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2023
**FALL
& WINTER
SEASONAL
PLANNER**



Regenerative agriculture—used at Blue Moon Acres—emphasizes soil health, which starts with establishing a living root.



This Land Is Our Land

An increasing number of our farm and rancher partners are focusing on improving soil health—for sustainability of the planet, of the farm industry, and of flavor. Learn what regenerative agriculture is and why it matters to your plate.

By Mahira Rivers

Jim Lyons stands on the deck of a two-story wooden house overlooking Blue Moon Acres, his 63-acre farm in Pennington, New Jersey. Wearing a khaki button-down shirt, Carhart jeans, and sturdy brown boots, he is perfectly dressed to navigate the farm's grassy terrain. He is deep in the weeds, metaphorically speaking, discussing the finer points of a new composting method. "This is just so cool," he pauses to say before launching into an analysis of fungal-to-bacterial ratios.

Composting is just one component of a broader farming strategy that's implemented at Blue Moon Acres. The approach is known as regenerative agriculture, and it focuses on promoting a natural, balanced ecosystem. It goes one step further to acknowledge the harm that industrial agriculture has caused and consequently aims to restore the soil—and everything tied to it—to optimal health for the next generation.

At Blue Moon Acres, this results in salad greens bursting with flavor, carrots that taste like the best versions of themselves, and rice that is arsenic-free and unbeatably fresh.

Baldor has long recognized the importance of investing in foodways of the future and providing the best food possible with the least environmental impact. That's why Blue Moon Acres is part of a growing portfolio

of farms supplying us with regeneratively grown products. Others include pioneers like Frog Hollow Farms, a stone fruit farm in California since 1976; Joyce Farms, a North Carolina-based heritage meat and poultry farm; King Grove, a boutique blueberry farm; Origin Milk, one of the country's few regenerative dairies; and Maine Grains, which seeks to restore America's grain belt via regenerative methods.

They're not alone in this care—regenerative agriculture is one of the most dynamic areas of farming. It's expected to grow 14% annually, reaching an \$8 billion market valuation globally by 2027. It has emerged as a top trend for retailers like Whole Foods and a key investment strategy for corporations like General Mills and Unilever. In 2022, the US government committed \$2.8 billion for climate-smart projects, including regenerative agriculture.

Baldor's partner farms each have a slightly different approach to regenerative, but the end result is the same: a new standard of quality. These farmers and ranchers are going beyond the status quo to regenerate their soil for the best-tasting ingredients. And they're producing a healthier, more resilient farming system and a healthier, more resilient planet while they're at it. "It's a win, win, win," says Lyons.

Blue Moon Acres owner Jim Lyons has been nurturing the soil back to optimal health for over ten years at his 63-acre farm in Pennington, New Jersey.

Beyond Organic and Sustainable

When asked to define regenerative agriculture, experts and practitioners agree that it's an approach that regenerates, or restores, an environment. Explaining what that approach entails, however, is not quite as simple. According to the National Resources Defense Council (NRDC), an environmental advocacy group, regenerative agriculture takes into account soil health, the welfare of plant and animal life, and the overall human impact. "Relationships are at the core of regenerative agriculture," says Arohi Sharma, a Deputy Director at the NRDC.

Unlike USDA-certified organic—a one-size-fits-all model focused on reducing synthetic chemicals and GMOs—regenerative solutions are tailored to the needs of each farm. And because every farm is different, every regenerative plan is unique. Still, there are some universal principles. Kiss the Ground, an educational nonprofit, lists these as: minimizing disturbance of the soil, establishing a living root, cover cropping, incorporating animals or organic fertilizer, and encouraging biodiversity.

The USDA reports that just 1% of arable land in the US is certified organic, leading experts to believe that the share of regenerative land is even smaller. As a result, there is a lack of familiarity among both farmers and consumers. "Years ago, when I said 'regenerative,' people would look at me like I was wearing a tin-foil hat," says Kevin Lindgren, Baldor's Director of Meat, Poultry, and Seafood Merchandising. "You know things are changing when huge companies like Walmart are mentioning regenerative in their ads. And farms of all size are starting to embrace at least some aspects of regenerative."

The word regenerative may sound new wave, but the practice is rooted in ancient traditions. Indigenous communities have been farming this way since the earliest days of agriculture.

