

## Issue N 1

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# EU MISSIONS

SOIL DEAL FOR EUROPE

NEWSLETTER



#EUmissions #HorizonEU #MissionSoil



## Mission Soil

**Welcome to the first newsletter of the [Mission 'A Soil Deal for Europe'](#) (Mission Soil)!**

By subscribing to this newsletter, you will become part of a community of organisations, institutions, companies and individuals who share a common goal: to protect and restore soil health.

You will be informed about the Mission Soil activities, from the latest news and events to project updates, calls for proposals, policy developments and much more!

**You can also read the [French](#) and [German](#) version of this Newsletter.**

**What is the Mission Soil about?**

The [Mission Soil](#) is an instrument funded by the European Union under the Research and Innovation Framework Programme Horizon Europe. It aims to create **100 living labs (places for on-the-ground experiments) and lighthouses (sites for showcasing good practices) to lead the transition towards healthy soils by 2030**. Currently, about 60% of soils in the EU are considered to be unhealthy (see [Dashboard of the European Soil Observatory](#)).

The Mission is also implementing an ambitious research and innovation programme, promoting harmonised soil monitoring in the EU, and increasing public awareness and engagement in soil protection and restoration. Activities under the Mission aim at finding solutions to major soil health challenges in rural and urban areas and contribute to its specific objectives:

1. Reduce desertification
2. Conserve soil organic carbon stock
3. Stop soil sealing and increase re-use of urban soils
4. Reduce soil pollution and enhance restoration
5. Prevent erosion
6. Improve soil structure to enhance soil biodiversity
7. Reduce the EU global footprint on soils
8. Improve soil literacy in society

## The Mission Soil Manifesto

On 18 April 2023, the European Commission launched the [Mission Soil Manifesto](#) at an event co-organised with the [European Regions Research and Innovation Network \(ERRIN\)](#).

The Manifesto gives visibility to the growing community of stakeholders and citizens that work together to protect and restore soil health. Signatories of the Manifesto become part of a network that enables them to share knowledge and best practices. The Manifesto can be signed by representatives of municipalities, regions, private or public companies, organisations, schools, associations, research institutions as well as by individual citizens who can become 'Friends of the Mission Soil'. More than 1 300 people have already signed the Manifesto either as individuals or on behalf of entities.

**If you too care about soil health, [sign the Manifesto](#) and get involved!**



## The First Mission Soil Projects

Since its launch in September 2021, three Work Programmes (WPs) with calls for proposals have been published under the Mission. The first projects under WP 2021 (amounting to €67 million of EU funding) are up and running.

### Projects under 2021 Work Programme listed by topics

#### 1. Preparing the ground for healthy soils: building capacities for engagement, outreach and knowledge



[Preparing for the 'Soil Deal for Europe' Mission \(PREPSOIL\)](#)

#### 2. From knowledge gaps to roadmaps on soil mission objective



[Soils for Europe \(SOLO\)](#)

#### 3. Validating and further developing indicators for soil health and functions



AI4SOILHEALTH

[Accelerating collection and use of soil health information using AI technology to support the Soil Deal for Europe and EU Soil Observatory](#) (**AI4SoilHealth**)

Soil Health  
**BENCHMARKS**

[Building a European Network for the Characterisation and Harmonisation of Monitoring Approaches for Research and Knowledge on Soils](#)  
(**BENCHMARKS**)

#### 4. Linking soil health to nutritional and safe food



SOIL O-LIVE

[The soil biodiversity and functionality of Mediterranean olive groves: a holistic analysis of the influence of land management on olive oil quality and safety](#)  
(**SOIL O-LIVE**)

#### 5. Incentives and business models for soil health

SoilValues

[Enhancing Soil health through Values-based business models](#) (**SoilValues**)



[Innovative Business Models for Soil Health](#) (**NOVASOIL**)

InBestSoil

[Monetary valuation of soil ecosystem services and creation of initiatives to invest in soil health: setting a framework for the inclusion of soil health in business and in the policy making process](#) (**InBestSoil**)

#### 6. Engage with and activate municipalities and regions to protect and restore soil health



[Healthy Municipal Soils \(HuMUS\)](#)

**7. National engagement sessions and support to the establishment of soil health living labs**



[National engagement activities to support the launch of the Mission 'A Soil Deal for Europe' 100 Living Labs and Lighthouses \(NATIOONS\)](#)

**8. Next generation soil advisors**



[Nature Based Solutions for Soil Management \(NBSOIL\)](#)

## Project Spotlight

### PREPSOIL

In this edition of the newsletter, we're putting the spotlight on the PREPSOIL project. Its coordinator, Niels Halberg (also Director of the Danish Centre for Food and Agriculture), provides us with his insights.



