

envisions

Common Soil Campus

a learning centre for Regenerative Land Stewardship

Vision Document



Summary

What if we would learn and work together like never before to restore soil and land for the benefit of all?

Common Soil is a platform for a new grassroots network of citizens that take actions to restore and steward living soil. Its main feature will be Common Soil Campus and Academy. Common Soil Campus will be an international learning centre for regenerative agriculture, land restoration, regional food systems and land stewardship that aims to inspire the next generations of farmers and citizens to become stewards of living soil. From the campus, Common Soil will also coordinate education, trainings and events, as well as public awareness campaigns and communications, crafting a story of inspiration, restoration and hope.



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Vision

The vision of Common Soil is a world where living soil is stewarded by humanity, in a sustainable dynamic balance with the planet's ecosystems. A world in which people understand our common planetary boundaries and therefore steward the fragile and vital "collaborativity" of all living systems and live healthy, happy and prosperous lives in nature's abundance.

Purpose

The primary purpose of Common Soil is to regenerate land and ecosystems through ecological agricultural practices that build soil fertility and biodiversity. Through restoration, education and experimentation, Common Soil and its land-based learning centre exist to reverse the trend of land degradation and accelerate the global transition of food and farming systems towards sustainability and resilience.



Mission

Our mission is to accelerate the restoration of degraded soils, land and ecosystems through regenerative agriculture and land stewardship. Through our programs, campaigns and stories we aim to inspire people the importance and beauty of living soil, and awaken a sense of stewardship in their daily lives. Through our campus we aim to build an example of regeneration by innovating, prototyping and implementing regenerative agro-ecological practices through education, training and action research.

Soil - the Blind Spot

The soil beneath our feet is not only the basis of our food, feed, fuel and fibre, it also serves to recycle our water, support plant growth, help regulate our atmosphere and provide a foundation for societies and cultures. We refer to our "home soil" and many cultures call our planet after soil (terra, jord, erde). We believe that a fundamental disconnect between people and the soil has led to some of our main environmental challenges, and that reconnection is a major opportunity to achieve sustainability.



According to the FAO (Food and Agriculture Organisation of the UN), ninety-nine percent (99%) of our food comes from our soil. Twenty-five percent (25%) of this soil has already been degraded to the level where it can no longer support food production. Globally, we are losing 10 million hectares of fertile soil each year. That is 30 soccer fields per minute. The majority of this degradation (75%) is due to the way in which we currently farm the land. Furthermore, each year in Europe alone we seal (pave or build) 1000km² of soil, an area the size of Berlin.

Using the Planetary Boundaries model of the Stockholm Resilience Centre we can link our main global urgencies (biodiversity loss, nitrogen cycle, phosphorus cycle and climate change) quite directly to industrial agriculture. Industrial agriculture also contributes about 30% to greenhouse gas emissions, and is a main driver for deforestation.

If one puts this in the context of population growth (heading to 9 billion in 2050), current malnutrition and poverty rates (about 1 billion people currently hungry), climate change increasing extreme weather events and rising food prices that lead to civic unrest, we must change.

Focussing on soil now is important for many reasons. Soil is a disappearing resource, yet healthy living soil is the key to food security. Moreover, soil is the blind spot of the current sustainability debate and yet holds a key to climate change mitigation. We need more global awareness about the importance of soil among citizens, more regenerative soil management practices and to reverse soil degradation. Soil needs to be seen from a holistic mindset, linked to water, food, energy, culture, biodiversity and life. Common Soil aims to achieve that by building a learning centre and a movement of soil stewards.

Regenerative Agriculture

"Regenerative organic agriculture improves the resources it uses, rather than destroying or depleting them. It is a holistic systems approach to agriculture that encourages continual on-farm innovation for environmental, social, economic and spiritual well being." - Rodale Institute

Considering the current state of soil and land, initial restoration and regeneration is necessary in order to restore ecosystem function and environmental sustainability. As agricultural management practices are humanity's main interaction with soils and encompassing ecosystems, it is therefore our key entry point into land restoration. A rapid shift towards regenerative agriculture (agro-ecological, organic and permanence based management practices) is the first priority, abandoning soil and ecosystem damaging practices as soon as possible.

Agricultural Practices

Within the context of our global environmental challenges a change of agricultural practices will have a strong positive impact. This is the main message of our programs, campaigns and our campus. On the Common Soil campus we will be practicing and innovating with emerging agricultural practices that improve and regenerate ecosystem and soil functions. Aiming, for example, to improve the hydrological cycle, increase biodiversity, increase levels of carbon in the soil, decrease pollution, increase soil life, etc.