When industrialization reached American farming in the 20th century, regenerative practices fell out of fashion. Industrial agriculture favors large-scale farms growing a limited number of crops for the cheapest price possible. Popular practices like overgrazing and tilling deplete the soil, which reduces natural productivity and cultivates an unhealthy, pest-ridden growing environment. To make up for this, synthetic chemicals are used to keep plants alive and boost yields but are ultimately just masking the problem.

In response to these damaging effects of "Big Ag" and monocrop culture, The Rodale Institute published a series of papers in the late 1980s asserting the importance of regenerative farming.

In 2002, the USDA set up the first national organic certification program, which overshadowed regenerative agri-

culture and became the gold standard in farming. But as environmental concerns like desertification and climate change continue to mount, the government's definition of organic has proven to be limited. "Consumers recognize the USDA organic stamp on a package, but that's just not enough anymore," says Matthew Rendine, Director of Produce Merchandising at Baldor. "Organic methods help the crop but not the land, yet the health of the soil is critical to the long-term health of the crops." In 2017, a group of farmers and business owners established the Regenerative Organic Certification (ROC) program to streamline and promote regenerative farming.

More recently, farmers have also begun to challenge the idea of sustainability in farming. "Why do you want to keep things as they are, instead of improving it?" asks Stuart Joyce, Executive Vice President & COO of Joyce Farms, a ranch that supplies Baldor with high-quality heritage breeds like Poulet Rouge chicken and Aberdeen Angus beef raised on regenerative farms in the Carolinas and Georgia.

The world's population is growing, arable land is declining, and there are unprecedented levels of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. Faced with these dire circumstances, regenerative has the power to fix the problem, rather than to merely sustain it.

Better Soil, Better Flavor

Jim Lyons crouches in front of a bed of arugula at Blue Moon Acres and scoops up a handful of soil. It is a fudgy chocolate brown color and as fluffy as cake crumbs.

Lyons has spent the past ten years rehabilitating his soil through organic composting, cover cropping, and minimal tilling. Now, it is absolutely teeming with life. "Microbiology is a game changer," Lyons says.

Infusing soil with a diverse array of microbial life unlocks a plant's ability to absorb micronutrients. Healthy soil results in healthy plants, which stay fresher for longer and naturally reduce the need for pesticides.

But most importantly for Baldor customers, healthy soil leads to great tasting ingredients. "When you talk about cooking, fat is flavor," says Kevin Lindgren. "But in farming, soil is the flavor."

Joyce Farms, founded in 1962, began transitioning to regenerative farming more than ten years ago. Through testing, they found that their animals thrived in a regenerative ecosystem, resulting in a superior product. "The pursuit of flavor has really guided us to regenerative agriculture," says Ryan Joyce, President and CEO of Joyce Farms. "The fat on our animals is amazing, that's the short and sweet answer," he adds.

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Advocates of
regenerative
agriculture want to
expand our definition
of good food. For the
sake of our future,
these farmers,
ranchers, and
entrepreneurs want
people to think
beyond the plate when
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buy and eat.”

Guernsey cows
graze freely on
regeneratively-
grown grasses at
Origin Milk farms,
resulting in richer,
more nutritious
milk.



At the heart of Joyce's operation is the soil. "If you don't start at the foundation, you cannot reach that ultimate peak flavor," says Nate Morgan, Sales Manager at Joyce. On the farms, heritage Angus cows graze rotationally, which not only keeps the soil healthy and productive, but gives herds access to over 20 varieties of grass, which provides an array of minerals and nutrients leading to a more robust flavor. The animals are healthier, too, and don't require antibiotics or hormones. "You don't have to be a health nut to appreciate that," says Morgan.

No matter what the final product is, regenerative farmers all agree that better flavor begins with the soil. Adrian and Lauren Bota founded Origin Milk in 2015 with the goal

of upending conventional dairy at their regenerative farms in Colorado, Ohio, and Pennsylvania. When asked, Adrian sees himself as a grass farmer first and foremost. After all, grass is what feeds the cows, which then impacts the quality of the milk. It's a you-are-what-you-eat state of mind. "We like to think of this as an entire ecosystem" says Adrian.

