Friends of the Earth
Climate-Friendly Food
For Healthy Kids and a Healthy Planet

Farmer Questionnaire for Regenerative and Climate-Smart Practices

There is no standard definition of "regenerative" or "climate-smart." Because of this, school nutrition teams, NGO partners, and distributors need a consistent way to evaluate how farm practices align with climate, health, and sustainability goals.

While looking for products with certified organic or other meaningful regenerative labels is ideal, there are many farmers and ranchers using organic and regenerative practices that are not certified due to cost or other barriers.

If a farmer or rancher you are working with does not have a certification, this questionnaire can help you better understand their production practices and whether they align with your procurement goals.

What does "regenerative" or "climate smart" mean?

There is no single practice that makes a farm or ranch "regenerative" or "climate smart." Regenerative agriculture is a complex system of practices that work together to restore soil, support biodiversity, build long-term farm resilience, and foster human health and sustainable farmer livelihoods.

How to use this questionnaire

Sample questions are provided on the left to help gain a better understanding of producer's practices. To streamline the process, you may focus on gathering responses in the assessment column on the right. After completing the assessment, use the guidance below to evaluate whether the producers' approach aligns with regenerative/climate smart farming practices.

How to interpret survey results

There is no set cut off for whether a farm is "regenerative." Rather than serving as a definitive judgment, this survey is meant to show where a farm sits along a broader continuum.

- Mostly "Yes": Strong alignment with regenerative/climate smart practices
- Mix of "Yes" and "Partial": Transitional farm—actively improving with meaningful practices in place
- Mostly "Partial": Early-stage alignment—some practices present but inconsistent or limited in scope
- Mostly "No": Conventional system with limited adoption of regenerative/climate smart practices

Regenerative and Climate Smart Farm Practices Questionnaire

Sample Questions	Assessment
These sample questions are provided to support a deeper understanding of producer's practices. To streamline the process, you may focus on gathering responses in the Assessment column.	● **Yes** = Aligned with best practices ● **Partial** = Some alignment, room for improvement ● **No** = Little or no alignment

Standards & Certifications

● Do you participate in any labeling programs or initiatives that verify your farming practices? If yes, please list them in the box below.	To learn how food labeling programs stack up, see Friends of the Earth's guide, Regenerative Food Labels: What's Behind the Claim? ☐ **Yes** ☐ **No**

Agrochemicals

Pesticide Use & Restrictions

Note: The term "pesticides" includes herbicides, insecticides, and fungicides

● What kinds of herbicides, insecticides, and/or fungicides do you use, if any? Are there any pesticides you intentionally avoid because of their toxicity or environmental impact? Do you follow any guidelines or standards or are you involved in any particular buyer initiatives that limit which pesticides you use? If yes, please explain in the box below.	☐ **Yes**: Uses only pesticides allowed under the USDA organic standard or avoids pesticides entirely ☐ **Partial**: Avoids pesticides that pose high risks to human health or the environment (e.g. avoids all highly hazardous pesticides or classes of concern. (See the Appendix for a list of concerning pesticides and common trade names.) ☐ **No**: Uses pesticides with few or no restrictions

Pest Prevention

- What non-chemical practices do you use to prevent pest problems before they start (e.g., crop rotation, planting resistant varieties, habitat for beneficial insects)? To what extent do you incorporate prevention in your pest management approach?

☐ **Yes:** Strong use of preventive practices (rotation, resistant varieties, habitat, etc.)

☐ **Partial**: Some preventive practices used inconsistently

☐ **No**: Little to no prevention strategy

Monitoring & Decision-Making

- Do you regularly scout or monitor your fields for pests? How do you decide when action is needed?

☐ **Yes**: Regular monitoring and uses results to guide decisions

☐ **Partial**: Some monitoring, but informal or inconsistent

☐ **No**: No systematic monitoring

Choosing Least-Risk Approaches

- Do you try non-chemical methods (biological, cultural, physical) to manage pests before turning to pesticides? If yes, please describe in the box below.

If you use pesticides, do you choose least-risk chemicals? (Considering toxicity to humans, soil or aquatic organisms, or beneficial insects?)

☐ **Yes:** Consistently uses non-chemical methods before pesticides and prioritizes lower-risk pesticides

☐ **Partial:** Uses non-chemical methods but not prioritized and has some consideration of pesticide risk

☐ **No:** Relies primarily on chemical control with little to no consideration of risk

Neonicitinoid / Treated Seeds

- Do you use pesticide-coated seeds (like neonicotinoid-treated seeds)? If so, how extensively and for which crops?

☐ **Yes**: Does not use treated seeds, or only in rare, justified cases with no alternatives

☐ **No**: Regular use of treated seeds

GMOs

- Do you plant genetically modified seeds? If so, how extensively and for which crops?