Ecosystem and Land Restoration

Many ecosystems on the planet are currently damaged, degraded or in rapid decline. A degraded ecosystem leads to a decline in biodiversity, a decrease in functions and productivity, and a lower resilience to external threats. On our campus we will look at the local landscape and restore land and ecosystems where possible to reverse this trend. In all of our work we aim to increase function, productivity, biodiversity and resilience.

"By 2020, ecosystem resilience and the contribution of biodiversity to carbon stocks has been enhanced, through conservation and restoration, including restoration of at least 15 per cent of degraded ecosystems (150 million hectares), thereby contributing to climate change mitigation and adaptation and to combating desertification." (UN Convention on Biological Diversity Aichi Biodiversity Target 15 and Target 2 of the EU Biodiversity Strategy to 2020)

Local and Regional Food Systems

We believe that local and regional agriculture and food systems can be crucial to build resilience and health. The produce of the farm will be sold to local consumers, who are able to visit and connect to the farm. This will strengthen the local economy, but also the relationship between citizen and soil. By working on direct marketing and sales, developing CSA models and discovering and expanding local and regional organic food markets we hope to make food from regenerative farming accessible to citizens and consumers.



Carbon and Climate Change

We are at the most critical moment in the history of our species, as anthropogenic changes to the climate threaten humanity's security on Earth. In 2012, total annual global emissions of greenhouse gases were approximately 52 gigaton CO2 equivalent (GtCO2e). These emissions must soon drop to a net of 41 GtCO2e if we are to have a feasible chance of limiting warming to 1.5°C, above which point we face irreversible impacts. Our planetary boundary is 350 parts per million (ppm) of CO2, we currently stand at 400 ppm.

There is a vast amount of research that has already been done on the ability of soil to sequester (and re-sequester) CO2 and provide a powerful driver in reversing climate change. Many of these studies are ongoing, but the results have already proven significant enough to warrant calls-to-action from the United Nations and the World Bank, among many others, to support regenerative farming techniques.

Common Soil Academy and Campus

A learning centre for Regenerative Land Stewardship

The Common Soil Campus is a rural learning centre that will host the Common Soil Academy as well as various other initiatives, including a Regenerative Agriculture Learning Farm, Course Facilities and Visitors Centre. The main purpose of the centre is to build an example of what is possible when we regenerate and steward land. Once established, the centre can become instrumental in accelerating the expansion of regenerative farming and ecosystem restoration in degraded regions and zones.

Location and Accessibility

In order for the campus to achieve its mission, location is crucial. The campus needs to be internationally accessible, have access to an urban centre, yet have a rural character. Our parameters are that the site has a large enough area for all future infrastructure, which we approximate at about min. 50 hectares, although 100 hectares would be better. Ideally, it is relatively accessible through public transport or at least max .1 hour drive to a city and/or airport. The site needs to offer future prospects of expanding towards a landscape scale.

If the campus is situated in a mediterranean zone it can serve as an example for dry-land restoration and water harvesting. If it is located in a temperate zone it can serve as an example for sustainable food production. So far we have explored the following regions as options, but are open to suggestions and contacts. We do not have access to land right now, nor to the capital to purchase land.

Catalunya, Spain

Accessible through Barcelona, temperate mediterranean climate. Language barrier Catalan/ Spanish to English. Growing organic market, growing sustainability movement.

Andalusia, Spain

Accessible through Faro, Sevilla, Granada, dry mediterranean climate. Severe droughts and erosion, little access to water, strong need for restoration agriculture.

Austria/Germany

Strategic and accessible location in Europe, high productivity, leading organic market. Low language barrier because of German and English. More examples needed.

Netherlands

Access to land is difficult, highly productive through intensification. Low language barrier and good accessibility through Amsterdam. Challenges with over-fertilisation, examples needed!

British Columbia, Canada

Accessible through Vancouver, which is aiming to be greenest city by 2020, lagging behind in terms of food and agriculture. Easy access because of language, difficult to access European network and funding opportunities.

Regenerative Agriculture Learning Farm

The farm will be the heart of the campus and provides the learning community with food, beauty, learning and research opportunities, as well as a place to implement regenerative practices. Practices we imagine implementing, combining and developing are the following:

- agroforestry
- alley cropping
- intercropping
- pasture cropping
- crop rotation
- cover cropping
- vertical stacking
- key-line design
- no-till
- perennial cropping

- closed loop nutrient cycling
- holistic grazing
- biodynamics
- composting
- effective microorganisms
- bio fertilisers
- bio char
- mulching
- mycorrhizal fungi applications
- and more

Our minimum standard is EU certified organic agriculture, but we aim to be 'organic+'.