Origin specializes in A2 milk from heritage, grass-fed Guernsey cows (A2 milk is more easily digestible than Holstein cow milk, which represents most dairy in America). By sight, the milk has a unique golden hue, thanks to a higher level of butterfat and beta-carotin. And because of Origin's rich soil and regenerative practices, the milk is bursting with nutrition—more Omega-3s, more protein, and

more calcium. Ultimately, it is a richer, more luscious glass of milk. "We're talking about food, so taste has to lead the way," says Adrian.

Redefining Good for The Future

The impact of regenerative agriculture on the plate is major, but the impact to the planet is even more significant. The most obvious of these is how regenerative agriculture can actually help combat climate change.

Healthy, living soil is known as a carbon sink—it has the potential to sequester vast amounts of carbon, reducing greenhouse gases in the atmosphere.

To illustrate how this works, imagine an intricate network of roots, like microscopic branches of an underground tree. This is called a rhizosphere. The roots, microbes, and mycorrhizal fungi that make up a healthy rhizosphere need carbon to survive. The deeper and more diverse this underfoot ecosystem, the more carbon is stored. In contrast, barren, over-tilled soil has no rhizosphere and therefore nothing to hold on to that carbon.

According to the Journal of Soil and Water Conservation, farms with regenerative practices sequester over two times more carbon than conventional farms.

Healthy soil with a robust network of roots is also better at holding on to water, which prevents runoff and topsoil depletion. This means farms can be more resilient in floods and draughts.

Other, less obvious benefits are the nutritional benefits of regeneratively-grown ingredients, from higher levels of vitamins and minerals to healthier fats and protein. And fewer synthetic chemicals like fertilizers, pesticides, and antibiotics means less potential cross-contamination, not to mention cost savings for the farmer.

A key tenet of regenerative agriculture that is harder to quantify is the positive impact that food systems have on human life. Per the NRDC, part of the regenerative framework includes "nurturing communities and reimagining economies" to address inequity. As such, Baldor partners with companies that are equally concerned with the people working on the farms and in the factories. "The farmer is at the core of what we are doing, just like soil is at the core of grass," says Adrian Bota, who puts this into action by paying his farmers a higher wage than many organic dairies.

American farmers are in trouble—farm debt is forecasted to reach an all-time high in 2023 and more farmers are filing for bankruptcy than ever. Regenerative agriculture aims to fix these economic woes, too. Regenerative methods not only salvage dead, inert soil to expand arable land, but can also be more productive, with stronger and bigger yields. This helps farmers save money in the long run—reducing

the need for costly inputs like fertilizers, tilling equipment, or irrigation. It also helps establish economic security with a steady, long-term supply of high-quality products.

Unlike fast fads in the food industry, regenerative agriculture is a long game. In some cases, it can take decades to regenerate soil and to see the fruits of that labor. "There's an easier way to grow and harvest chickens, but we want to do it the better way," says Nate Morgan of Joyce Farms. The reward for being patient, in addition to everything already discussed, is an assurance that these products and businesses won't disappear at a moment's notice.

When it comes down to it, advocates of regenerative agriculture want to expand our definition of good food. For the sake of our future, and for generations to follow, these farmers, ranchers, and entrepreneurs want people

to think beyond the plate when deciding what to buy and eat. "If you're going to drink dairy, you should drink the best," says Adrian Bota, adding, "it's the best because of the flavor, nutrition, genetics, and because of the environmental impact."

The future of regenerative agriculture is both exciting and urgent. There is an abundance of farmland in need of regeneration in this country, not to mention the number of farmers struggling to make a wage. At the same time, the environmental incentives have never been greater.

And if the pandemic taught us anything, it's that our food system is one intricately connected web. What's good for our farmers is inevitably good for us all. At Baldor, we see the critical role our

customers play in this ecosystem. "Chefs have been the linchpin," says Jim Lyons. "Without them, we wouldn't be here." By partnering with farms like Blue Moon Acres, Baldor wants to enable our customers to be a part of the regenerative solution. Our collective investment today guarantees a better, healthier, more delicious tomorrow for everyone.

Mahira Rivers is a restaurant critic and freelance journalist based in New York. She writes about restaurants and food culture at large for publications such as The New York Times, New York Magazine, and Food & Wine. She also writes a column for Resy on trends in the restaurant industry, informed by her experience as a former Michelin Guides inspector; her work there was nominated for a James Beard Media Award in 2022.

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