☐ **Yes**: Does not use GMO seeds

☐ **No**: Uses GMO seeds (e.g. Roundup Ready, XtendFlex, XtendiMax, Engenia, Tavium, Liberty Link, Enlist, etc.)

Habitat

- Do you maintain habitat for wildlife and beneficial organisms (e.g., hedgerows, pollinator strips, wetlands, riparian buffers)? If yes, please describe in the box below.

Are there any other ways you support pollinators and natural pest predators on your farm?

☐ **Yes**: Maintains diverse, intentional habitat (e.g., hedgerows, native plantings, buffer zones) integrated into the farm; actively supports pollinators and beneficial species across the landscape

☐ **Partial**: Some habitat present (field margins, small plantings, or unmanaged areas), but limited in size, diversity, or intentional design

☐ **No**: Little to no dedicated habitat; farm landscape is mostly or entirely cropped with minimal support for biodiversity

Fertilizer Practices

- Have you eliminated the use of synthetic fertilizers? If not, have you reduced use of synthetic fertilizer over the past five years and/or set any targets to reduce use over time?

☐ **Yes**: Does not use synthetic fertilizers

☐ **Partial**: Tracks and reduces synthetic fertilizer use over time

☐ **No**: Uses synthetic fertilizers without restrictions

Soil Health Practices

Feeding the Soil

- How do you maintain or improve soil fertility? Do you regularly use practices like compost, manure, cover crops, or livestock integration to add organic matter?

Do you primarily use on-farm or off-farm fertility sources? Have you set goals to increase on-farm nutrient cycling or reduce purchased fertility inputs?

☐ **Yes**: Regular use of compost, compost teas, manure, and/or cover crops to build soil; fertility primarily comes from on-farm sources

☐ **Partial**: Some fertility practices, but limited or inconsistent; uses a mix of on-farm fertility practices and off-farm inputs

☐ **No**: Relies primarily on synthetic and/or off-farm fertility inputs

Cover Cropping

- Do you plant cover crops? If so, how often and on how much of your land?

☐ **Yes**: Uses cover crops regularly across most acreage

☐ **Partial**: Uses cover crops on limited acreage or occasionally

☐ **No**: Does not use cover crops

Tillage Practices

- Do you take any steps to minimize soil disturbance through alternative tillage practices (low-disturbance implements, shallow tillage, reduced passes)? If so, how extensively do you employ these practices?

☐ **Yes**: Minimizes disturbance and actively manages for soil health

☐ **Partial**: Some attention to reducing tillage disturbance but inconsistent

☐ **No**: No clear effort to manage tillage impacts

Crop Rotation

- Do you use diverse crop rotations to manage soil fertility and pests? How many crop and/or pasture rotations?

☐ **Yes**: Diverse rotation (at least three crops and/or pasture phase) used to manage fertility and pests

☐ **No**: Minimal or no meaningful rotation

Soil Cover / "Soil Armour"

- Do you keep your soil covered throughout the year (e.g., cover crops, crop residue, mulching) or between cash crops? Do you use any other practices to protect soil from erosion, moisture loss, and temperature extremes?

☐ **Yes**: Soil is kept consistently covered year-round using cover crops, residues, or mulches; bare soil is minimized and actively managed

☐ **Partial**: Soil is covered part of the year or on some fields, but gaps remain

☐ **No**: Soil is frequently left bare between crops or during the off-season

Livestock

Animal Care & Welfare Practices

- Do animals have year round access to the outdoors and spend the majority of their time on pasture?

Do you follow any recognized animal welfare standards or certifications (e.g., pasture-based systems, certified humane programs, organic livestock standards)?

- ☐ **Yes**: Animals are raised under high-welfare conditions with meaningful outdoor access and with clear adherence to recognized animal welfare standards or certifications
- ☐ **Partial**: Some animal welfare practices are in place (e.g. outdoor access or reduced confinement), but standards are inconsistent or not formally verified
- ☐ **No**: Limited attention to animal welfare beyond minimum legal requirements; animals primarily raised in conventional confined systems
- ☐ **N/A**: Does not have livestock

Livestock Integration & Grazing Management

- Do livestock contribute to nutrient cycling, weed control, or soil building?

- ☐ **Yes**: Livestock are intentionally integrated to improve soil, nutrient cycling, and ecosystem health
- ☐ **Partial**: Liestock are present but integration is limited or inconsistently managed
- ☐ **No**: Livestock are not integrated into regenerative practices
- ☐ **N/A**: Does not have livestock

Managed Grazing

- Do you use managed/rotational grazing (adaptive multi-paddock, mob grazing, etc.)?

Do you monitor outcomes (e.g., pasture regrowth, soil cover, animal health, soil compaction)?

