

Relationships of regeneration in Great Plains commodity agriculture

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ABSTRACT ORIGINAL

In recent years regenerative agriculture has attracted growing attention as a means to improve soil health and farmer livelihoods while slowing climate change. With this attention has come increased policy support as well as the launch of private sector programs that promote regenerative agriculture as a form of carbon farming. In the United States many of these programs recruit primarily in regions where large-scale commodity production prevails, such as the Great Plains. There, a decades-old regenerative agriculture movement is growing rapidly, but not due to the incentives offered by companies' carbon programs. On the contrary, farmers are adopting regenerative practices to cut their dependence on corporate agrochemical inputs and expertise, and to thereby achieve technology sovereignty. These practice changes often strain farmers' existing social relationships while drawing them into new and previously neglected ones, including the more-than-human relations necessary for building soil health. These new relationships and the knowledge they generate may in turn lead farmers to think differently about their own autonomy. These findings provide insight into farmers' skepticism of private sector carbon farming programs, and highlight the value of attention to the multiple types of relationship change that accompany and facilitate regenerative transitions. © The Author(s), under exclusive licence to Springer Nature B.V. 2024.