News Release

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New Research and Publications Available: Rapid Evidence Assessment on UK Plant and Soil Science Research with a Regenerative Agriculture Focus

A groundbreaking Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA) has been led by **Dr. Julia Cooper** at the Organic Research Centre (ORC) to map the landscape of UK plant and soil science research within the context of regenerative agriculture. This comprehensive analysis highlights key knowledge gaps and provides a roadmap for future research priorities.

Regenerative agriculture, or 'regen ag', has rapidly gained traction as an innovative approach to farming that prioritises soil health, biodiversity, and climate change mitigation. While its principles align with longstanding organic and conservation agriculture practices, the movement has been propelled forward through effective advocacy and increasing interest from UK farmers, researchers, and policymakers.

Project Overview

This REA systematically identified the challenges facing regenerative agriculture in the UK's arable sector and assessed the quantity and relevance of existing research on these topics. The findings offer critical insights into gaps in knowledge and research needs, setting the stage for further studies and practical applications.

Key Findings and Research Priorities

The first phase of the project engaged stakeholders through interviews and workshops, identifying key themes, including agronomy, variety development, soil health, climate change mitigation, system design, and economics. This initial work informed discussions at the **Cambridge Future of Agriculture Conference (March 2024)**, refining the research priorities into six overarching categories:

1. **Standardisation of Regenerative Agriculture** – Definitions, metrics, and certification schemes.
2. **Advice and Guidance** – Best practices for root crops, intercropping, cover cropping, and reducing tillage.
3. **Crop Genetics** – Breeding for low input requirements and weed competitiveness.
4. **Soil Health** – Indicators of soil biological function, effects of mob grazing, and strategic tillage.

5. **Wider System Impacts** – Effects on the water cycle, product nutritional quality, and greenhouse gas emissions.
6. **Socio-Economic Factors** – Impact on livelihoods, adoption barriers, and constraints.

Report, Presentation and Next Steps

The Challenges Publications (March 2025) offer synthesised summaries of the study's findings, emphasising key themes and gaps in knowledge.

The results offer valuable insights for researchers, policymakers, and funding bodies to guide investment and support the transition to more regenerative farming systems.

The findings were also presented at Groundswell 2024, in conjunction with the Agricultural Universities Council UK's farmer research priorities review.

D1: Database of information sources and key research findings/knowledge gaps can be looked at as a "discussion paper". It was used to frame discussions at the Cambridge Future of Agriculture Conference.

D2: A summary of key knowledge gaps, research needs and ways to address them is the final report incorporating stakeholder workshop & outcomes from the Future of UK Agriculture Conference is the comprehensive in-depth analysis of state of knowledge and gaps on the challenges that were refined at the Cambridge Future of Agriculture Conference.

Notes to editors:

About ORC

https://linktr.ee/orgrescent

The Organic Research Centre (ORC) is an independent research charity working for better and more sustainable farming systems that protect the environment and provide good food for everyone. It drives its own research agenda to tackle global issues by acting locally and finding community-based solutions for farmers and their supply chains. Its vision is that, together, we'll deliver the transition to naturally healthy and resilient farming systems by:

- Leading change by connecting and collaborating internally and externally across our networks of researchers and farmers.
- Bringing new thinking to the mainstream by developing nature positive solutions through pioneering and rigorous independent research.
- Empowering people to embrace different ideas by translating our research into practical application and advice, influencing policymakers, farming communities and wider society.
- Demonstrating the economic as well as the environmental rationale for an alternative approach to improve livelihoods and social impact.

Established in 1980, for over 40 years the charity has played a central role in the development of organic food and farming research, knowledge exchange and policy.