

Earth Charter x Value Creators

Creating Value in the Horticulture System

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Background

This semester, our team embarked on the Value Creators Journey. We decided that we want to research the question: How might community-driven, small-scale regenerative horticulture be integrated into local EU food systems in a way that strengthens farmer collaboration and consumer trust? After two months of studying literature and researching in the field, we found out that for us, it would have been most impactful to create value for consumers and farmers. In particular, we tried to investigate which possible solutions could have had an impact on both. We came to the conclusion that a community and label would have had the most impact, in our opinion and after talking to a lot of stakeholders in the field.

We strive to create a label that can state that the production of fresh produce is done in a certain way, namely, small-scale and regenerative.

We are aware of the fact that many labels already exist on the market (biological, KMO, etc). Despite this, we also know that the labels already in place and well-known are too expensive for small-scale farmers. These realities simply cannot afford the costs of these labels.

That is where our added value would be placed: by proposing a free label (or for a very contained cost), we would give an opportunity for small farmers to have this label and enter a community. In detail, this community would be a place where farmers can exchange knowledge and help each other achieve higher goals related to the principles of the label. That way we could keep the costs low would be through utilising peer- and self-assessment; indeed, it will be the farmers who will assess whether a new member meets all the criteria to enter the community and therefore get the label.

We came across the opportunity of collaborating with Earth Charter Netherlands, and we would be delighted to embrace this challenge. We see plenty of potential for upscaling with the EC, since they are already a very well-established international organisation, and their name holds a reputation. Furthermore, since our label would come from an institution which is not known (especially abroad), promoting it through the Earth Charter would help us spread it and make it popular among farmers and consumers.

Prototype

The community we aim to build is a collaborative network of small-scale, organic, and regenerative farmers who share a commitment to ecological and ethical principles inspired by the Earth Charter. Its purpose is to connect farmers who often work in isolation, offering them a space to exchange knowledge, share innovations, and support each other. By participating in this community, farmers engage in a system of self- and peer-assessment based on clear criteria that reflect regenerative and environmentally responsible practices.

This community fosters accountability, transparency, and continuous improvement. Through regular exchanges, discussions, and feedback, farmers not only strengthen their own practices but also contribute to a broader movement for sustainable agriculture. As a result, the community becomes a tool for empowerment: it helps farmers build resilience, gain recognition, and navigate the market more fairly. Ultimately, it fills an existing gap by creating a strong, supportive network that reinforces ecological values and promotes collaboration across regions.

Label

The label is the visible symbol of the values and efforts upheld by the community of farmers. Instead of relying on expensive, external certifications that small-scale farmers often cannot afford, this label is obtained through the community's internal process of self- and peer-assessment. It is built on principles adapted from the Earth Charter, ensuring high ethical and ecological standards while avoiding greenwashing, which is common among existing labels on the market.

Farmers receive a bronze, silver, or gold distinction depending on how well they meet the agreed criteria. This motivates continuous improvement while maintaining credibility and transparency. For consumers, the label acts as a trustworthy marker that allows them to identify produce grown according to regenerative and sustainable values. It helps farmers distinguish their products in the market, build trust with customers, and gain visibility. The optional QR code included on the label offers direct access to information about the farm or the community, further enhancing transparency. In this way, the label becomes both a communication tool and a market advantage for farmers committed to ethical and ecological agriculture.

Principles and values of the community and label related to the Earth Charter values

Earth Charter Principle	Core meaning	Translated Label Principle for Farmers
I. Respect and Care for the Community of Life	Recognize the interdependence of all life and act with respect for all beings.	Respect for All Life – Farms protect biodiversity, honor all living systems, and cultivate in harmony with nature.

II. Ecological Integrity	Safeguard Earth's ecological systems and restore their health.	Regenerative Soil and Water Practices – Soil regeneration, minimal tillage, organic inputs, and water conservation are mandatory.
III. Social and Economic Justice	Build equitable societies that eradicate poverty and provide sustainable livelihoods.	Fair and Inclusive Agriculture – Farming guarantees fair wages, gender equity, local employment, and inclusive governance in farm cooperatives.
IV. Democracy, Nonviolence, and Peace	Strengthen participation, dialogue, and peaceful coexistence.	Participatory and Transparent Governance – Farmers engage in decision-making, practice non-exploitative relationships, and support conflict-free land use.

