



A CEO'S VIEW:

Regenerative Agriculture Scales When Finance Is Designed to Deliver

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May 2026

Regenerative agriculture is no longer a niche conversation. It's becoming a board-level issue—because climate volatility is rewriting yield assumptions, input costs are destabilizing farm economics, and biodiversity loss is eroding the natural infrastructure every supply chain depends on.

But let's be honest about what's holding us back. Regenerative agriculture won't scale on good intentions, isolated pilots, or another round of glossy commitments. It will scale when it becomes the rational choice for farmers and the investable choice for markets—especially through the 3–5 year transition period where costs arrive first and returns arrive later.

I've spent much of my career working alongside farmers, local organizations, and supply chains across the Global South. That perspective has shaped how I understand one of the persistent challenges sustainable finance continues to face: the last mile problem.

The gap isn't capital. It's delivery infrastructure.

Many sustainable finance strategies for agriculture are well-designed at the top, but struggle in delivery. The commitments are real. The pilots are promising. They fall short at scale because capital without a delivery infrastructure rarely translates into lasting change.

Financial institutions face a specific set of frustrations that I hear consistently:

- Pilots that work in one region but can't be replicated elsewhere
- MRV data that looks good in a report but doesn't hold up in a credit committee
- Transition risk they know is real but can't price with confidence
- Greenwashing exposure from portfolio commitments they can't independently verify
- Farmer engagement models that extract data but don't build trust or adoption

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These aren't failures of ambition. They're failures of operating infrastructure — and that's a solvable problem.

The transition problem is not farmer reluctance—it's the package

We sometimes frame this as a farmer adoption problem. In reality, it's a systems design problem. Farmers engage when the package is coherent: practical technical assistance, credible capacity building, some form of financial support that shares risk, and enough market assurance to justify the change.

Most regenerative transitions include a period of variability—often across 3–5 years—while farmers test practices, rebuild soil function, and adjust management. If we automatically label that period as “higher risk,” we build a financial penalty into the transition. The smarter decision is to design finance and insurance that acknowledge transition dynamics while rewarding verified resilience over the long term.

Consider what that looks like from a farmer's perspective: you're being asked to accept short-term yield variability, absorb new learning costs, and trust that markets will reward you in year four or five — while your lender prices your loan based on year one. That's not a farmer reluctance problem. That's a product design problem.

What it takes to scale: six system elements

From a leadership standpoint, scaling regenerative agriculture comes down to one goal: make the resilient option the easiest option. In practice, six system elements determine whether efforts stay small—or become durable, repeatable platforms:

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1. **Risk pricing that rewards resilience.** Treat soil health, biodiversity, water function, and emissions reduction as risk management—not marketing.
2. **Blended finance that funds the full transition.** Capital alone is insufficient. The winning models combine capital + technical assistance + monitoring. Philanthropists, foundations, and public actors can unlock scale through first-loss layers, guarantees, technical assistance facilities, and outcome-linked payments that crowd in private capital.
3. **Market assurance and aligned incentives.** Farmers invest when demand signals are stable and requirements are coherent. Long-term commitments matter.
4. **Credible evidence that is practical.** Traceability, due diligence, and MRV must be decision-grade without becoming an administrative tax on producers.
5. **Farmer-centered data governance.** When producers and communities have clarity and agency over data, it becomes a learning asset that accelerates adoption.
6. **Supply-shed and landscape collaboration.** Pre-competitive collaboration can reduce duplication, align expectations, and enable share infrastructure and data systems—creating the efficiencies required to scale.





Collaboration needs an operating system, not just a coalition

Everyone says “collaboration.” The hard part is making it work. Collaboration only creates value when it changes how decisions get made, how delivery gets coordinated, and how outcomes get verified across actors who do not share the same incentives or systems.

That is also why independent, trusted partners matter. Agribusinesses, financial and insurance institutions can move faster when they can rely on delivery quality and data integrity. In our experience, the strongest models pair global consistency (so definitions and methods hold across markets) with real local presence—boots on the ground—to build farmer trust and deliver change in context.

