



# An emerging web of narratives from carbon farming in Sweden

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**P**otential tends to be rather high for Friday afternoon Zoom meetings to be digital rooms where tired folks reluctantly press “launch meeting” for hopefully the final time that week. The rich and lively conversation that materialised during the first carbon farming focus group meeting set a different precedent, however. Many different strands of thought stand out in my mind from this conversation, which gained further form and raised further questions after mulling them over with colleagues from the project group. The reflections I offer here are intended as an invitation to direct our collective attention to different ways we make sense of carbon farming and the subsequent practices and solutions we pursue in trying to work for this transition. The questions that emerged during my collegial conversations and in writing this reflection are hopefully ones that provoke further dialogue and probing into our communication and practice around carbon farming.

It is not a stretch to say that we are living in interesting times when one hears about the increasing amount of interest in carbon farming, not from the perspective of just another economic opportunity or business gimmick, but from the perspective of tending to soil health, taking care of the land, and increasing climate resilience. There is a different kind of stewardship involved in the latter approach – one that leans towards place-based knowledge, experimentation, and relationship with the land and critters (e.g. worms, cows, mycorrhizal fungi, etc.) with which one is entangled. A sense that careful and immediate action is important due to the diverse planetary tipping points that we are fast approaching. And the knowledge that we know *enough* to carry through with shifting to more regenerative agricultural methods enabling us to cut emissions and catalyse a whole host of other ecosystem and social benefits.

Yet this way of approaching carbon farming is in deep tension with policy processes, carbon markets, and economic sense-making that we experience and participate in in Sweden and Europe. How can we act quickly even when *all* the science is not there to guide action and policy? Precise science and models can increase the legitimacy and reliability of carbon farming for farmers, food producers, investors, and policy makers, allowing for practice to evolve, economic risks to be minimized, and coherent, well-informed policies to be formulated. Yet the barriers for implementing wide-scale measuring, reporting, and verification schemes (MRVs) based on quantifying changing carbon levels in soils are formidable. Measuring of soil carbon content and changes in soil health is complex and expensive. There seemingly can be no one-size-fits-all model, as soils across space and time are incommensurable – soils obscure our human categories and dichotomies, making it tricky to plan and think linearly. Yet, farmers and businesses need the confidence to make this transition. Models are, of course, one important way to make sense of carbon farming but they also obscure the specific and situated processes of soils and farmers. What kinds of confidence could we, instead, build from the un-abstractable and experimental engagement when we focus on soil health? What we might be able to learn for our practice from paying attention to the multiple and abundant “voices” (of soils, of farmers, ...) that come forth when we listen to different things? How could these diverse conceptions of time and life help to move us past the limits of Western science and market mentalities that seem to inhibit innovation today?

We are in the midst of a rapid knowledge increase – farmers and researchers and web platforms all sharing experiences and know-how – at the same time as we are waiting and hoping for more scientific knowledge and markets to catch up. The question I am left with is what possibilities lie with a *different kind of collective attention* towards not only the urgent task of mitigation, but also towards the deeper and longer timescales of life on our planet?

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