*Niels Halberg, Coordinator of PREPSOIL*

### **What results has PREPSOIL achieved so far?**

*Engagement and co-learning activities are already ongoing through [regional soil needs workshops](#) held in more than 20 regions in Europe (covering agricultural, urban/industrial, forestry/nature and mixed land use). In the [Articles and blogs](#) section on our website, you can find short blog posts about some of the workshops and their results.*

*Several tools and spaces for interaction, knowledge-sharing and co-learning are available on the [PREPSOIL website](#), such as: the collection of [soil threats](#) for different land types across Europe, the [Forum for Communities of Practice](#) and [Soil Advocates](#), the [map of Living Labs and Lighthouses initiatives](#), as well as examples of [best teaching practices](#) of soil health education in Europe.*

### **Why is Mission Soil's work important for Europe?**

*Mission Soil is important for Europe because it focuses on addressing soil degradation and promoting sustainable land management practices. Soil degradation poses significant challenges to agriculture, food security, and ecosystem health. By improving soil health and fertility, Mission Soil aims to maintain and enhance agricultural productivity, preserve biodiversity, mitigate climate change, and safeguard water resources.*

### **What do you love most about your work on PREPSOIL?**

*Having the opportunity to engage stakeholders in a mutual learning process on how to take actions to improve soil health in Europe, because soil is the foundation of our existence and future. I also love the fact that we are engaging Communities*

*of Practice, some of which have championed soil fertility preservation for decades, in a joint Mission. Their preoccupation with soil health is now supported at the highest levels! Taking care of the soil, ensuring its health, and leaving it in a better condition for future generations – these are all important objectives for me. I'm proud that PREPSOIL serves as an important steppingstone towards achieving these objectives.*

## News

### Directive on Soil Monitoring

On 5 July 2023, the European Commission adopted its proposal for a Directive on Soil Monitoring ([Soil Monitoring Law](#)) to protect and restore soils and ensure that they are used sustainably.

The Soil Monitoring Law provides a legal framework to help achieve healthy soils by 2050. To this end, it foresees to:

- create a **monitoring framework for soils** in the EU,
- promote sustainable soil management,
- ask EU Member States to identify potentially contaminated sites and address unacceptable risks to human health and the environment.

The Mission 'A Soil Deal for Europe' is considered a key instrument for the implementation of the Soil Monitoring Law, notably through its funding for soil monitoring and 'living labs' as places to create and test solutions for soil health.

### Upcoming activities of funded projects

#### [PREPSOIL](#) conducts soil needs assessments in 21 European regions

PREPSOIL is organising a series of [regional soil needs workshops](#) and interviews to assess the soil needs for different land uses across 21 European regions, providing tools and spaces for interaction, knowledge-sharing and co-learning. The outcome will contribute to the creation of a synthesis report (by 2024) of soil needs and drivers of change for each land use type, and a regional Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda (expected mid-2025).

## **NATI00NS supports regional stakeholders in applying for the soil health Living Labs topics**

NATI00NS is hosting a series of capacity-building webinars, specifically dedicated to explaining the concept of Living Labs. These webinars cover a range of topics, including recommendations for the establishment of Living Labs, governance and business models, and the process of application for Living Labs under the [\*\*Mission's call for proposals\*\*](#). The deadline for submitting proposals is 20 September 2023.

The next event organised by NATI00NS you can register for:

- **6 July 2023, 10:00 – 11:30 CEST: [\*\*Core elements and specificities of the living lab topics\*\*](#)**

## Open calls

### **New funding opportunities are open to contribute to the Mission Soil! Deadline: 20 September 2023**

Proposals can be submitted under nine different topics addressing: the subsoil, soil pollution and digital tools, innovations to prevent and combat desertification, soil-friendly practices in horticulture, spatial planning, cultural and creative initiatives for bringing communities closer to soil and establishing the first wave of living labs.

- [\*\*Learn more about the nine open calls\*\*](#)
- [\*\*Watch the recordings of the info days for potential applicants\*\*](#)

Proposals can also be submitted under two joint calls with the Mission 'Restore our Ocean and Waters by 2030' and the Mission 'Adaptation to Climate Change'.

- [\*\*Joint demonstration of an integrated approach to increasing landscape water retention capacity at regional scale\*\*](#)



- [Joint demonstration of approaches and solutions to address nutrient pollution in the landscape-river-sea system in the Mediterranean Sea Basin](#)

## Events

### Past events

#### [Jump-start the Mission Soil – an event to cluster projects funded under the EU Mission 'A Soil Deal for Europe'](#) (Brussels, 22-23 March, 2023)

The 'Jump-start the Mission Soil' event, organised by the European Research Executive Agency (REA) brought together 250 stakeholders, including project representatives, Mission Board members, policymakers and other national and European experts. The successful hybrid event was a major opportunity for participants in funded projects to network, identify synergies and get to know the wider policy context of the Mission Soil. While the first session addressed the Mission's policy context and science-policy interfaces, the second day focused on in-depth discussions on: communication and engagement strategies, data management and their integration with the [European Soil Observatory](#) (EUSO), and local and regional activities with a focus on living labs.