What financial and insurance institutions often underestimate is how much of their scalability challenge is actually a data integrity issue. When MRV is designed extractively — data collected from farmers but not owned or even shared back with them — it produces compliance outputs, not learning systems. The result is data that satisfies a report but can't support a credit decision or an insurance model because the underlying farmer practices and behavior haven't changed.

Where SAN is positioned to contribute (without reinventing the wheel)

No single institution will “solve” the regenerative transition. We will get there by building collaborative ecosystems that connect agronomy, markets, data, and finance.

SAN has spent decades building exactly the infrastructure that sustainable finance and insurance institutions need but rarely have: trusted farmer relationships, locally rooted delivery networks, and MRV systems designed to be rigorous without being extractive.

We are not a financial institution. We don't pretend to be. But we are increasingly convinced that the gap between where sustainable finance wants to go and where it actually lands is an infrastructure gap — and that's our domain.

Specifically, what we bring:

- Radical collaboration, operationalized: convening multi-stakeholder partnerships across agricultural supply chains and supply sheds, with governance built for co-investment and shared accountability.
- Global consistency with local legitimacy: a network that pairs shared frameworks with locally rooted organizations that bring long-term presence and trusted farmer relationships in +100 countries.
- Evidence that works in the real world: practical approaches for traceability, due diligence, and outcome-based MRV that are rigorous without being extractive.
- Community-led monitoring: training community monitors (e.g., through the Community Monitoring and Assurance System -CMAS) so data strengthens local awareness and accelerates adoption, instead of becoming a compliance burden.
- Nature-based solutions for input reduction: programming that strengthens ecosystem function and reduces reliance on external inputs over time.

The organizations that lead the next chapter of sustainable agriculture finance will be the ones that stop trying to build delivery infrastructure themselves — and partner with organizations that already have it.





A practical call to action

If regenerative agriculture is essential infrastructure for the future food economy, then we should finance it like infrastructure: with patient capital, credible measurement, and delivery systems that work at scale.

For sustainable financial and insurance institutions, the opportunity is to move from small pilots to repeatable models that can shift portfolios.

- Redesign products around transition reality: build finance and insurance that bridge the 3–5 year adoption window and reward verified resilience outcomes.
- Deploy blended finance with clear intent: use philanthropists/foundations and public actors to fund first-loss, guarantees, technical assistance, and outcome-linked payments that crowd in private capital.
- Fund the operating system: invest in local delivery capacity, farmer engagement, and practical MRV—so capital is matched by execution.
- Enable supply-shed collaboration: reduce duplication by aligning requirements, sharing infrastructure, and building common data systems in shared sourcing regions.
- Make evidence decision-grade: produce outcome data that credit committees, insurers, and portfolio teams can actually use.

I'm looking forward to exploring what scalable, evidence-based operating models look like with sustainable finance and insurance leaders in the coming weeks. If you're building in this space and want to compare notes, I'd welcome the conversation.

About the Sustainable Agriculture Network

The Sustainable Agriculture Network (SAN) is a global impact network transforming agriculture into a force for good — healing and nourishing our extraordinary planet. Together with 38 diverse member organizations across more than 120 countries, SAN advances sustainable, equitable, and climate-resilient farming systems that empower communities and restore nature.

Through radical collaboration, SAN connects farmers, businesses, researchers, and civil society to co-create solutions that tackle the world's most pressing challenges — from climate change and biodiversity loss to social inequity. Our network's collective efforts have already helped transform over 40 million hectares of farmland, driving measurable progress toward regenerative and inclusive food systems.

Rooted in integrity, inclusivity, curiosity, empathy, adaptability, and evidence-based action, SAN leads with both urgency and hope. We envision a future where agriculture heals, communities thrive, and nature flourishes.

Learn more at www.sustainableagriculture.eco

