

EUROPEAN LAND AND SOIL ALLIANCE (ELSA)

THE BOARD

c/o Stadt Osnabrück / Postfach 44 60
D - 49034 Osnabrück



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New Soil Strategy - healthy soil for a healthy life

Statement of the European Land and Soil Alliance (ELSA)

ELSA welcomes the European Commission's revision of the Thematic Strategy for Soil Protection and underlines the importance of soil as a limited resource. This strategy should be a broad process involving all relevant stakeholders, including landowners.

From ELSA's point of view, however, it is imperative that a legally binding regulation (EU framework directive) for the protection of soils be subsequently developed, discussed and adopted. Unfortunately, a few member countries and interest groups have caused this framework directive to fail, despite it being urgently needed.

ELSA sees numerous interconnections between European and international initiatives and agreements that definitely ought to be taken into account in the revised version of the Thematic Strategy, such as Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the European Green Deal, the EU Biodiversity Strategy, the EU Soil Health and Food Mission, etc.

ELSA explicitly emphasises that soil protection is not just a local, regional or national issue. The opinion expressed by various interest groups at the time of the failure of the EU Soil Framework Directive, that the subsidiarity principle is contrary to EU soil legislation, is technically incorrect and also unsustainable.

Climate change, soil erosion, desertification, humus loss, land take and soil sealing, the protection of "good" soils for food security as well as biodiversity are European issues that also need to be discussed and solved at European level. This also includes uniform assessment standards, because the pollutants in soils affect everyone's health equally.

However, ELSA also explicitly emphasises that towns/cities, districts and municipalities are indispensable partners in soil protection and hold a key position in implementation at local and regional level.



ELSA would like to highlight the following objectives:

- Europe-wide recording of soil quality depending on valuable functions, such as production, habitat, filter, buffer, water retention capacity, soil fertility and climate protection. Protection of fertile soils, which also have a high retention capacity and filtering/buffering capacity, is of paramount importance.
- Safeguarding and improvement of the humus content (C_{org} content) and protection of soils with a high C_{org} content (e.g. marshland) in order to preserve the “soil” carbon sink.
- Protection and expansion of the climate protection function. On the one hand, soils are to be recorded, protected and/or upgraded as C reservoirs. On the other hand, it is important to preserve the soils in urban habitats as reservoirs and sites for plants in order to dampen the effects of increasing weather extremes (heavy rain and heat).
- Safeguarding of soil fertility in order to preserve the soil as a valuable and indispensable basis for the production of food and feed in terms of food security and food sovereignty
- Management of agricultural soils adapted to reduce the risk of erosion and protect against desertification
- Increase in the share of organically farmed agricultural land in accordance with the EU Directive with goals set to a specific timeline
- Reduction of land take for housing, roads, commerce/industry at the European level, which results in the destruction/removal of humus-rich topsoil. For this purpose, laws or ordinances, or better still, financial/fiscal management tools could be used (e.g. land certificates, soil sealing tax). The revenues could be used to support soil protection measures or land recycling.
- Creation of uniform standards (assessment, precautionary, examination, threshold or action values) as a benchmark for a common and responsible approach to soil damage. A uniform approach in Europe prevents damage to health, ensures healthy food and avoids unfair competition (e.g. in land recycling). The successes of European legal instruments such as the EU Water Framework Directive and the EU Air Quality Directive are convincing proof of this.

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European Land and Soil Alliance (ELSA) e.V.