The farm will be designed as a learning laboratory for regenerative farming, aiming to be at production scale, but with a main focus on learning. The farm will be diverse and integrated, combining the production of grains, legumes, vegetables, fruit and mushrooms with animal products such as dairy, meat and sweet water fish. In the future it will also include beehives, a tree and plant nursery, a living seed bank, compost manufacturing, appropriate technologies, farm-produced fuel, greenhouses, food-forests and more. The farm will be designed through zoning, including nature and wild zones, agro-ecological mixed zones, economic zones and building zones.

Info /guest centre

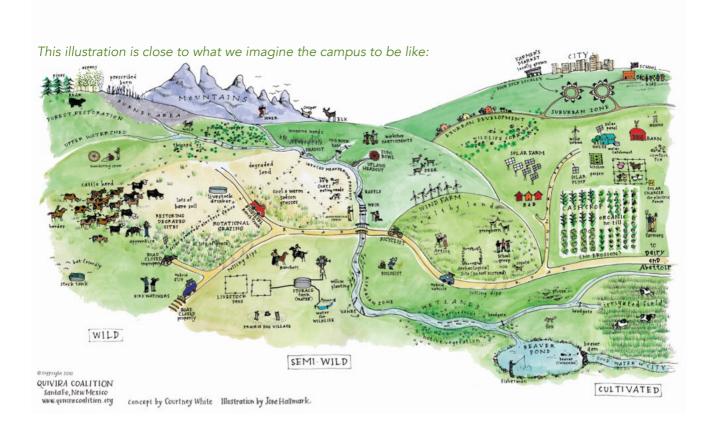
The info and guest centre will function as an entry to the campus, and also as the location for events (gatherings, festivals, exhibitions), offices, restaurant, farm shop, guesthouses, campsite, natural swimming pool, children's playground and outdoor pavilions. It will be the nerve centre of the campus.

Community Living, 3-10 Family houses

Core staff, long-term and short term students can live on the campus and make use of a community library, eating space, community garden, electric car park and car share, renewable energy sources, composting and waste systems, natural pond filtration system.

Education centre

This is the place where long-term and short-term students reside and convene for classes. It includes student accommodation, a basic science lab and research centre, experimental land plots, teaching kitchen, classrooms, shared workshops and ateliers.



Learning by doing - the restoration pioneers

Phase 1 - Pioneering and Designing

Learning how to restore land and build regenerative agriculture by doing it.

In the pioneering phase the campus will be co-designed and developed by students as a unique learning opportunity. During this 1-3 year phase the core team will facilitate a learning-by-doing program with about 10 students, which takes the campus as a prototyping learning ground and implementation area, while designing for phase 2. The course will bring in experts at particular times when needed, and collectively the core team and students will build up the campus, including buildings, agricultural production, land restoration and conservation.

Suggested Topics

Land observation
Pattern and systems mapping
Land mapping and surveying
Hydrological cycle design
Water management planning

Keyline design Species mapping and design Tree planting (agroforestry) Nature restoration



Vocational training in regenerative agriculture and land restoration

Phase 2 - Accelerating and Expanding

From phase 2 the Common Soil Campus will host an international vocational training course, planned to start after three - five years. This training is a one or two year full time course at the Common Soil Campus, focussing on young change makers age 18-35 (but open to anyone) who are highly motivated to get involved with regenerative agriculture, land restoration, regional food systems, either as farmers, entrepreneurs or consultants. The education will have four main foci, each approached holistically and combined practically.

