



**CERTIFIED
REGENERATIVE**

BY **AGW**

**Certified Regenerative by AGW
Guidance on Risk**

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Introduction and Purpose

Identifying, assessing, and mitigating risk is a core requirement of the Certified Regenerative by AGW program, and a key part of what makes it meaningful. Good risk management doesn't just protect against negative outcomes; it also drives genuine improvements in farming and management practice.

Guidance on Risk is designed to support AGW Auditors in assessing risks and management strategies across Certified Regenerative by AGW operations. Please note: this is **not** designed to be an exhaustive checklist, nor does it constitute individualized compliance advice. It is a practical resource to be used alongside the standards.

How to use this document

This document should be used alongside the Certified Regenerative by AGW standards and the operator's Regenerative Plan. Where an operator has identified risks in their Plan, auditors should assess whether those risks have been appropriately managed. This document also helps auditors identify risks that may not have been captured in the operator's own assessment.

This document covers Sections 2, 3, 4, 5, and 7 of the Certified Regenerative by AGW standards, the sections where formal risk assessment is required. Note that Section 6 (Cropping and Grassland) is not included here, as risks in this area are managed through the operator's Integrated Crop Management plan and Regenerative Plan, and are addressed within the relevant sections of this document where they overlap with soil, water, air, and biodiversity risk.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact AGW at info@agreenerworld.org

Section 2: Soils

Positive soil management

Healthy soils are fundamental to regenerative farming. Good soil management reduces the risk of negative outcomes while enabling land to remain productive over the long term.

Regenerative practices that support soil health include sympathetic crop rotation, cover cropping, catch cropping, maintaining living roots and root biomass, minimizing or ceasing cultivations, responsible machinery use, careful timing of fieldwork and inputs, and responsible water management.

When assessing soil risk, auditors should consider the following factors:

- Soil type
- Topography and aspect
- Climate
- Season
- Current weather conditions
- Annual rainfall
- Machinery use
- Tillage practices
- Current crop type
- Crop rotation
- Livestock type
- Any overgrazing that may be reducing living roots or root biomass.

Each soil type carries its own characteristics and associated risks. The table below provides a summary. Auditors may also find the [NRCS Soil Texture Calculator](#) a useful reference tool when classifying soils on site.

| Soil type | Risk | Characteristics | Positive management strategies |
|------------------|--|---|--|
| Sandy | Leaching of nutrients and erosion due to rapid drainage and loose structure. | Well-draining. Typically low in nutrients. Quick to dry and warm up. | Cover cropping to prevent erosion and improve and/or maintain soil structure. Addition of Organic Matter and or manure helps retain nutrients. Mulching if possible, helps reduce evaporation. Suits minimum tillage practices well. |
| Clay | Compact easily. Poor drainage. Water run off a greater risk than other soils. Limited workability. Heavy machinery use can lead to multi-level compaction and capping. | Holds water well. Slow to drain. Fertile. | Tillage practices should be minimized to reduce compaction and maintain soil structure. The addition of organic matter and or manure aids fertility drainage and fertility. Cover crops aid the slowing of run off. |
| Silt | Finer particles predispose increased risk of run-off as weaker structure compared to other soils. Prone to erosion. | Retain water well. Prone to capping. Typically fertile. | Reduce tillage to reduce the erosion from water and wind. Apply organic matter and or manure to maintain soil structure and aid drainage. |
| Loam | May suffer compaction if worked in poor conditions. Heavy machinery can lead to compaction. Vulnerable to erosion if not properly managed. | Typically drains well and has good nutrient retention. Easily worked. | Easily worked and well-structured these soils suit minimal tillage. The addition of organic matter and or manure to reduce erosion and compaction. |
| Peat | When dry can be windblown and prone to erosion. Cultivations may lead to decomposition and loss of soil volume. Loss contributes to carbon emissions. | Holds water well and generally more acidic. Typically fertile. | Keep the soil covered to reduce erosion. Tillage should be minimized to reduce compaction. Consideration should be given to conservation through perennial crops or managed for conservation. |
| Chalk | Degradation and nutrients can become out of balance | Alkaline soils, typically well drained and stoney. | Cropping is limited to crops that suit alkaline soils. Improvement in nutrient content and availability by the application of organic matter and or manure. |
| All | Excessive tillage or plowing leading to degradation of soil structure and depletion of organic content. | | Reduce or eliminate tillage, monitor, and promote soil health and soil biology, mitigate erosion and soil loss. |

Section 3: Water

Positive water management

Water is a vital and finite resource. Poor farm practices can deplete it, pollute it, and damage the aquatic habitats that depend on it. Good water management protects water quality and availability—for the farm, for neighboring land, and for the wider environment.

Regenerative practices that support water health include building soil organic matter to improve water retention and reduce run-off, maintaining living roots year-round, managing fertilizer and pesticide applications carefully, protecting riparian habitats, and using water efficiently where irrigation is required.

