

SOIL

Soil is a most valuable but largely non-renewable resource performing many functions vital to life such as providing necessary structural and nutritional support for food and biomass production, storage, filtration and transformation of many substances including water, carbon or nitrogen.

These functions involve complex interactions within the soil itself, between the soil and the crop/grazing animal and between the soil and the wider environment.

Besides its role as a provider of raw materials, it also serves as a habitat and gene pool, as well as a platform for human activities, the landscape and heritage.



ELO believes that the functions of soil are worthy of protection because of their socio-economic as well as environmental importance.

Sustainable rural development can be reached in part through adequate soil management, combined with the protection of water and further natural resources. Both the European Commission and our organization believe that there is a **need for better understanding and more research to be done in this respect and are very well aware of the fundamental aspects of sustainable soil management.**

The intervention of man into this natural set of inter-relationships has provided the basis for much of modern life from food production to infrastructure grounds. These soil uses should continue while minimising adverse impacts on soil functions.

Some European soils are facing major threats, some which are reversible, other which are not. These threats were addressed during Working Group meetings in which ELO took part in the context of the preparation of the Thematic Strategy for Soil Protection, focusing on erosion, contamination, sealing, compaction, reduced organic matter, salinisation and landslides. This Strategy aims to ensure the protection and sustainable use of soil in the EU through preventing soil degradation, preserving soil functions and restoring degraded soils.



ELO welcomes the Strategy but wishes to call the Commission's attention to the question of whether the approach to sustainable soil management should be accomplished through a guidance linked to maintaining good agricultural and environmental condition or through a regulatory framework such as a Soil Framework Directive.

In direct line with its policy, ELO decided to enhance awareness with regard to environmental and soil management in the rural world by creating a new award in close cooperation with the scientific world and the European Union: the "Environment and Soil Management Award".

The Soil Thematic Strategy defines common principles to limit the threats to EU soils by combining action at EU and Member State levels. ELO contributed to the elaboration of workable tools.

A proposal of a Soil Framework Directive is currently in the pipelines of the European Commission. The broad framework of this proposal, mainly requires MS to identify risk areas. MS however will be left to define the level of ambition of their targets. Given the nature of the legislative process ("codecision" procedure/EP+EU Council), its practical effects are not expected before 2015.

In any case, **ELO is in favour of incentives for land businesses** such as agricultural payments, which would help and encourage land businesses to mitigate the threats.