

**Transformative Living  
Labs for Soil Health:**  
Advancing Regenerative  
and Conservation  
Agriculture Across Europe



# What blocks scale-up? Key barriers and enablers identified by TRAILS4SOIL Living Lab stakeholders

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## Participatory Workshop - World Café

To capture stakeholders' knowledge on the barriers and enablers to regenerative and conservation agricultural practices (ReCAP)

### Workshop method

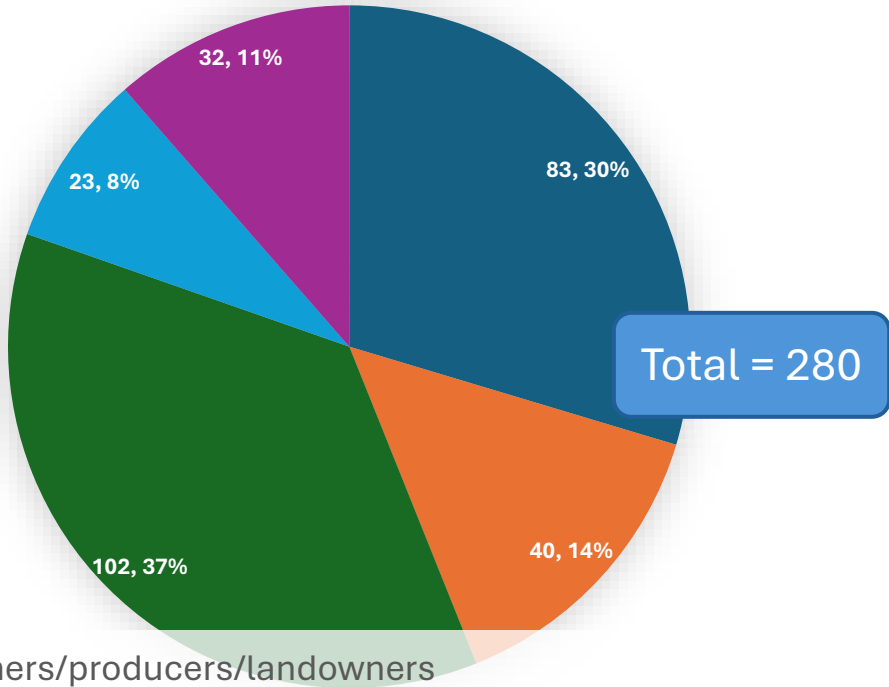
- World café
  - Policy & regulation frameworks
  - Knowledge, technology & resources;
  - Environment, site conditions & social/cultural factors
- 3 rounds to add barriers and enablers - 20 dots for barrier/enabler factors considered most important (max of 3 dots on any one point)