When assessing water risk, auditors should consider the following factors:

- Proximity to potential pollutants
- Rainfall and current weather conditions
- Climate and season
- Topography
- Soil type and condition
- Machinery use
- Current cropping and crop rotation
- Health of the current crop
- Water use and extraction
- Living roots and root biomass

The table below summarizes the key risks to water, their potential causes, and examples of positive management strategies.

| Risk | Potential causes and situations | Examples of positive management strategies |
|--------------------------------|--|--|
| Soil erosion | Overworked soils can run off the land and cause pollution in water courses causing sedimentation. This reduces water quality, oxygen levels, light penetration, and harm aquatic habitats. | Manage soils to avoid erosion. Keep living roots all year and establish a new crop as soon as possible after harvesting another. Aim to build soil organic matter to increase soil water holding capacity. |
| Nutrient run off | Excessive use of fertilizers such as nitrogen and phosphates can lead to issues such as algal blooms and a reduction of oxygen in the water. This negatively affects aquatic life. | Fertilizers should only be applied when active uptake is possible and effective and weather conditions are favorable to crop uptake and no runoff is likely to take place. |
| Pesticide contamination | Pesticides can enter water if timing of application is poor. Water run off after application can also cause contamination. | Follow manufacturer's instructions and only apply when run off is not likely to occur. Employ practices that minimize the requirement of the use of pesticides. |
| Manures | Manures can cause pollution where heaps are located near water or on land where runoff is more likely. The timing of manure application is critical. Point loading of leachate affecting groundwater is a consideration. | Manures should be stored or covered to avoid leaching from precipitation. Application of manures should only be carried out when crops are actively growing to minimize nutrient loss. |
| Ground water extraction | The over extraction of ground water can lead to aquifer depletion. This can result in reducing availability for other users as well as be a cause of salt contamination of freshwater. | Application of water should use the most efficient delivery methods where possible. Water extraction as well as data on the water levels in aquifers should be recorded and implications of extractions known. |
| Climate change impacts | Changes in climate means rainfall events can be more severe leading to an increase in run off. | Applying regenerative agriculture techniques such as building organic matter and maintaining living roots can help mitigate the issues caused by climate change. |

Section 4: Air and Climate

Positive air and climate management

Farming activities can contribute to air pollution and greenhouse gas emission, but they can also be part of the solution. Regenerative practices that build soil health, reduce external inputs, and manage livestock and machinery thoughtfully can significantly reduce a farm's impact on air quality and climate.

Key areas of focus include reducing reliance on fossil fuels, managing manures and slurry to minimize ammonia and methane emissions, avoiding unnecessary burning, and timing applications of fertilizers and pesticides to reduce atmospheric losses.

When assessing air and climate risk, auditors should consider the following factors:

- Emissions from machinery, vehicles, and fuel use
- Pesticide drift and overspray
- Dust and particulate matter from cultivations and unpaved tracks
- Ammonia emissions from manures, slurry, and fertilizers
- Methane emissions from ruminant livestock
- Nitrogen oxide emissions from fertilizers applications
- Odor from manures and slurry

The table below summarizes the key risks to air quality and climate, their potential causes, and examples of positive management strategies:

| Risk | Potential causes and situations | Examples of positive management strategies |
|------------------------------------|---|---|
| Dust and particulate matter | Can degrade air quality and increase respiratory problems. Common causes include unpaved roads and dirt tracks, and tillage operations. | Keep speed down on dirt tracks. Reduce cultivation speed and only cultivate when conditions won't cause dust. |
| Pesticide drift | Can cause negative health effects and damage non-target crops. Occurs when spraying takes place in conditions that carry product to unintended areas. | Only spray when conditions ensure product lands on the target crop. Use buffer zones such as trees and hedges at field boundaries. |
| Ammonia emissions | Can cause particulate matter to form and acidify habitats. Primary sources are livestock manure and fertilizers. | Only apply when crops are actively growing and able to take up nutrients. |
| Methane emissions | A greenhouse gas that can form other pollutants in the atmosphere. Main sources are ruminant digestion and, in some systems, rice growing. | Consider diets that reduce methane production in ruminants. High-quality forage can help. Slurry injection can reduce methane release. |
| Nitrogen oxide emissions | Can contribute to ground-level ozone and particulate matter. Caused by the application of nitrogen fertilizers. | Apply nitrogen fertilizers only when crops are actively growing. Smaller, more targeted applications reduce nitrogen oxide emissions and limit nitrogen loss. |
| Greenhouse gas emissions | Fossil fuel combustion is a primary contributor to climate change. Farm machinery including tractors is a significant source on most operations. | Consider upgrading to machinery with cleaner engines where possible. Shallower cultivations can reduce draft load and fuel use. |
| Odor emissions | Can negatively affect quality of life for rural communities. Caused by poorly managed or unstirred manures and slurry. | Store and turn manures regularly. Stir slurry before application to reduce odor. |

Section 5: Biodiversity

Positive air and climate management

Farms are part of a wider ecosystem. Protecting and enhancing biodiversity supports soil health, water quality, pollination, natural pest control, and overall ecological resilience. Regenerative farming recognizes that biodiversity is not just a conservation goal. It is fundamental to a productive, resilient operation.