Earth Charter Principle	Meaning / Essence	Farmer Label Principle
1. Respect Earth and life in all its diversity.	Protect and cherish the web of life.	Biodiversity Guidance – Farmers maintain ecological diversity and respect all life forms.
2. Care for the community of life with understanding, compassion, and love.	Live in harmony with other species and people.	Compassionate Farming – Practices respect animal welfare and community well-being.
3. Build democratic societies that are just, participatory, sustainable, and peaceful.	Link sustainability with justice and peace.	Democratic and Fair Farm Communities – Farms operate with shared decision-making and fair treatment.
4. Secure Earth's bounty and beauty for present and future generations.	Intergenerational responsibility.	Regenerative Principles – Farming methods restore resources for the next generations.
5. Protect and restore the integrity of Earth's ecological systems, with special concern for biological diversity and the natural processes that sustain life.	Restore and protect ecosystems.	Restorative Agriculture – Soil, water, and habitat restoration are central to farm certification.
6. Prevent harm as the best method of environmental protection and, when knowledge is limited, apply a precautionary approach.	Precautionary principle.	Pollution-Free Farming – Eliminate chemical pollution and safeguard ecosystem health.
7. Adopt sustainable patterns of production, consumption, and reproduction that Earth's regenerative capacities, human	Responsible use of resources.	Circular Farm Economy – Waste-free production, composting, and reuse of materials within the farm system.

rights, and community well-being		
8. Advance the study of ecological sustainability and promote the open exchange and wide application of the knowledge acquired.	Knowledge for sustainability.	Knowledge and Innovation in Agroecology – Farmers engage in continuous learning and innovation.
9. Eradicate poverty as an ethical, social, and environmental imperative.	Link social justice with sustainability.	Livelihood Security – Ensure farming sustains families and communities economically.
10. Ensure that economic activities and institutions at all levels promote human development in an equitable and sustainable way.	Fair distribution of benefits.	Ethical Market Access – Farmers receive fair trade value for sustainable products, avoiding exploitative intermediaries.
11. Affirm gender equality and equity as prerequisites to sustainable development and ensure universal access to education, health care, and economic opportunity.	Equal participation and opportunity.	Gender-Equitable Farming – Women's leadership and decision-making are integral.
12. Uphold the right of all, without discrimination, to a natural and social environment supportive of human dignity, bodily health, and spiritual well-being, with special attention to the rights of indigenous peoples and minorities.	Environmental health is a human right.	Healthy and Just Farming Environments – Farms protect clean air and water, and respect Indigenous and minority rights.
13. Strengthen democratic institutions at all levels, and provide transparency and accountability in governance, inclusive participation in decision making, and access to justice.	Local empowerment and participation.	Cooperative Governance – Farmers participate in fair, transparent decision processes.
14. Integrate into formal education and life-long learning the knowledge, values, and skills needed for a sustainable way of life.	Sustainability through knowledge.	Farmer Education and Training – Ongoing agroecology and sustainability learning.
15. Treat all living beings with respect and consideration.	Ethical relationships with all life.	Ethical Treatment of Animals and Ecosystems – Compassionate care, no exploitation.

16. Promote a culture of tolerance, nonviolence, and peace.	Harmony among people and nature.	Peaceful Coexistence Farming – Farms as spaces of cultural respect and ecological harmony.
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Assessment

Steps for acquiring the label:

1. Learn about the background of the label.
 - a. The values behind the label: sustainability of the production process, circularity, and the social aspect
 - b. Why can it be useful for your farm? - This is the place to think about why you want the label: - Marketing purposes, recognition of produce, desire to be part of a community, etc.
 - c. Why does it apply to your produce? - Here, think about which values are similar, and you already apply in your work.
2. Conduct self-assessment
 - a. Conduct a truthful self-assessment of your work practices, products and resources
3. Allocation of the assessing partner
 - a. As the label will assess farms within the community of partners, another farm will need to be found willing to collaborate on the assessment. They will check the self-assessment and reassess for more holistic results
4. Assessment
 - a. The evaluating farm will decide where the new farm measures according to the values behind the label: sustainability of the production process, circularity, and the social aspect.
5. Get a level- bronze, silver or gold
 - a. The levels are acquired yearly. For example, if the first year the farm receives a bronze level, and there is improvement in the next assessment, they can reach silver or gold.

Future Vision

Future of the label/future plan (Outcomes)

The future of the label depends on our ability to integrate it into the market. If we find a viable partner or platform that can promote our product and attract more attention from consumers, it will help. After all, we are trying to support small-scale, organic farms that produce and sell locally. Therefore, it is important that consumers are aware of this. In the future, the label has the potential to be scaled up...

