capacity, water infiltration, biodiversity, photosynthesis, climate change mitigation, nutrient cycling, etc.)
- A total halt to all subsidising regimes, such as the basic Common Agricultural Policy of the European Commission (CAP) payments based on the volume of productions or on managed land extension, as they are generic subsidies to industrial farming and land appropriation by big enterprises and those that allocate resources are not complying with the principle 'public money for public goods'.

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Abalimi Bezekhaya, Alpe Adria Green, AmiEs de la Terre de Québec, Association for Promoting Sustainability in Campuses and Communities (APSCC), Association Green Istria (Udruga Zelena Istra), Boodaville, Climate Change Network Nigeria, Coordinadora d'Organitzadors de Camps de Treball Internacionals de Catalunya, CTT Food Grower's Initiative, DaLaa, international volunteers for Social Development asssociation, Departamento de Geología y Geoquímica, Desafio das Letras Unipessoal Lda, Dream Tulbagh organisation, Ecological Instittute for Sustainable Development, Faculdade Evangélica de Goianésia FENAB, FRERES AGRICULEURS ET ARTISANS POUR LE DEVELOPPEMENT (FAGAD), Fundación SES, Gaia Ashram, Georgian National Academy of Science, GREAT (Gerakan Kerelawanan Internasional), IAEDEN-Salvem l'Empordà, Indigenous Youth Exchange Africa, Institute for Soil Sciences and Agricultural Chemistry, Centre for Agricultural Research, INSTITUTO DE BIOLOGIA DEL SUELO SAC, International Volunteers for Peace (Australia), La Loma Viva Foundation, Laboratorio de Geomorfología y Suelos, Les Jeunes Ambassadeurs de l'Environnment pour le Developpement Durable, Les Rams Consult ltd, Natural Life Association, Naturefriends Greece, NICE (Never-ending International workCamps Exchange), ONG Horizonte, plantup-za urban food growers, Plataforma de Integración Ciudadana, PROYECTO CIRCULAR HUMUS-SPAIN, RAERM Red de Agroecologia y Ecodesarrollo de la Región de Murcia, Red Española de Compostaje, Regeneration International, SCI Switzerland, Simbiosfera, grupo de estudio y trabajo de la universidad de Buenos Aires, SMILE Society, Social Opportunity Group, Sociedad Española de la Ciencia del Suelo, Soils and Water Use Dept., SoilsNational Research Centre, Sols Vivants Québec , chapitre de Soil4Climate, South Africa volunteer workcamps association, South African Organic Sector Organisation, South American Mycorrhizal Research Network, Subir al Sur, Tanzania Organic Agriculture Movement (TOAM), The CRUPDA, Bangladesh, Tiyospaye Winyan Maka, UBuntu Bridge, UDYAMA, Universal Versatile Society, Universidad de Ciencias Aplicadas y Ambientales U.D.C.A, VJF, Voluntarios Internacionales Mexico A.C.

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individuals signed the Manifesto

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The Soil4Life Manifesto was first drafted on October 17th, 2019 by a group of young Soil Ambassadors during an international Soil Protection and Management training led by The Coordinating Committee for International Voluntary Service - CCIVS www.ccivs.org , within the framework of the Soil4Life project coordinated by Legambiente Onlus, co-financed by the European Commission through the Life programme. It is a call to action that was further developed during a two-year participatory process, addressed to global leaders and decision makers to support the transition to a life-sustaining, healthy and thriving environment - of which the ground we walk on is the foundation.

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