Environment and Ecosystems; Restoration	Regenerative Agriculture Practices	Local and Regional Food and Production	Management and Professional Development
Applied Ecology	Composting systems	Distillation	Holistic Management
Applied Biology	Biochar and Carbon	Fermentation	Whole System Planning
Applied Botany	Bio-fertilisers	Preserving	Social processes
Applied Chemistry	Tree and Plant nursery	Healthy Cooking	Stakeholder
GIS/GPS systems	Living Seed Library	Health and Nutrition	engagement
Applied Soil science	Keyline Design	Food Processing	Budgeting
Environmental science	Crop Rotation	Organic Dairy	System Analysis
Forest ecology	Cover Cropping,	Sustainable Meats	Land access
Riparian/wetlands	Intercropping and	Sustainable Fish	Direct marketing
Water/hydrology	Pasture cropping	Healthy Whole Grains	Direct sales
Basic geology	Orchards and Pruning	Fighting food waste	CSA planning
Restoration Ecology	Animal Husbandry	Energy systems	Facilitation
Land use planning	Water and Irrigation	Waste systems	Project design tools
Wildlife conservation	Farm design	Community building	Coaching
Habitat conservation	Machinery and Tools	Food safety	Networking

These topics will be addressed in short workshops or courses, which would for example be theoretical in the morning and practical in the afternoon. The pedagogical vision is based on learning for head, heart and hands; the students need to understand the systems, practice real interventions and connect with each other and their personal passions and aspirations as part of the group process. The style of learning will be collaborative and participatory using an "open source" attitude, similar to "Open Source Ecology". The support staff will encourage self-directed learning and sharing of skills, and coach the students throughout their learning process.

After a year of general courses, students could choose a vocational specialisation, which they design themselves, supported by the core team. This can include setting up their own business, doing an internship or research project.

Short Courses and Consulting

Besides the full time vocational training we will also develop and offer short courses, trainings and consulting for farmers, land managers, politicians, consumers and entrepreneurs. Every expert that teaches a course in the full time training will be invited to offer a one day seminar for local or regional participants. Ideally most courses, lectures and workshops are always open to external participation. We will also actively develop a lecture series, and open consultation workshops in the region. For consumers and citizens we are also thinking of creating separate short courses (Soil to Plate, Healthy Cooking, Regenerative Agriculture A-Z, Composting, etc.)



Common Soil Movement

Consumers and citizens are often confronted with negative stories about environmental degradation and climate change. Creating positive stories will awaken a sense of hope, opportunity and participation, and can help shift citizens to change attitudes and lifestyles. Common Soil will tell a story of restoration by demonstration, and invites everyone to join the movement. We aim to build a community of stewards of the soil; people that support our work and make their own efforts.

Eco- and Agro-tourism

In order for the campus to become a beacon of inspiration, regular visitors will be very important. Over the years we will build tourism opportunities ranging from camping to bed-and-breakfast, eco-cottages and a restaurant/farm shop. Every visitor will have an experience of a regenerating landscape and healthy tasting delicious organic food. Activities for visitors will include farm-tours, workshops, retreats, work in the garden, etc.

Conferences and Festivals

Common Soil will host conferences and festivals on the theme of soil, food and health. These gatherings will attract both professionals and private citizens, and can take place on and off campus. Examples are capacity building seminars for farmers, conferences for students and youth, festivals for parents and children, etc. An example is the Living Soil Forum in Järna Sweden, which was part of the 2013 Summer of Soil.



Campaigns and Communications

To foster understanding of the vital role of living soil amongst consumers and citizens, we will run campaigns and communications from the campus. It is of vital importance to use this campus as a communication and storytelling resource towards farmers, policymakers and citizens, because our stories stem from real 'on the ground' experiences. We aim to communicate through various channels about every step of the project, in order to create a message of hope and inspiration. Updates will be published at least daily on website and social media channels, as well as (video) blogging, newsletters, mini-documentaries and reports.

Collaborations and Partnerships

Common Soil will build strong ties with organisations working for living soil, healthy food and regenerative organic agriculture. Through networking and participation in events we will connect with fellow stewards of living soil. We will engage in formal partnership when mutually beneficial and in as many informal partnerships as possible to show that this movement is strong and growing.

Research and Monitoring

An important aspect of the work at Common Soil Campus is research and monitoring. By connecting to various universities and directly to students we aim to attract research projects to

the campus. By measuring and monitoring soil, yield, biodiversity, species, etc. we can make sure that we are actually achieving that which we set out to do. We recognise that a lot of research has been done already (Rodale Institute, FiBI, BERAS, etc) and that now is a time for implementation and expansion of the various practices, and that working examples are needed.

A crucial aspect of research and monitoring at Common Soil Campus is our base-line study. Before any changes have been made we will collaborate with researchers to take a full base-line study of the land, focusing on soil and biodiversity. This will later allow us on to show the impact of our changes.



Local Impact and Benefits

Besides being regenerative for the local land and ecosystem, the campus also aims to support and develop the local social fabric and economy. The campus will attract local and international visitors for short and longer stays. The produce of the farm will be sold directly at local farmers markets and to local restaurants, thereby building resilience and a local economy. The campus will also provide jobs, internships and volunteering opportunities, both for local as well as international people.