Practices that support biodiversity include reducing or eliminating pesticide and herbicide use, maintaining and expanding habitats such as hedgerows, field margins, and wetlands, managing grazing carefully to avoid overgrazing, and ensuring habitats are connected rather than fragmented across the landscape.

When assessing biodiversity risk, auditors should consider the following factors:

- Cropping diversity and rotation
- Pesticide and herbicide use
- Habitat availability, quality, and connectivity
- Livestock management and grazing pressure
- Water management and risk of run-off
- Soil management and cultivation practices
- Presence of invasive species
- Climate change and its effects on species distribution

The table below summarizes the key risks to biodiversity, their potential causes, and examples of positive management strategies:

| Risk | Potential causes and situations | Examples of positive management strategies |
|---|---|---|
| Use of monocultures | Lack of diversification within the field | Consider mixed crops or leave areas uncropped with native species suitable for encouraging biodiversity. |
| Crop rotation | Need to have a break crop to reduce crop disease | Were suitable, consider cropping such as grasslands with diverse species in ground for 4 years or more. |
| Pesticide and herbicide use | The need to control weeds that affect yield | Consider interrow weeding and controlling weeds with cultivations, or predrilling to reduce pesticide use. Areas on field boundaries may be left allowing for habitat development. |
| Habitat location and fragmentation | Prioritizing cropping in all areas and maximizing farmed land | Allocate areas in fields suitable for improving biodiversity. Ensure these link up with other areas in other fields to minimize a patchwork of habitat and maximize large areas for wildlife. |
| Livestock over grazing | Over grazing reduces habitat and damages living roots | Manage livestock such as sheep so that over grazing does not occur. |
| Water management | Poor water management may cause water pollution from run off | Increase soil organic matter to reduce the chance of run off and improve field water holding capacity. |
| Soil management | Poor soil management will negatively affect biodiversity such as reduce living roots, cause run off. | Consider minimizing cultivations such as using direct drilling or minimum tillage. Design rotations with a range of cropping to help build living roots. |
| Climate change and land reversion | Changes in temperature and precipitation patterns can affect abundance and distribution of biodiversity | Consider where crops are grown and how the field topography and soil may be impacted by changes in precipitation patterns and volume of precipitation. |

Section 7: Social Responsibility

Positive social management

Regenerative farming must work for the people who live and work on the land, as well as for the land itself. Fair pay, safe working conditions, and respect for workers and local communities are not optional extras; they are core to what the Certified Regenerative by AGW program stands for.

Good social management means having clear policies in place, communicating them to workers, and reviewing them regularly. It also means being proactive about health and safety, rather than waiting for incidents to occur.

When assessing social responsibility risk, auditors should consider the following factors:

- Machinery operation and worker training
- Noise exposure and hearing protection
- Heat stress and working conditions in extreme weather
- Exposure to dust, fumes, and chemicals
- Repetitive tasks and ergonomic risk
- Worker mental health and wellbeing
- Working hours and rest periods
- Terms of employment and fair pay
- Potential for exploitation, forced labor, or child labor
- Fairness of disciplinary procedures

The table below summarizes the key social risks, their potential causes, and examples of positive management strategies:

| Risk | Potential causes and situations | Examples of positive management strategies |
|------------------------------|---|---|
| Machinery accidents | Unsafe machinery, lack of training | Have detailed training plans for use of machinery in line with government and manufacturer requirements. Also include refresher training. |
| Noise exposure | Lack of noise containment; none or poor-quality ear defenders | Take safety advice on best practice. |
| Heat stress | Long periods in hot weather or factory | Ensure staff have adequate breaks and access to fresh water. Suitable clothing and hat to reduce heat from sun. |
| Falls from height | Lack of training and barriers at height | Consider alternatives. Cherry pickers. Use nets, barriers and/or safety lines. |
| Respiratory | Exposure to dust or fumes | Consider ability to remove or reduce dust or fumes. Use correct safety mask and replace according to requirements. |
| Repetitive injuries | Repetition of an action | Changes in job rotation if possible. Training. |
| Mental stress | Workload; external causes; isolation; workplace bullying | Opportunity to request help and advice. |
| Exposure to chemicals | Handling chemicals | Ensure correct training given and correct Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). |
| Long work hours | Limited resources for task | Consider staff rest and increase in resource. |
| Exploitation | Gangmasters/hidden labor terms/forced labor/child labor; low wages; poor working conditions | Interview workers present. Utilize living wage calculators to determine if wages and benefits are sufficient. Review worker records. |
| Unfair disciplinary practice | Retaliation in the workplace | Interview workers present and ensure structural protections. |