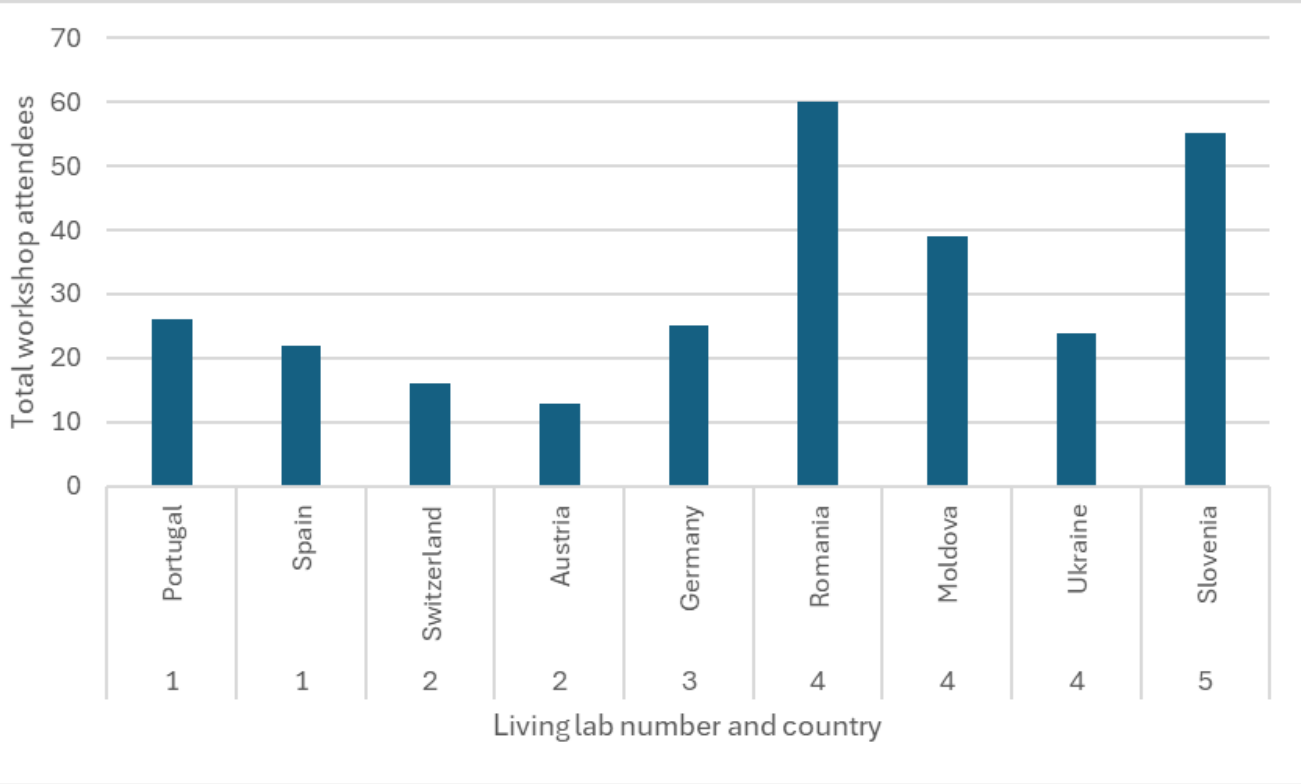
# Overall stakeholder participant details



## Total stakeholders



- Farmers/producers/landowners
- Industry
- Academics/Researchers
- NGOs/civil society
- Policymakers/local authorities/national policy makers



## Workshop participant numbers: 12-60

## Barriers

- **Mismatch** between policy objectives and practical ReCAP implementation (ES, PT, MD, SI)
- **Complex and fragmented** legislation, excessive bureaucracy/ administrative burden (ES, PT, SI)
- **Lack of integration** across institutions and policy areas (MD, SI, ES)
- Regulatory **uncertainty and instability** (MD, DE, CH)



## Enablers

- Supportive and coherent policy and regulatory framework for ReCAP (PT, MD, SI, RO ES)
- Better co-ordination between institutions, policymakers, farmers and experts (PT, RO, MD, SI)
- Support for capacity building and knowledge exchange on ReCAP (ES, PT, CH, SI)
- Clearer standards, definitions and evidence-based policy (MD, SI)

### Barriers

- Economic and financial insecurity (ES, PT, CH, UA)
- Insufficient compensation payment levels or incentives (PT AT, DE,RO)
- Lack of market-based remuneration for ecosystem services (DE)



### Enablers

- Stronger financial support and reward mechanisms for ReCAP (DE, AT, CH, PT, ES)
- ReCAP market and value-chain development (ES, DE, RO)

#### Barriers

- Low awareness and limited understanding of ReCAP (CH, DE, RO, UA)
- Lack of advisory support, dialogue and knowledge transfer (ES, PT, DE, RO, SI)
- Technology costs and access (ES, PT, MD, RO, UA, SI)
- Lack of data, monitoring and clear standards (SI, CH, MD, UA)



#### Enablers

- Communication and awareness-raising (PT, AT, RO, SI, CH)
- Strengthen advisory services and technical support (ES, PT, CH, DE, RO, SI)
- Training, education and capacity-building (ES, DE, RO, SI, PT)
- Better research, evidence and data systems (SI, CH, MD, UA)
- Improving access to technology and innovation (ES, MD, RO, UA, SI)