The Common Soil Campus aims to fully integrate into the local context we'll find ourselves in, in order to build local resilience from the ground up. Once a location has been selected we will fine tune the design to meet the local conditions. Some impacts might be:

- Visitors spending money (transport, food, accommodation, shops)
- International fame, an opportunity to set an example of a region/municipality that has changed its agro-ecological system.
- Increase biodiversity leads to increased wildlife, leading to increased nature visitors
- Stronger and more resilient local economy

Strategic Position

We believe Common Soil meets a clear need and has a strategic position within the field of education, agriculture, applied action research and campaign communication.

Education

We see that there are various full time farmers trainings for organic farming in Europe. These courses are needed and important, but are sometimes missing learning pathways for regenerative or restoration farming. They also often only focus on production farming only. On an academic level there are a various masters programs in the field of agro-ecology and restoration ecology. These programs are mostly theoretical, and even though they are very important, they do not always equip students with the practical experience that is necessary for system-wide restoration. Neither do they offer an actual experimental campus and entrepreneurial opportunities.

Additionally, there is a rapid growth in short term education. Examples are Permaculture Design Courses, Holistic Grazing courses, Regenerative Agriculture Workshops, conferences, seminars and online learning. These are often short, mainly theoretical, and do not offer a learning campus and support infrastructure.

Common Soil Campus offers a complimentary learning pathway that would be interesting for students from any of the above groups, but also for others that would like to fast track towards setting up a regenerative agriculture farm or business, or help others do the same. It is unique because it offers a 'practice-what-you-preach' learning environment, where students are encouraged to think critically, but also move their thinking into action.



Agriculture

Even though organic agriculture is growing globally, there is still a huge gap between what would be needed to meet environmental targets and the results of agriculture to meet those. The debate is stuck on the difference between organic and non-organic, but the examples of farms that go beyond organic to restore nature and mitigate climate change are rather limited. The examples that do exist are not well known, do not always offer educational opportunities or have not conducted a baseline study at the beginning. We aim to close that gap by combining agriculture, restoration, education, research en communication in a local setting.

Campus

In our research we have found various other centres that have similar aims and impact. We conclude that there are many geographic gaps in this list. Globally there are few centres that focus on soil, young people and regenerative agriculture through practice, experimentation and full-time vocational learning. We have listed some existing initiatives that have inspired us with short descriptions below to give insight in the 'field'.

Campo Languna Blanca, Argentina - www.tompkinsconservation.org

A beautiful production farm as a beacon of inspiration.

Krameterhof, Austria - www.krameterhof.at

Production and education farm using Permaculture principles.

> Kulturcentrum Järna, Sweden - www.ytterjarna.se

Creative education centre within sustainable agriculture region

La Vialla, Italy - www.lavialla.it

Large family-run organic-biodynamic farms in Italy, climate-neutral, direct marketing

Navdanya, India - www.navdanya.org

Centre for living seed and living soil, focussing on region farmers training

New Forest Farm, WI, USA - www.newforestfarm.net

Farm-scale Permaculture Production farm with Apprenticeships and short Courses

> Ridgedale Permaculture, Sweden - www.ridgedalepermaculture.com

Farm-scale Permaculture Production farm with Internships and short Courses

> Regenerative Design Institute, CA USA - www.regenerativedesign.org

Education centre for regenerative design and permaculture

> Schumacher College, UK - www.schumachercollege.org.uk

Education centre for holistic science, sustainable horticulture, new economics

SEKEM, Egypt - www.sekem.com

Biodynamic production, 'Greening the Desert' project and Sustainability University

> Tamera Healing Biotope, Portugal - www.tamera.org

Intentional community around a water retention landscape in dry-land region.

, The Living Classroom, Australia - www.thelivingclassroom.com.au

Very similar to Common Soil Campus vision, but all the way in Australia

Trill Farm, Devon, UK - www.trillfarm.co.uk

Educational production farm including local businesses and farm events.

> Vale de Lama, Portugal - www.valedalama.net

Learning centre around regenerative agriculture, health and eco-tourism

Communication

The documentaries "Hope in a Changing Climate", "Green Gold" and "Green Gold 2", as well as stories from Sekem, Ridgedale, La Vialla and Languna Blanca have inspired many people about land restoration. Most stories in regular media, however, leave a negative imprint in terms of sustainability and agriculture, including communication about soil, which is mainly focusing on soil

degradation trends. By creating a place for actual restoration and sharing this story completely we will show people that it is possible to reverse the trends, fostering hope and inspiration.

