

Can regenerative agriculture deliver nutritious food and a just food system?

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Introduction

The UK food and farming system is associated with high greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and environmental impacts from multiple sources, including the loss of nutrients and chemicals, soil loss and degradation and habitat destruction. However, the food and farming system is also vital to addressing the environmental crises society faces.

Beyond the 'farm-gate,' fears of diet-related health problems and food security focus attention on what food is produced, where and how. Regenerative Agriculture (RA) has been presented as a solution – but its definition and efficacy are contested, undermining its potential.

This project will enable policymakers and other stakeholders to navigate RA risks and opportunities and spur enlightened dialogue crossing divides to bring effective change.

Methods

We are working with the Green Alliance and the Food Foundation as well as a larger stakeholder group.

Our interdisciplinary approach includes a rapid literature review, 30 semi-structured stakeholder interviews, and a survey of 300 people eliciting concepts and perspectives on RA and associated values and motives.

Insights are being used to create four RA 'versions', designed to draw out key differences in views of what RA should be. These versions will be presented in stakeholder workshops exploring their requirements and potential environmental, societal and economic implications. Opportunities and risks will be examined through engagement with expert knowledge.

The project brings together modellers and practitioners to consider and critique current indicators for assessing impacts. Actions are co-created with a diverse stakeholder group, ensuring the relevance of outputs.

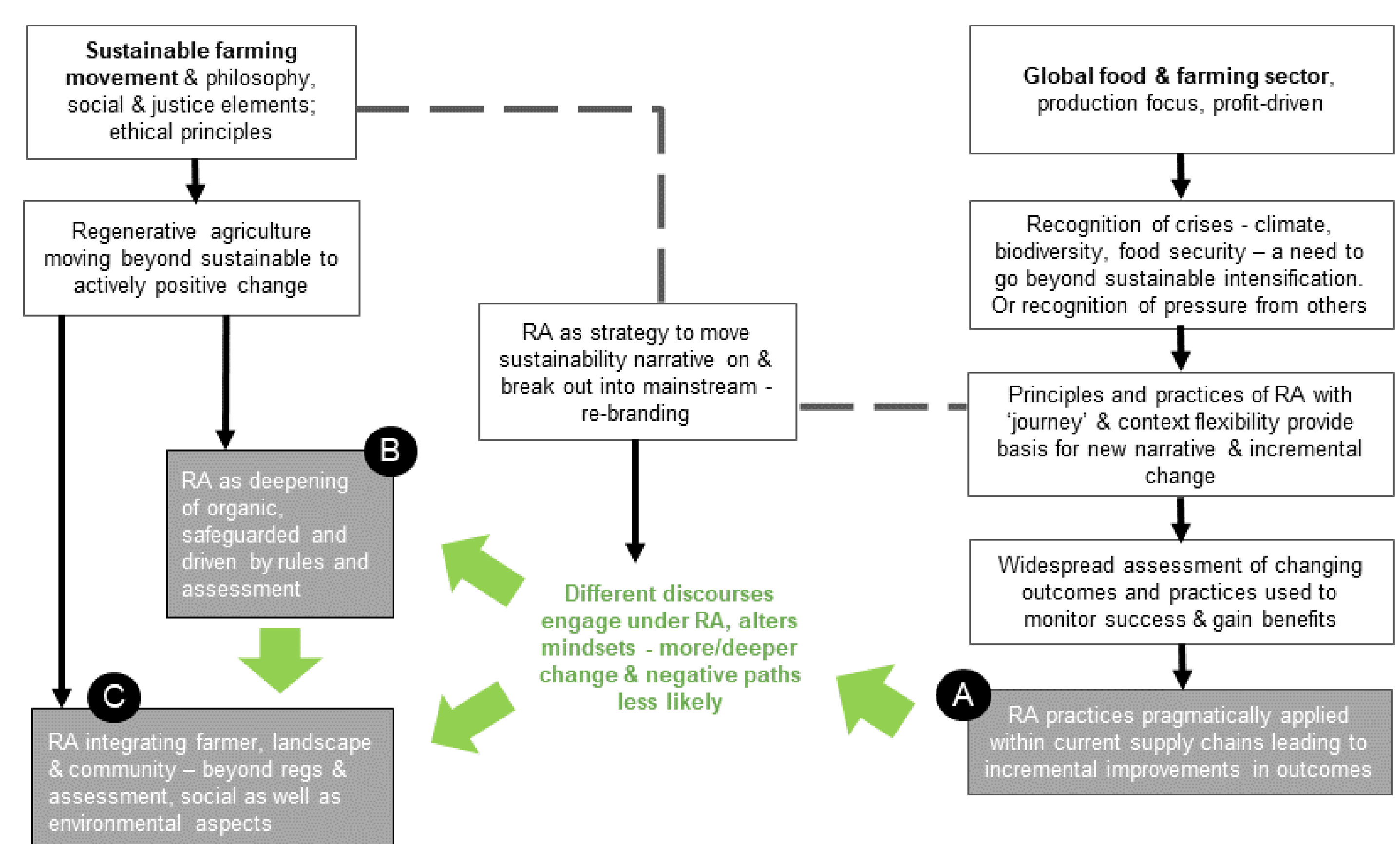
Outcomes

Work so far gives an initial overview of RA types and pathways to change (see figure). Tensions between these types are around farming philosophy, motives, principles and practices, the extent and type of external regulation, and perceptions of efficacy in driving change in food and farming. Perceptions and realities of power play an important role.

These early findings highlight some commonalities across RA types, including the importance of context specificity, farmer-led change and peer-to-peer learning. They also highlight differences, including whether RA can drive transformation and whether the idea of RA as a journey is realistic or simply enables greenwashing.

Next steps will explore enablers for, and implications of, RA versions created from stakeholder views.

An overview of RA types and pathways



RA type **A** may be viewed as reducing pressure for more transformational change (**B**, **C**) or a pathway of learning and experience may move farmers from **A** to **C** (green arrows). RA as an umbrella term may be an enabler of such transitions (green text). Some believe **B** creates barriers to **A** and that RA of this type will be trapped in a niche. Others see **B** as vital to avoid greenwashing and believe that it (and organic) can expand if wider systemic barriers are addressed. **C** is most based on philosophical principles. Proponents see it as representing an ideal RA with positive consequences much deeper and wider than other approaches. Views of these types of RA differ in how they view the chances of change and in what and how much change they see as being needed or positive.

Prompts for your reflections

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The Topic

How would you define regenerative agriculture (RA)?

What is the biggest question you have about RA?

What other issues might we consider in our next steps?

If you could change one thing about this research or its approach, what would it be?

Do you have any examples of similar work or experiences that could inform our research?

Outcomes

Do you see opportunities for collaboration or integration with other research or initiatives?

We are working with Food Foundation to include the perspectives of urban communities about how RA might be shaped to improve things for people the current food system isn't working for – is there any particular group or initiative you think we should talk to?

We are creating visualisations of our RA versions – do you have ideas about how we might use these to spur debate?

What do you think policymakers and other stakeholders might find most useful in our work?

The Method

What aspects of this Sprint's research approach seem most effective?

Are there gaps or limitations in the research process you think we might address?

How well does this approach balance speed and robustness in generating evidence-based solutions in this sector?

Our team is keen to explore novel ways to gather data, engage with our stakeholders and present findings (for example, working with an artist to visualise RA versions). Do you have experience of using artwork in your research? Or any innovative ideas about other approaches we might try?