



Bundesverband Boden



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TEN KEY POINTS FOR AN EU-WIDE SOIL PROTECTION POLICY

Soils are complex habitats, deeply connected to rich flora and fauna. This makes it necessary to protect these diverse habitats. After the failure of the European Soil Framework Directive last year, we need new momentum for developing a European Soil Policy. As a broad alliance of organisations for soil and nature protection we are calling for a binding European framework for soil protection – similar to the frameworks that protect water and air quality.

1. Common European Targets

For a European policy on soil protection we need to develop common targets. These goals have to include the conservation and protection of natural soil functions as well as soil structure. A good ecological status of European soils can only be achieved when targets are universally valid. EU member states have to commit to a commonly agreed good ecological status – comparable to approach under the EU Water Framework Directive.

2. Limit Land Take of Natural Soils

500 km² of European soils are estimated to be sealed every year. This corresponds to an area half the size of Berlin. We need common rules for the general use of natural soils. Natural soils should only be structurally claimed when demand is proven and other land already in use has fully been exploited. Agriculturally used areas should be maintained and reclaimed from eroded areas, since they are crucial for food production. We need to work towards stopping land take due to increased urbanization by 2050 at the latest (zero net-use), as the European Commission has already proposed in its strategy toward a resource-efficient Europe. Another issue is the intensification of agricultural land-use which has significant ecological and chemical consequences for soils. An EU-wide framework should ensure stable and environmentally sound use of soils, both in the short- and the long-term.

3. Comparable Protection Measures throughout the EU

Together with the European Parliament and the Member States, the European Commission has to develop soil protection measures that are comparable throughout the European Union under the ordinary legislative procedure. These measures should take regional differences into account. Universal rules for all EU countries including set implementation periods are necessary. Comparable measures include precautionary measures, but also remediative measures as well as those measures ensuring safe groundwater. Member States have to determine priority areas that are prone to risks such as erosion, salinisation, soil density etc. Additionally, reference areas with conditions specific to various soil types have to be established.

4. Universal Standards and Limits

Especially in the material sector universal indicators and limits for pollutants are of great importance in Europe. These would guarantee a level playing field in Europe as well as add to the protection of the environment and human health. Instruments and indicators need to be established on a national level, taking regional differences into account. Europeanising limits should not lead to a lowering of already existing targets. Additionally, national actors need to conduct a regular monitoring of soil quality, in order to make a change in soil quality measurable. Soil compaction caused by the use of heavy machinery in agriculture and forestry should also be included.

5. Take the Nexus-Approach into Consideration

Soil protection cannot be reduced to merely one policy area. Therefore, further policy areas need to be included and need to take up responsibility for soil protection. These should include agriculture and forestry, food security, flood control (water retention in permeable soil), groundwater recharge (filter function) as well as surface water protection (buffer and filter for contamination and nutrients). EU transport policy and European structural and regional policy needs to include the sealing, compaction and soil contamination in their undertakings concerning infrastructure and contribute to their prevention and reduction.

6. Use Soils as CO₂-Sinks

Soils offer an important contribution to climate protection. Next to the oceans, soils are the biggest sink for CO₂-emissions. The transformation of grassland into arable land and the drainage of swamps need to be stopped. The EU climate debate has to increase the role of soil as a CO₂-sink.

7. Prevent Landgrabbing

Landgrabbing, which is often conducted by capital-intensive investors, leads to an increase in monocultures, an intensification of conventional agriculture and thus to the weakening of natural soil functions. Local farmers should get pre-emptive rights for soil purchases in all member states. The EU has to stop the process of land concentration. Big agricultural areas should obtain comparably less direct payments under the CAP.

8. Establish Incentive-Based Measures

There is a need for EU-wide incentives that prevent the contamination, compaction, erosion and sealing of soil. The promotion of ecological agriculture plays a key role here.

9. Stringently Implement the Polluter-Pays-Principle

Soil polluters, as they can be found in the mining sector and in agriculture and forestry, need to be obliged to take remediative measures of natural soil functions. What is already valid for industry plants under the IED (industrial emissions directive) should become valid for all polluters.

10. Raise Public Awareness

Soil protection is still a difficult topic that lacks popularity and its importance is little known among the general public. Information about soil protection should be spread via campaigns, the media and so on and so forth. As in so many cases, education is key. This topic should be discussed and people be made aware of it starting from a young age.

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