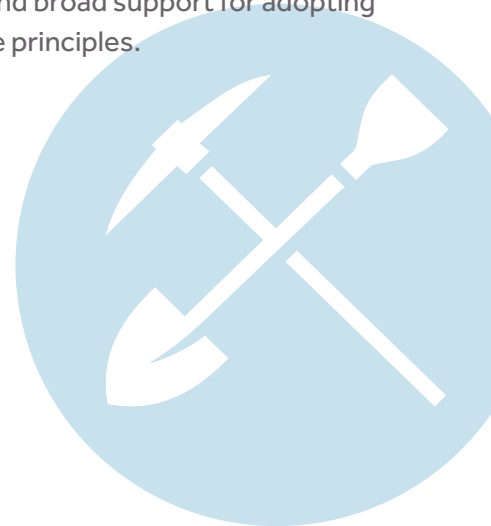




## WHY REGENERATIVE AGRICULTURE?

Public agencies that own farmland, often find it challenging to align agricultural land management with their conservation missions. Adopting regenerative agriculture principles and practices allows public agencies to manage their farmland in a way that closely mimics a natural system, while also producing food for people, and providing other valuable natural amenities. This approach can keep the operation profitable, build natural capital, and generate financial returns due to increased resilience and decreased use of inputs such as fertilizer and pesticides.

To use regenerative agriculture as a system to manage farmland, it is important to ensure that land managers and decision makers understand the key principles of regenerative agriculture. Though several definitions have been developed, they are all based on the idea that soil is a living, functioning system. Managing land for soil health is a critical component of regenerative agriculture. Basic principles of regenerative agriculture are outlined in the factsheet in the following pages of the report. The factsheet can be utilized to build a shared understanding and broad support for adopting regenerative agriculture principles.





# FACTSHEET: REGENERATIVE AGRICULTURE

## Resources for Illinois Public Agencies

Across Illinois, most of our farmland is losing invaluable topsoil and contributing to nutrient pollution in our waterways. Public agencies, such as forest preserve districts and conservation districts, can improve soil health of their farmland holdings through land stewardship practices. Though these agencies exist to protect and restore natural lands, their conservation efforts are primarily focused on habitat management but not farmland practices. For those tasked with farmland management within public agencies, this document provides a brief overview of an approach to farmland management through regenerative agriculture.

## Strategy for Soil Health

Public agencies can use regenerative agriculture to improve stewardship of their land. Regenerative agriculture represents a way of thinking about soil improvement that benefits both the farmer and the environment. This farming system includes the integration of the following practices and principles, which can be implemented in a phased approach over time to maximize soil health, water quality, habitat benefits and minimize risk:

- 1 Minimizing soil disturbance** by practicing no-till or reduced tillage can reduce erosion and mitigate extreme weather. Reducing disturbance allows microbial communities and fungi to grow untouched, thereby improving soil aggregation and water holding capacity.
- 2 Keeping soil covered** using cover crops to keep soil covered for as much of the year as possible. Soil cover can decrease erosion and fertilizer needs by improving residue retention and adding soil organic carbon and nutrients to the soil.
- 3 Diversifying rotations** by adding additional crops to rotation can reduce costs for pest control, mitigate extreme weather and has the added benefit of diversifying income. Increasing diversity avoids depleting soils of nutrients while improving resistance to pests and diseases.
- 4 Integrating livestock** in order to graze cover crops and perennial crops in the rotation, restore on-farm nutrient cycles, and further diversify income.

## STARTING THE TRANSITION

Public agencies can facilitate the gradual transition to regenerative agriculture through building partnerships with agricultural stakeholders and adopting farmland management policies and programs that align with their conservation goals. While public agencies seek to improve soil health, their tenants will need time and financial stability to determine how best to change their practices and implement them. Informing farmers about the benefits of regenerative agriculture other farmers have experienced will further support the transition.

More resources on regenerative agriculture and improving soil health are available [here](#).