Trends and Movements

In the last decades there has been a rapid expansion of climate change awareness, as well as scientific understanding of the various environmental challenges we are facing. More recently there have been various activities that connect these challenges with our farming systems, and focusing more and more on the opportunities that regenerative farming offers.

We can see this in the growing demand for organic food, in the growth of the permaculture movement, but also in recent publications such as "Agriculture at a crossroads - IAASTD" (2008) and "Wake up before it is too late - UNCTAD" (2013). In the last year, several books were published on the theme ("Grass, Soil, Hope" by Courtney White, "Cows Save the Planet" by Judith D. Schwartz, "The Soil Will Save Us" by Kristin Ohlson) and some ideas have gone viral ("Allan Savory: How to fight desertification and reverse climate change" - TED Talk, 2.5 million views). The Rodale Institute has just recently published a white paper called "Regenerative Organic Agriculture and Climate Change" and launched a campaign called "the Carbon Underground". Moreover, the UN has declared 2015 International Year of Soil, and the Global Soil Week will have its third edition, attracting hundreds of experts. We believe the time is now for a project like Common Soil and Common Soil Campus.

Existing Support and Network

The vision for Common Soil emerged during the <u>Summer of Soil</u> in Järna, Sweden in 2013. In the lead-up and follow-up of this event, various conversations touched on the need for a campus and platform, and a community was build around the theme of living soil, regenerative agriculture and the role of young people.

Individuals that were part of these conversations are Patrick Holden (CEO Sustainable Food Trust), Vandana Shiva (Navdanya), Richard Perkins (Ridgedale Permaculture), John D. Liu (Commonland, EEMP), Jostein Hertwig (BERAS International Foundation), Reinoud Meijer (founder YIP) and many others.

At the same time, various alumni from the International Youth Initiative Program as well as participants from its annual Initiative Forum gained interest in agriculture, land restoration, soil and living sustainably. A large international network of young people has been formed that is keen and ready to be involved with restoring land hands-on, being part of the change.

The Summer of Soil 2013 led to the creation of 14 soil-focused projects, and co-founder Pieter Ploeg was invited as keynote speaker to the 2013 Global Soil Week, the Youth Congress 2013 Europe's Future - Your Future, 2014 Initiative Forum and as an expert to the European Commission on Soil Awareness Raising.

Our network currently connects to the following organisations and networks:

- ▶ Soil Action at the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission, Italy
- Global Soil Partnership secretariat, FAO of the UN, Italy
- Global Soil Forum, IASS, Germany
- ▶ BERAS International Foundation, Sweden
- Sustainable Food Trust, UK
- Stichting Commonland, Netherlands
- Nature and More and Soil and More, Netherlands
- International Youth Initiative Program, Sweden
- Navdanya, India
- Sekem, Egypt
- International Partnership for Transformative Learning, Germany

Team

In the research phase of this project the core team consists of Pieter Ploeg (NL), Nakyta Grimm (CA) and Lyra Skusa (DE). We are graduates from the International Youth Initiative Program and have also worked there for several years. We also co-founded and coordinated the 2013 Summer of Soil, and various other educational projects such as Mission U, summer courses at Goethe Institute, leadership trainings, volunteer programs, learning journeys and conferences. We are currently building our capacity to run this project and building a network of people to help us in this ambitious restoration effort. Our team is not fixed, and various others have been involved in co-designing or have shown interest in joining the project. Some key contributors are Hannah Steenbergen (UK), Olga Bloemen (NL), Merijn de Jong (NL) and Sarah Box (NL). Once we gain traction and momentum we are ready to expand.

First Priorities (2015 - 2016)

- 1. Build capacity in the core team in the form of networking, trainings, courses or studies
- 2. Expand network and build community around project vision, mainly through website, social media, newsletter and event participation
- 3. Build on 2015 International Year of Soil activities to gain momentum, build network, attract attention and stay tuned to the movement.
- 4. Get access to land; secure ownership or long-term lease for 50-100ha land through networking. Abandoned farms, degraded land, potential partners with land, etc.
- 5. Secure funding for the startup phase by reaching out to foundations, grants, crowdfunding
- 6. Attract potential participants for the Pioneering Year



Ideas? Want to help or join? Get in touch!

www.commonsoil.org

info@commonsoil.org