- ☐ **Yes**: Uses intentional, adaptive grazing with appropriate stocking density, recovery periods, and active monitoring to improve soil and pasture health
- ☐ **Partial**: Some grazing management (e.g., basic rotation), but limited planning, adaptation, or monitoring
- ☐ **No**: Continuous or unmanaged grazing with little attention to timing, recovery, or ecological impact
- ☐ **N/A**: Does not have livestock

Animal Feed & Sourcing

- What do you feed your livestock (pasture, stored forages, grain, supplemental feed)? Is the feed certified organic? If not, is the feed certified non-GMO? Approximately what percentage of feed is produced on-farm versus purchased?

- ☐ **Yes**: Majority of feed comes from on-farm sources and/or is certified organic; works to minimize external inputs and ensure clean feed
- ☐ **Partial**: Mix of on-farm and purchased feed; some organic or higher-quality sourcing, but not consistent
- ☐ **No**: Relies primarily on purchased conventional feed with little attention to sourcing, production practices, or input reduction
- ☐ **N/A**: Does not have livestock

Appendix: Common Pesticides, Trade Names, and Key Concerns

Pesticides is an umbrella term that includes herbicides, insecticides, and fungicides. This is a list of concerning pesticides that are commonly used on staple school food crops (corn, soy, wheat, fruits, vegetables). Farmers can legally make "regenerative" or "climate smart" claims without restricting use of any of these pesticides.

This is NOT an exhaustive list of pesticides of concern or product names.

Pesticide (Active Ingredient)	Common Trade Names	Key Health & Environmental Concerns
Herbicides		
Glyphosate	Roundup®, Ranger Pro®, Touchdown®	Linked to cancer; harms soil life; drives herbicide-resistant weeds
Dicamba	XtendiMax®, Engenia®, Clarity®	Drift damage to neighboring farms and ecosystems; harms non-target plants
2,4-D	Enlist One®, Weedar® 64	Hormone disruption; potential cancer risk; drift and volatilization concerns
Paraquat	Gramoxone®, Firestorm®	Highly toxic; small exposures can be fatal; linked to Parkinson's disease
Atrazine	AAtrex®	Hormone disruption; groundwater contamination; persistent in environment
Glufosinate	Liberty®	Neurotoxicity concerns; commonly used as glyphosate alternative
S-metolachlor	Dual Magnum®	Water contamination; potential developmental and endocrine effects
Insecticides		
Diazinon (organophosphate)	Diazinon®	Neurotoxic; harmful to birds and aquatic life; developmental risks
Carbaryl (carbamate)	Sevin®	Nervous system effects; toxic to pollinators and beneficial insects
Methomyl (carbamate)	Lannate®	Highly toxic; acute poisoning risk; harmful to wildlife and farmworkers
Pyrethroids (e.g., bifenthrin)	Brigade®, Baythroid®	Neurotoxic; highly toxic to fish and aquatic life; widely used replacements for older insecticides
Imidacloprid (neonicotinoid)	Admire®, Gaucho®	Highly toxic to pollinators, beneficial insects and aquatic species; persistent in the environment; neurotoxicity concerns
Thiamethoxam (neonicotinoid)	Cruiser®	Highly toxic to pollinators, beneficial insects and aquatic species; persistent in the environment; neurotoxicity concerns
Clothianidin (neonicotinoid)	Poncho®	Highly toxic to pollinators, beneficial insects and aquatic species; persistent in the environment; neurotoxicity concerns

Fipronil	Regent®	Highly toxic to pollinators and aquatic organisms; persistent in the environment
Fungicides		
Chlorothalonil (fungicide)	Bravo®	Probable carcinogen; toxic to aquatic life; persistent
Mancozeb (fungicide)	Dithane®	Breaks down into compounds linked to thyroid disruption and cancer risk
Azoxystrobin (fungicide)	Quadris®	Toxic to aquatic organisms; widely used on fruits and vegetables
Seed treatment mixes	CruiserMaxx®, Acceleron®	Combine insecticides + fungicides; systemic exposure; pollinator and ecosystem impacts

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About Friends of the Earth's Climate-Friendly School Food Program

Friends of the Earth's Climate-Friendly School Food Program helps school districts make shifts toward delicious, plant-forward, and organic menus that benefit students and the planet. We work with over 100 school districts in California, as well as state agencies, NGO partners and organic and regenerative farmers. We provide organic procurement and plant-based technical assistance and marketing materials, support student and community engagement strategies, and link school districts with the resources they need in order to be successful. Our Organic School Food Initiative, launched in California, aims to make organic foods available to every student. We also partner with school districts and NGOs to advocate for state and federal policy change. For more information or to request support please email climatefriendlyfood@foe.org.