### Barriers

- Resistance to change (ES, PT, RO, MD, SI)
- Farmer mindset, tradition and established practices (ES, PT, MD, UA, SI)
- Social pressure and community acceptance (ES, AT, CH DE, MD)
- Limited understanding and knowledge among wider public (ES, AT, SI)



### Enablers

- Support a change in farmer mindset and attitudes (ES, PT, MD, UA, SI)
- Peer-to-peer learning and demonstration (PT, ES, CH, SI)
- Awareness-raising and communication (PT, RO, SI, CH)
- Education, training and skills development (ES, PT, DE, RO, SI)
- Strengthen social acceptance and community support (CH, DE, ES, MD)
- Reducing transition risk and supporting long-term confidence (DE, UA, CH, PT)

### **Moldavian farmer:**

«In the first years, we tried cover crops, but our region is very dry. If there is no rainfall for two or three months, especially after main crops, cover crops fail to emerge, leaving only costs without real benefits.»

### **German farmer:**

«Now they're all starting to plough really heavily again since the pesticides are being phased out, so things are actually going in the opposite direction.»

### **ReCAP are context-specific:**

- In arable regions where wind erosion and drought are problems: no-till, integration of trees and hedges
- Where agriculture is more small-scale and conditions are wetter and colder: cover crops, integration of livestock



- High machinery costs (farm size)
- High perceived financial risk especially in the first few years
- Short land leasing contracts (many experience yield reduction in first years of no till)
- Limited access to organic fertilizers, due to specialisation
- Reduction of pesticides (for no-till)
- Lack of practical examples
- Legislative barriers to implement trees in arable landscapes
- Psychological barriers: imitation of neighbours, pressure from family members, landlords, neighbours...

### **Portuguese farm advisor:**

«Our farmers need to see to believe. [...] And if we could show the financial assessments, that would be top.»

### **German farm advisor:**

«We're not yet in a position where there's always a model farm, one that's already up and running and doing well, within a 20-kilometer radius.»

- Applied research
- Demonstration trials
- Field visits
- Regional flexibility in choice of ReCAP
- Advisory/ coaching/ training regarding the implementation of ReCAP
- Subsidies for initial yield losses
- Subsidies for machinery?



- Different stakeholders interpret the term differently. This leads to tensions regarding certain practices and a risk for greenwashing
- Most Farmers do not want a certification label for regenerative or conservation agriculture (too bureaucratic and low market esteem)
- Common goal: improving soil health and adapting to climate change and extreme weather events
- Regenerative ideally brings together various approaches to sustainable agriculture, such as conservation agriculture and organic farming
- We should support farmers in their actual goal, that is adaption to weather extremes and climate change.



## Challenges and opportunities

### **Challenges**

- High dependancy on relatively intensive soil tillage for weed control and mineralisation of nitrogen
- Applied research needed to find ways to reduce tillage and cover the soils permanently, while still controlling weeds and reaching appropriate yields

### **Opportunities**

- High knowledge in weed and pest management without pesticides (adapted varieties, crop rotation, mechanical weed control etc.)
- Many ReCAP are implicitly included in organic farming (integration of animals, diverse crop rotations, organic amendment, mechanical control of weeds and cover crops, biodiversity structures...) and it can be a way to receive financial compensation for it



# Key Take Home Messages



- 1. Recognise regenerative and conservation agriculture as a long-term transition** - long-term planning, stable funding, monitoring, recognition of wider benefits
- 2. Make incentives reflect real costs and risks** - transition costs, investment needs
- 3. Design policy with farmers, advisers and experts** – co-design, consultation and stronger dialogue for practical and effective policies
- 4. Invest in knowledge, advice, capacity-building and awareness-raising** - Stronger extension services, demonstration farms, peer learning, coaching and practical guidance
- 5. Simplify and stabilise policy frameworks** – clearer, easier to implement and more predictable, creating the confidence needed for long-term change.

Thank You!



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