Possible expansion opportunities

- Knowledge hub (through Earth Charter)
 - o Same peer-to-peer assessment, but globally
 - o Video tutorials on how to meet different levels of our label
 - o Research library on organic and future-oriented farming techniques and practices
- Farmer Profiles
 - o Page for each farm/farmer showing their qualifications and label level
 - o Story of the farm/farmer and photos
 - o Visitor information
 - o Direct messaging capabilities

Scaling up of our community could occur in three phases

- Phase 1 (Years 1-2)
 - o Pilot with a smaller group of 10 farmers
 - o Refine the assessment tool based on the feedback we receive
 - o Establish baseline consumer awareness
 - o Build relationships with key local retailers and farmers' markets
 - o The label is displayed at the farm and at farmers' markets
- Phase 2 (Years 3-5)
 - o Upscale to 100 farms EU-wide through EC platforms
 - o Launch consumer awareness campaign
 - o A platform through EC, available to consumers, where they can view the farmers' profiles, background, and story
 - o The label will start to be integrated in supermarkets
- Phase 3 (Years 5-10)
 - o Expand to farms worldwide
 - o The label is recognised by the EU Commission

Appendix

Appendix 1. Assessment form

	1 Bronze/Seed	2 Silver/plant	3 Gold/Tree	Points
Respect and Care for the Community of Life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Awareness of biodiversity. - Limited circularity - Fair treatment of workers - Limited sense of future orientation (in use of resources and making decisions) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Interconnection between soil, plants, and people - Fair treatment and respect for workers and opportunities for learning and creativity - Effort to minimise ecological harm and maximise sustainability - The farm considers the decisions made by the community around it - Clear future orientation (in use of resources and decision making) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Nurtures the ecosystem not only in the farm but also around it - Evident regenerative practices - Empowers workers and their potential, promotes soil healing and water protection - The farm considers extensively the decisions made by the community around it - Substantial future orientation and includes and mentors the youth) 	
Ecological Integrity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Protects the ecological system - Practices limited sustainability - Does not use harmful substances - Uses at least one renewable resource in their farming practices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Protects ecological system and actively practices sustainability - Does not use harmful substances and materials - Promotes recovery of the ecosystem in the farm, uses renewable resources and energy in their farming practices - Educates about regenerative farming practices in their field - Prevents pollution in their farm work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Protects ecological system and actively practices sustainability, - Does not use harmful substances and materials - Promotes recovery of the ecosystem in the farm and the community - Uses renewable resources and energy in their farming practices - Educates about regenerative farming practices in their field and the local community - Prevents pollution in their farm work - Supports and practices innovation and development in the sector - Internalize the full environmental and social costs of goods 	

			and services in the selling price - Enables consumers to identify products that meet the highest social and environmental standards	
Social Economic Justice	- Has clean water, uncontaminated soil and safe sanitation - Educates and empowers the workers in the farm - Ensure that the majority of trade supports sustainable resource use, environmental protection, and progressive labor standards - Ensures safety of all members of the farm - Supports young people	- Has clean water, uncontaminated soil and safe sanitation - Educates and gives responsibility roles to the workers in the farm - Ensure that all trade supports sustainable resource use, environmental protection, and progressive labor standards, -Ensures and practices safety of all members of the farm, - Supports and educates young people	- Has clean water, uncontaminated soil and safe sanitation - Helps with food insecurity, -Educates and gives responsibility roles and empowers the workers in the farm and the community - Ensure that all trade supports sustainable resource use, environmental protection, and progressive labor standards - Ensures safety of all members of the farm and the community - Supports, includes and educates young people in the farm's work	
Democracy, nonviolence, and peace	- Gives freely, timely, and clear information about the environmental actions of the farm to the community and consumers - Supports the nearby communities - Protects the rights to freedom of opinion, prevents cruelty to animals and all living beings - Supports solidarity and cooperation	- Gives freely timely and clear information about the environmental actions of the farm to the community and consumers - Supports and strengthens the nearby communities - Protects the rights to freedom of opinion, prevents animal cruelty and to all living beings and protects them - Educates the youth - Raises awareness about ecological and social challenges	- Gives freely timely and clear information about the environmental and social actions of the farm - Supports and strengthens the regional and local communities - Encourages cooperation in the local community - Protects the rights to freedom of opinion - Educates and supports the youth - Raises thorough awareness about ecological and social challenges	

		<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Encourages solidarity, accountability, and cooperation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Prevents animal cruelty to all living beings and protects them- Encourages solidarity and cooperation	
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