#### [Agriculture Innovation Mission \(AIM\) for Climate Summit](#) (Washington DC, 8-10 May)

The EU Mission Soil goes global! In the framework of the AIM for Climate Summit in Washington DC, the Mission Soil was presented to an international audience to showcase European research and innovation investments in soil health. Mission activities on carbon farming and examples of national initiatives for sustainable management from Denmark, Ireland and the Netherlands served as a basis for wider discussions on the role of soil management for promoting

climate-smart agriculture. [AIM for Climate](#) was launched by the United States and the United Arab Emirates in 2021, in the context of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Conference of the Parties (COP26) in Glasgow. This year's summit was meant to prepare the ground for further raising ambitions and building collaboration, also in the lead-up to COP28 in the United Arab Emirates.

### [EU AgriResearch Conference 2023](#) (Brussels, 31 May – 1 June 2023)

With 500 participants attending in person and many more online, the AgriResearch Conference brought together scientists, farmers, researchers, rural communities, industry, consultants, politicians, citizens and representatives of non-governmental organisations to reflect on how to address future challenges in agricultural and forestry research and innovation. Commissioner for Agriculture Janusz Wojciechowski emphasised the need for synergies, describing 2023 as 'a year of challenges to make the agricultural and forestry sectors more resilient and sustainable'. He also stressed the importance of giving farmers access to the right knowledge and innovations, as well as providing them with the financial support to become more productive, sustainable and competitive. The concrete challenges and increased uncertainties that individual farmers are facing were illustrated by Rogier Schulte (professor of Farming Systems Ecology at Wageningen University and Research) in a keynote speech that set the scene for further panel discussions.



Throughout the conference, participants acknowledged the importance of healthy soils and their manifold functions as the basis for resilient agriculture and forestry. Soils were particularly visible at the closure of the conference, with Sadhguru, leader of the [Save Soil Movement](#), signing the Mission Soil

Manifesto and stating: *'It's not scientists and academics that will execute soil revitalisation, it's the farmers.'* ([Watch his video message on YouTube](#))

The Manifesto was also signed by the European Commission's Director-General for Agriculture and Rural Development Wolfgang Burtscher, Director-General for Research and Innovation Marc Lemaître and Director-General of the Joint Research Centre Stephen Quest. The conference was followed by field visits to showcase agricultural innovations in practice, organised by the [EIP-AGRI](#) on 2 June 2023. Read more on the [conference webpage](#) and listen to the [podcast!](#)

## Upcoming events

[European Healthy Soils – 1st edition: Soil Fertility](#) (Muttenez, 13-15 September 2023)

This first edition of the European Healthy Soils Conference Series will address the importance of healthy soils and their fertility as a prerequisite for functioning society, environment, economy, and climate. If you are interested, please consult the [agenda](#) and [register!](#)

[Power to the Peatlands conference](#) (Antwerp, 19-21 September 2023)

Peatlands have become key components in national and international strategies on biodiversity, climate change mitigation and water retention. The conference will zoom in on the science, management and policy aspects of peatland restoration and conservation. The programme will be based on four major themes: carbon and water, biodiversity conservation, restoration, and land use and policy.

[Save the date! European Mission Soil Week, Leading the transition towards healthy soils](#) (Madrid, 21-23 November 2023)

From 21 to 23 November, the first European Mission Soil Fair, the EU Soil Observatory Stakeholders' Forum, and the PREPSOIL project are joining forces to hold a major European conference under the auspices of the Spanish Presidency of the Council of the EU. The event is kindly hosted by the [Spanish National Research Council](#) (CSIC).

The European Mission Soil Week will bring together Mission stakeholders and projects, give visibility to the importance of soil protection, restoration and monitoring, and discuss actions and solutions that are needed to progress towards more sustainable land management.

If you want to stay tuned for more details, you can pre-register [at this link](#). You will receive more information in the upcoming months.

## Resources and Readings

**[Mission Soil Implementation Plan](#), European Commission, DG RTD, Sept. 2021**

**[Soil Policy legacy report, 22nd World Congress of Soil Science](#), British Society of Soil Science, Dec. 2022**

**[Soil Monitoring report](#), European Environment Agency, Jan. 2023**

**[A new tool maps the state of soil health across Europe](#), European Commission, JRC, March 2023**

## Subscribe to our Newsletter

**Do you have any project news, events or publications you would like to see published in the Mission Soil newsletter? [Get in touch with us!](#)**

***Next issue: Meet the Mission Soil Board!***

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